

## Exploring the Hero's Journey in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*

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### Abstract

This research paper explores the quest journeys of the protagonists in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* using Joseph Campbell's concept of the Hero's Journey from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The study highlights how the archetypal quest myth is presented in modern narratives. Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* embarks on a journey of self-discovery, challenging societal norms and seeking personal freedom. Santiago in *The Alchemist* follows a more traditional hero's path, driven by a recurring dream to find a hidden treasure, ultimately realizing that the true treasure lies within. Both journeys lead to significant personal transformations, though their outcomes differ dramatically. While Santiago's journey aligns with the classic structure of departure, initiation, and return, Edna's quest highlights the constraints of her societal context, leading to a tragic conclusion. Santiago encounters physical and spiritual trials in the desert, guided by mentors like Melchizedek and the Alchemist, and returns home enlightened. Conversely, Edna, influenced by characters like Mademoiselle Reisz and Robert Lebrun, faces internal and societal conflicts that ultimately lead her to seek freedom in death. This comparative study illustrates how modern narratives adapt and reinterpret the Hero's Journey to explore diverse themes and experiences. It emphasizes the enduring relevance of Campbell's monomyth in understanding the complexities of human struggles and aspirations, showing how both protagonists, despite their different paths, reflect universal quests for identity and self-fulfillment. The paper underscores the impact of societal constraints on personal freedom and the varied outcomes of such quests in different cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** archetypal quest, monomyth, self-discovery, freedom, personal transformations, self-fulfillment

### 1. Introduction

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, translated into English by Alan Clarke and published by Harper Collins in 1992, is a globally acclaimed novel that follows the journey of Santiago, a young Andalusian shepherd. Santiago embarks on a quest to find a hidden treasure near the pyramids of Egypt. The novel is celebrated for its simple yet profound narrative, combining elements of adventure, magical realism, and spiritual allegory. Through Santiago's journey, Coelho explores themes of destiny, personal legend, and the interconnectedness of all things. The story emphasizes the importance of following one's dreams and listening to one's heart, suggesting that the pursuit of one's personal legend leads to self-discovery and fulfillment. Santiago's journey closely mirrors the stages outlined in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, following the archetypal hero's path of departure, initiation, and return. Santiago heeds the call to adventure through his recurring dream, faces numerous trials in the desert, and ultimately returns home transformed with newfound wisdom. *The Alchemist* has been praised for its inspirational message and has sold millions of copies worldwide, resonating with readers from various cultural backgrounds. It has been translated into numerous languages, reflecting its universal appeal and the timeless nature of its themes. The

novel's ability to inspire and encourage readers to pursue their dreams has cemented its place as a beloved and influential literary work, demonstrating the enduring power of the hero's journey in modern storytelling.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, published in 1899, is a seminal work of early feminist literature that follows the journey of Edna Pontellier, a woman in late 19th-century American society. The novel explores Edna's quest for personal freedom and self-discovery against the backdrop of a repressive social structure that limits women's roles and aspirations. Edna's journey mirrors the stages of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, albeit in a modern and socially constrained context. Her call to adventure begins with a growing sense of dissatisfaction with her prescribed roles as wife and mother. This internal awakening leads her to seek independence and self-fulfillment.

Throughout the novel, Edna faces numerous trials, including societal condemnation, personal isolation, and internal conflict as she struggles to reconcile her desires with societal expectations. Her mentors include characters like Mademoiselle Reisz, who represents artistic and personal freedom, and Robert Lebrun, who awakens her romantic and sexual desires. Unlike the traditional hero's journey where the protagonist often achieves a triumphant return, Edna's journey culminates in a tragic conclusion. Her inability to fully integrate her newfound sense of self within the confines of her society leads her to seek ultimate freedom through death. This departure from the classical hero's return highlights the novel's critique of societal constraints on women's autonomy and the devastating impact of these limitations. *The Awakening* has been praised for its bold exploration of female sexuality, independence, and identity. It resonates with readers as a powerful critique of societal norms and an exploration of the complexities of personal freedom. The novel's portrayal of Edna's quest continues to inspire and provoke thought, underscoring the enduring relevance of the hero's journey in examining human struggles and aspirations.

