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Filling in the Gaps with Parallels Between Pregnancy and Chopin's *The Awakening*

What is Reader Response? This approach "encourages and expects readers to negotiate and construct meaning through interaction between their background knowledge and the text" (Ghaith & Madi 14). Essentially, it is up to the reader to fill in the gaps of what the author has not explicitly said with the text. This form of literary criticism is similar to New Criticism in that the critic looks closely at the text, Reader Response differing in that it requires the reader to respond by reading between the lines. This skill is taught very early on in a reader's reading journey as even as beginners readers are encouraged to draw inferences about the story that is not explicitly in the text as well as making connections to other texts, events, or the reader's own life.

By reading Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* through this critical lens, a reader can come to the conclusion that the forty chapters do not end in Edna Pontellier's death, rather that the novel ends with Edna giving birth, as women do after forty weeks of pregnancy, suggesting that the forty chapters rather parallel the forty weeks of Edna being with child.

There are various pregnancy symptoms present throughout the book. In Chapter 13, Edna looked at herself in the mirror and noticed that "her eyes were bright and wide awake and her face glowed" (Chopin 44). During pregnancy, a woman glows. In Chapter 14, Edna "could only realize that she herself--her present self--was in some way different from the other self" (Chopin 47). Edna's self in her pregnancy is changing and therefore different from the woman she was

Commented [1]: I like that you compare and contrast these two theories! Maybe make two different sentences here. The wording is a little awkward.

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before her pregnancy. In chapter 15, Edna's appearance "suggested a rich, rare blossom" (Chopin 48). Blossoms are a part of flowers and flowers through symbolism suggest sexuality. During this fifteenth week of her pregnancy, Edna's sexual drive has been reawakened, hence the sudden influx in her sexual desires toward Robert.

"In short, 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" (Chopin 15). This realization came about in the sixth chapter of the book. If the reader is to assume that Edna is in fact pregnant, this is potentially the week of her pregnancy in which she would realize that she is indeed with child, hence why she is realizing her relations within herself as a mother.

"A certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand near by that might reach out and reassure her" (Chopin 32).

"No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first throbbings of desire" (Chopin 35).

There are several instances throughout the novel, however, that suggest that Edna is unfit to be a mother, which could in turn describe why she felt "an indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, fill[ing] her whole being with a vague anguish" (Chopin 7). While not completely sure of her pregnancy during this third chapter (or third week), Edna is beginning to be aware that she must further commit to her matronly duties, something that she has not been comfortable with and could do without in her life.

#### Works Cited

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. New American Library, 1976.

Ghaith, Ghazi M. & Madi, Mirna S., "Reader Response versus New Criticism: Effects on

**Commented [3]:** There are a lot of great connections here that just need a little more analysis. Also make sure you focus on how the reader can fill in these gaps and how that changes their reading of the novel.

"Orientations to Literary Reading." *TESL Reporter*, vol. 41, no. 2, Oct. 2008, pp. 14–26.

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