Social injustice often incites personal affliction and indecision. For Edna Pontellier, oppressed heroine of Victorian feminist piece The Awakening, this atmosphere of social and consequentially personal, injustice eventually resulted in her suicidal demise. Through richly detailed figurative language, telling character interactions, and frequent episodes of Edna's emotional and physical breakdowns, the reader is immersed in the tiresome struggle of a belittled, misfit housewife in a rigid community, and can sympathize with Edna as she commits her destiny by valy.

A unique quality to this work is its intricate symbolism and imagery, both of which trace Edna's journey toward individuality and its miserable end. Birds, a universal representation of freedom and escape (or lack thereof), follow Edna through the story. A caged parrot, rejected for its verbose manner by Edna's self-important husband, elicits immediate sympathy at the novel's exposition in its blatant similarity to the caged Edna, rejected if she too does not behave as expected. As Edna realizes her power to defy, she, as the effete Mademoiselle Reisz notes, develops "strong wings" on her back. These wings, unfortunately, never take flight; as Edna reaches the point of dead-end desperation, an injured bird spirals toward the beach from mid-air, a highly sympathetic image. Other imagery describing Edna - her queen-like stature in yellow silk and crystals, or her open-collared
Nanachance at the seashore — intensify the reader's hopefulness for the woman's emotional release, making her downfall contrastedly more wrenching and sympathized. Symbols, imagery and other various figurative language clearly distinguish between trapped Edna and defiant Edna, sweeping the reader along her emotional path that certainly results in disappointment and sympathy for the restrained housewife.

Edna's social standards as a wealthy Victorian housewife become evident in her interaction with others, and demonstrate her tendency to feel an imposter in her own skin. Madame Ratignolle, Edna's prim, gracious companion, embodies an inhuman airiness that the reader cannot relate to; rather, one sympathizes with Edna, the true individual victimized by a shallow society. Milé Reisz, the socially questioned maiden who inspires much of Edna's defiance, elicits remorseful emotion in Edna through her stirring music, and Edna's evident pain in not having access to Reisz's individuality emphasizes her sympathized disposition as a victim to injustice.

Alcée Arnaudin, suave gentleman highly typical of the social community, heightens the reader's sympathy for Edna in his inability to emotionally connect to her; while he provides her a rush of fancy and disobedience, Arnaudin cannot truly liberate Edna through his romance and make her feel like a respected woman aside from her role as Pontellier's spouse. Supporting characters are critical to painting a picture of the society in which Edna lives, and how she is treated unjustly and deserves sympathy from her world and ours.

Edna, like the reader, experiences multiple emotional highs and lows in the progression of her "awakening," revealing her mental state to all through her musings.
while alone, and how that state triggers sympathy. In moments of inspiration, Edna acts symbolically to indicate her growth. Forward: eating contentedly the meal that Jacques refused, noting pensively the intriguing scent of jessamine flowers, purchasing an oddly cramped home to call her own and triumphantly cleaning the possessions in her old home that she intends to move. Oppositely, distinct moments indicate Edna's resistance, her realization that she has hit a wall that, as the reader sympathizes, she could never hurdle: swimming the evening ocean only to pause and fearfully focus on the distant shore, reading Fouquet's letters of exciting but unattainable liberation, shattering a glass vase and stomping upon her indestructible wedding band.

Edna's actions, particularly when alone, symbolize her mental conflict, sympathized by anyone who must conform to a principle by/that feels no conviction for.

Sexism has been a topic of literature for centuries, and when seen through the eyes of a direct victim, its social and personal effects become markedly apparent. Edna Pontellier elicits sympathy on multiple levels: on a social level, amongst the Awakening's diverse range of characters, and on an emotional, personal level, within the moving episodes of Edna's turmoil, both through her own actions and through those of direct symbols. Individuals deprived of the personal expression experience the mental turmoil of choosing rebellion or submission, a sympathetic journey, that humans like Edna have and will continue to embark on into the future.