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is a seminal work in comparative mythology, first published in 1949. In this book, Campbell introduces the concept of the "monomyth" or the "Hero's Journey," a universal narrative pattern that he argues is present in myths from cultures worldwide. The Hero's Journey consists of several stages, including the Call to Adventure, Initiation, Return, and Apotheosis, through which the hero undergoes significant transformation. Campbell's work synthesizes various mythological stories to illustrate this common structure, showing how these narratives reflect fundamental human experiences and psychological processes. He draws on the works of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud to discuss the archetypal elements and the symbolic significance of the hero's adventures. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* continues to be a valuable resource for understanding the commonalities in human storytelling and the universal themes that resonate across different cultures and historical periods.

## 2. Methods

This research employs a comparative literary analysis of *The Awakening* and *The Alchemist* using Joseph Campbell's monomyth framework. The analysis focuses on identifying the stages of the Quest myth in both novels and examining how each protagonist's journey aligns with or deviates from this archetypal structure. The methodology involves a close reading of the texts, supported by secondary sources that provide critical insights into the themes and characters of the novels. The Quest myth is one of the common motifs in mythology and literature where a hero goes on a journey to accomplish a certain goal. Joseph Campbell argues that "such... mythologizing is common in all civilizations" (271). The tales of quest are found in various cultures over different historical times, and they frequently have the same narrative structure, which he calls the "monomyth" (xxv). The structure follows a certain kind of hero, difficulties or challenges, journey, conflict, goal, return, and reward. Many tales and adventure stories in classical literature used to be structured in this pattern.

### 3. Review of Literature

The existing literature on Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* offers valuable insights into the application of archetypal literary criticism, particularly through the lens of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey and Jungian archetypes. Ahmed Abdelsattar Abdelaziz Keshk's analysis of Santiago's journey emphasizes the psychological and spiritual aspects of the hero's quest, aligning it with classical narrative patterns. Similarly, scholars like Anupam R. Nagar and David A. Leeming explore the universality of the hero's journey, highlighting its symbolic resonance with human experiences and desires across different cultural and historical contexts. Works like those of Indra Prasad Adhikari and Kamal Krishna Khanal further reinforce the persistence of archetypal quest motifs in modern narratives.

However, my research moves beyond these traditional interpretations by directly addressing the influence of gender and societal constraints on the hero's journey, particularly through a comparative analysis of *The Awakening* and *The Alchemist*. While previous studies, such as Limin Bai's re-examination of Edna Pontellier's death through Darwinian naturalism, acknowledge the unique challenges faced by female protagonists, they do not fully explore how these challenges subvert or critique the male-centric hero myth as outlined by Campbell. My study seeks to fill this gap by arguing that Chopin's *The Awakening* actively challenges the traditional patriarchal structure of the hero's journey, highlighting the limitations and obstacles imposed on female protagonists in a way that has not been sufficiently addressed in the existing literature.

By comparing Edna's inward, societally constrained journey with Santiago's outward, spiritually liberating quest, my research establishes a point of departure from the current literature. It emphasizes how *The Awakening* offers a critique of the patriarchal underpinnings of the hero's journey, questioning the accessibility of transformation and self-fulfillment for women within a traditional narrative framework. This comparative analysis, therefore, not only contributes to the understanding of how modern narratives adapt the Quest myth but also reveals how these adaptations can serve as critiques of gendered power structures, offering a fresh perspective on the enduring relevance and limitations of Campbell's monomyth in contemporary literature.

Ahmed Abdelsattar Abdelaziz Keshk, in "A Journey for a Personal Legend: An Archetypal Reading of the Hero's Journey in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*," investigates Santiago's psychological and physical journey toward his Personal Legend using the archetypal literary approach and theories propounded by Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. Keshk concludes that heroes of contemporary narratives undertake journeys similar to those in classical stories, with the story pattern remaining consistent despite changes in form. He asserts that the hero's adventurous journey resonates with readers across different backgrounds, providing solace (Keshk 3938-3949). Likewise, Anupam R. Nagar, in "Critiquing the 'Quest' Archetype: Thinking Across Boundaries," discusses Northrop Frye's Archetypal Literary Criticism, which examines texts through their connections to myths, archetypes, and social norms. Nagar suggests that the quest archetype in the Ramayana, where Ram seeks Sita, reflects humanity's enduring search for its true inner identity or 'self' (Nagar 1048-1051).

Similarly, David A. Leeming, in "Quest," explores how the hero's journey mirrors the human experience, symbolically depicting the obstacles and challenges people face in life. He argues that the heroic quest represents the universal hero myth, where the hero's journey involves archetypal stages like the search for truth or riches, struggle with monsters, and descent to the underworld, mirroring the essence of human beings and their universal desires (Leeming 149). Likewise, Indra Prasad Adhikari's *Exploration of Inner Quest in Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist*, examines Santiago's inner journey and how he accomplishes his

mission by overcoming challenges and transforming into a wise and enlightened person. Using Spiritualism and Quest archetypes, Adhikari concludes that understanding the world is the actualization of the self (Adhikari 48).

Joseph Campbell distinguishes between physical and spiritual heroic deeds in myths, with the former involving brave actions and the latter exploring spiritual experiences, providing inner peace by illustrating the difference between life events and the unconscious. Myths narrate stories that reconcile individual consciousness with universal will, helping individuals recognize the illusions of the physical world and connect with a deeper metaphysical reality (Campbell 35, 221). In addition, Kamal Krishna Khanal's analysis of Joyce's *Dubliners* through Jung's 'Collective Unconscious' and 'Archetypes' finds that the stories are bound by an archetypal quest motif. Despite differences in narrative components like characters and settings, the fundamental structure remains consistent, portraying modern versions of the archetypal quest motif (Khanal 160).

Limin Bai's, "The Re-understanding of Edna Pontellier's Death," re-examines Edna's death in *The Awakening* through Darwin's Naturalism, suggesting that Edna's quest for freedom from social norms leads her to the sea, symbolizing the vastness of the universe and the linkage between the material and natural worlds. Bai concludes that Edna's death celebrates the Darwinian self, as her soul mixes with nature, achieving her quest for freedom (Bai 846). Tajamul Islam Baba and Javeed Ahmad Raina's article, "The Alchemist: A Journey Towards Self-Actualization," examines Santiago's journey towards self-discovery, emphasizing self-actualization from the perspective of organismic theorist Kurt Goldstein and Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation. They conclude that Santiago's journey symbolizes humanity's endless quest to find its place and the true meaning of life (Baba and Raina 144-145). Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* have been studied from various perspectives, but a comparative analysis based on the Quest myth is lacking. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the similarities and differences between these novels through the lens of the Quest myth, revealing how modern narratives adapt and reinterpret this archetype to explore diverse themes and experiences.

#### 4. Analysis

In *The Alchemist*, Santiago is driven by a recurring dream of finding a treasure buried under the pyramids in Egypt. This dream serves as his call to adventure, compelling him to leave his familiar life as a shepherd and embark on a journey of self-discovery. Conversely, Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* feels alienated and constrained by the societal norms of nineteenth-century America. Her call to adventure is an internal awakening, a realization that she desires independence and self-fulfillment beyond the roles of wife and mother.

Santiago faces numerous physical and spiritual trials in the desert, learning to read omens and understand the language of the universe. These challenges test his resolve and lead to his ultimate transformation. Edna, on the other hand, confronts societal expectations and personal limitations. She defies traditional gender roles, engages in an affair, and moves out of her husband's house, seeking to establish her identity and pursue her passions.

Santiago receives guidance from Melchizedek, the King of Salem, and later from the Alchemist. These mentors help him navigate his journey, teaching him valuable lessons about life and destiny. Edna's journey is influenced by Mademoiselle Reisz, a pianist who represents artistic and personal freedom, and Robert Lebrun, with whom she falls in love. These characters inspire Edna to pursue her desires and challenge societal norms. Both protagonists undergo significant transformations. Santiago achieves spiritual enlightenment, understanding that the true treasure lies within himself. His journey leads to personal fulfillment and wisdom. Edna realizes her desires and challenges societal constraints but ultimately finds herself unable to reconcile her inner self with the external world. Her journey

ends tragically as she seeks freedom in death, highlighting the oppressive nature of her society.

Santiago's journey in *The Alchemist* aligns closely with the traditional Quest myth, emphasizing spiritual growth and enlightenment. His adventure follows the classic stages of departure, initiation, and return, leading to a positive resolution. In contrast, Edna's journey in *The Awakening* challenges and deviates from the traditional Quest myth. While she experiences personal growth and self-awareness, her quest is marked by conflict and ultimately ends in tragedy. Edna's story highlights the limitations and societal pressures faced by women in her time, contrasting with Santiago's more universal and timeless quest for self-discovery.

In the case of Santiago, the protagonist of *The Alchemist*, he stands apart from other heroes not because of his journey but because of his call to adventure or recurring dream, and its goal. In contrast, Edna, the protagonist of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, is an alienated female heroine. Right from the start of the story, she feels being an outsider in the Creole community. Chopin uses the symbol of the "green and yellow parrot" (5) locked outside the house. This depiction symbolizes Edna being looked as an outsider. Initially, both protagonists feel unprepared for the journey. However, the allurement of the treasure in Santiago, and the feeling of being an outsider in Edna, leave them no choice but to go on the adventure. In *The Alchemist*, Santiago is tempted by the dream of treasure which is buried under the pyramid in Egypt, and becomes curious to explore the Special World despite its risks. On the contrary, during a conversation with Robert, Adele Ratignolle, the perfect Creole mother figure in *The Awakening*, mentions that Edna "is not one of [them]; she is not like [them]" (24). "Mrs. Pontellier [Edna], though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles" (14). She is "not a mother-woman" (15). Similarly, the gypsy woman in *The Alchemist*, whom Santiago visits in Tarifa to get his dream interpreted, represents a messenger from the physical world, interpreting the dream for Santiago and encouraging him to contemplate the call for adventure in search of "the marvels of the world" (33). "Dreams are the language of God," (13) the gypsy woman tells Santiago, "When he speaks in our language, I can interpret...But if he speaks in the language of the soul, it is only you who can understand" (13). With the expression, Santiago gets encouraged even more to go on an adventurous journey. Likewise, Edna, Chopin's protagonist, stands out from "the stereotyped fashion plate", which sets her "different from the crowd" (19). Because of the orthodox societal norms that society expects her to follow, Edna becomes a rebellious character who wants to find her inner self. These incidents trigger the protagonists to go on their respective adventures.

Similarly, the hero often refuses to begin his journey instantly. This is typically because he does not realize that he needs a change or he does not see the problems in his surroundings. It could also be because he is afraid of dying on the journey. Even though Santiago, Coelho's protagonist, eventually agrees to go on the journey, initially, he rejects the whole idea. Like most people, he prefers to be protected by his familiar world over facing potential danger. Santiago's reluctance makes sense when we learn that he initially dismisses his dream as nonsense and not worth pursuing. So, he chooses to stick to his routine rather than enjoying the thoughts of venturing into the unknown. Similarly, in *The Awakening*, Edna in the beginning develops a thought of canceling her journey towards self-realization. These incidents imply the protagonists' hesitation or refusal to start a journey into uncertainty. Accepting the call would mean risking their lives and livelihoods for an uncertain future. Santiago "had to choose between something he had become accustomed to and something he wanted to have" (28). In a like manner, although she finds herself apart from Creole society, Edna is happy with her husband, Leonce Pontellier. "She fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them ... He pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her" (22).

As a faithful wife of a man who admires her, she believes that she “would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality” (22), leaving her position behind “the realm of romance and dreams” (22). Both protagonists push their dreams aside. Santiago focuses on the thoughts of the merchant’s daughter whom he admires. Similarly, Edna “grew fond of her husband,” (23) and opts to do whatever is expected from her, neglecting her own passions.

Furthermore, Campbell expresses that when the hero decides to depart for the journey, he encounters “a protective figure” (63) who bestows him special abilities. This mentor can be a teacher, an elderly person, a wizard, or a similar. This stage reinforces the hero’s belief that he has been selected for the journey by a higher power beyond his understanding. In *The Alchemist*, as Santiago tries to make sense of his puzzling dream, he meets a wise elderly person named Melchizedek, who introduces himself as the King of Salem. Likewise in *The Awakening*, Mademoiselle Reisz plays the role of a mentor who guides Edna in her journey towards self-realization. In *The Alchemist*, Melchizedek provokes Santiago to go on a journey to uncover his destiny, referred to as the “Personal Legend” by Coelho (18). Santiago’s desire to discover the treasure of life is fueled by his encounter with Melchizedek, whom he sees as a divine blessing. Similarly, Edna meets Mademoiselle Reisz, a famous pianist who lives alone. Mademoiselle Reisz’s music deeply affects Edna, which indicates that Edna is beginning to desire freedom. Coelho, in *The Alchemist*, has portrayed Melchizedek as a messenger of God who guides Santiago and helps him realize his dreams. He assures Santiago saying that “when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it” (23). Thereafter, he gives Santiago two stones, Urim and Thummim. These stones serve as a tool for Santiago to navigate his path towards his dream. These stones help him to understand any challenges that come on his journey. In *The Awakening*, instead of conforming to society’s rules, Mademoiselle Reisz dedicates herself to music and her own desires. When she plays music Edna gets lost in her imagination. “There came...the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him” (30). From the analysis of her imagination, it can be anticipated that the man, in her imagination, represents patriarchy, and “a distant bird winging its flight away from him” (30) is Edna herself, who is trying to break the boundaries made by society. In this way, Mademoiselle Reisz serves as a supernatural aid in the quest journey of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, who functions as a catalyst to trigger Edna’s self-realization.

Just like Mademoiselle Reisz evokes Edna’s desire for self-realization, Melchizedek gives a crucial lesson to Santiago, emphasizing the importance of focusing on one’s goals and being aware of the language of omens. He urges Santiago to follow his destiny till its completion without getting nervous. The hero ventures beyond the familiar world and into a “zone of magnified power” (Campbell 71). Here, the hero confronts and surpasses various obstacles, such as dragons, demons, and lions, to progress to the next stage of his journey. By demonstrating his strong determination to begin his journey, in *The Alchemist*, Santiago leaves his ordinary life behind and enters “the Soul of the World” (23) where magic and supernatural events occur. Similarly, Edna also enters a world which is different from the previous one. She rejects all the conventions and norms of the society. By refuting the societal norms, she makes her own world where she can live as per her wish. Melchizedek, in *The Alchemist*, gives Santiago two stones Urim and Thummim which help him to navigate towards his destiny. This marks a new phase in the story, where Santiago’s mentor’s guidance and the symbolic stones get tested. Santiago is now focused on overcoming any obstacles on his journey without hesitation. In the same way, the protagonist of *The Awakening*, Edna seems to be ignoring her family after she finds that her husband, too, is neglecting her desires because of his patriarchal beliefs. Coelho, in *The Alchemist*, has used

the metaphor of a ship sailing towards the unknown, leaving the familiar world behind. By using the metaphor, he illustrates the concept of Crossing of the First Threshold:

At the highest point in Tarifa there is an old fort, built by the Moors. From atop its walls, one can catch a glimpse of Africa. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, sat on the wall of the fort that afternoon and felt the levanter blowing in his face... Melchizedek watched a small ship that was plowing its way out of the port. He would never again see the boy. (33)

Santiago's ship leaving Andalusia for Morocco symbolizes a significant journey. It's a journey that Santiago has to go all by himself, leaving behind his past knowledge and experiences. Similar to Santiago's journey, Edna is also fed up with her motherly role. "If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort" (12). One day when Raoul, the younger son of Pontelliers has a fever, Leonce "reproach(es) his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children" (10). He complains "If it was not a mother's job to take care of children, whose job was it?" (10). Getting frustrated with her orthodox roles, one day Edna goes out to the beach with Robert Lebrun, a handsome boy whom she meets in Louisiana Creole society, where he teaches her swimming. Before that, Edna had never swum. "A certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand nearby that might reach out and reassure her" (32). After learning to swim, she "grow(s) daring and reckless... She swim(s) far out, where no woman had swum before" (32). She looks back to the shore and feels that the water behind her is "a barrier which her unaided strength would never be able to overcome" (32). Edna's experience of swimming alone, reaching afar from the shore indicates her crossing of the first threshold.

If the hero cannot overcome the obstacles across his journey, he gets engulfed into the whale's belly. During this phase, the hero contemplates his identity and actions, and undergoes a transformation (Campbell 83). The "Soul of the World" (84) presents Santiago with numerous challenges and dangers. In his journey, he has to confront and overcome a unique set of trials, like robbery, starvation, the heat of the desert, tribal wars, and falling in love with Fatima. These trials or situations make Santiago feel hopeless and frustrated. Many times, he is on the verge of abandoning the journey. "He reminded himself that he had been a shepherd, and that he could be a shepherd again. Fatima was more important than his treasure" (100). Similarly, when Edna gets in touch with Adele Ratignolle, a perfect stereotypical woman figure in Louisiana Creole, she begins to have a "realization that she herself was nothing, nothing, nothing..." (22). Edna starts to engage herself in her previous motherly role. She becomes "fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart" (23). Despite the obstacles, Coelho's protagonist, Santiago, is committed to going through them. His reluctance and the cruel nature of these tests, ultimately, help Santiago in recognizing his true self and that of those around him. Similarly, Edna, the protagonist of *The Awakening*, begins "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" (17). When Edna does not see even a "little glimpse of domestic harmony," (61) present in her married life, she finds it upsetting and even shocking. She only feels "pity for the colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment" (61). "The hopelessness of it" makes her restart the journey when she finds "herself face to face with the realities" (23). In this way, Edna and Santiago get out of The Belly of the Whale, the concept in Campbell's archetypal quest myth.

The hero journeys through the world of uncertainty. The world of uncertainty varies in each journey; it could be a hostile environment, an abandoned area, or even the realm of the dead. It serves as a space where the hero mentally prepares and strategizes to confront the ultimate challenge. If the hero lacks confidence in his ability to succeed, he is most likely to

fail this crucial stage. In *The Alchemist*, Santiago gets robbed by the thieves in Tangier, a place in Africa. They leave him with no money to reach Egypt. Therefore, he starts to work in a crystal shop in Tangier to collect some money to get to Egypt. But the shop owner says “Even if you cleaned my crystal for an entire year...even if you earned a good commission selling every piece, you would still have to borrow money to get to Egypt. There are thousands of kilometers of desert between here and there” (49). This expression of the shop owner demotivates Santiago to reach his destiny, and he “went to his room and packed his belongings” (63). In the same manner, in *The Awakening*, after Robert Lebrun breaks Edna’s heart by escaping the relationship, Edna falls into the hands of Alcée Arobin, a wealthy womanizer. He compliments Edna for drawing her attention. “He admire(s) Edna extravagantly” (79). There springs a sense of love between them. Santiago, while working in the crystal shop for eleven months and nine days, earns some amount of money. He thinks that it is “enough to buy himself a hundred and twenty sheep, a return ticket, and a license to import from Africa into his own country” (63).

Later, along the way to the desert, he encounters challenges like tribal wars. One of the tribesmen in the desert says “Once you get into the desert, there’s no going back” (80). However, he does not lose his hope of reaching Egypt and keeps moving towards it. Similarly, the growing infatuation between Edna and Alcée, in *The Awakening*, makes Edna deviate from her goal. They “stay and sit beside the wood fire” (81). He expresses his feelings for her. “How different life might have been if [I] had known [you] years before” (81). But, “Alcée Arobin was absolutely nothing to her,” (82) because she comes to realize that there is no emotional attachment between them, and she cannot be a “specimen of the sex” to any man (87). Alcée Arobin initially acts as if he is trying to console her, but slowly and gradually, he suppresses Edna. She becomes “supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties” (98). Edna wants a friend who understands her feelings and emotions, but Alcée manipulates her feelings so he can get what he wants. Additionally, she does not want to be confined in the “pigeon house” (91) of societal expectations and conventional gender roles again. Campbell expresses that once the hero leaves home, he sets off on a journey. This journey is unfamiliar and challenging, but the hero is mature enough to confront any obstacle. This is because the hero has been transformed (89).

The hero encounters an idealized woman, resembling a heavenly blessing on his journey. Meeting this perfect woman and their symbolic union suggests the hero’s potential to attain the gift of love and overcome future challenges. The woman embodies both nurturing maternal qualities and seductive traits. However, this union also signifies the hero’s transformation into a new role (Campbell 100). In this instance, the woman, often a mysterious elder, typically trains, motivates, guides, and equips the hero for his journey. Perhaps most importantly, the woman implants confidence and imparts knowledge whenever the hero feels like giving up. In the case of *The Alchemist*, after learning valuable lessons from Melchizedek and the camel driver, Santiago continues his journey into the African desert, where he meets a girl named Fatima and falls in love. While physical love brings frustration and disappointment, Fatima’s love guides him towards his ultimate goal. “He knew that his love for her would enable him to discover every treasure in the world” (99). Fatima becomes a significant presence in his life and eventually expresses her desire for him to continue pursuing his quest to find his treasure. She expresses:

I want you to continue toward your goal. If you have to wait until the war is over, then wait. But if you have to go before then, go on in pursuit of your dream. The dunes are changed by the wind, but the desert never changes. That’s the way it will be with our love for each other. (102)

Consequently, in *The Awakening*, Mademoiselle Reisz serves the function of Goddess who shows the path to Edna towards her self-realization when she gets diverted from her goal.



When Edna comes in contact with Alcée Arobin, he begins to have the upper hand in their relationship and considers women as just a pleasurable object to rule over. She seems to be lacking the inner strength because of her relationship with Alcée. At that time, Mademoiselle Reisz warns her that “the bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth” (88). Then, Edna feels “as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to take upon and comprehend the significance of life” (89). In this way, Mademoiselle Reisz and Fatima consolidate the respective protagonists to overcome the hindrance that occurred on the way to their goal.

More often, the hero gets tempted by a temptress. The temptress represents any distraction that distracts the hero from his goal. Men often get tempted by women, but this is not only the case. Female heroes might face male tempters, but what matters most is the temptation itself, not the gender. In the case of *The Awakening*, Edna gets distracted from her goal when she meets a womanizer, Alcée Arobin, who satisfies her sexual needs. Here, we can notice a departure from the orthodox temptress in which a woman used to be portrayed as a temptress who hinders the hero's journey. In the narrative, a male, Alcée Arobin, is depicted as a male tempter. Alcée controls Edna through secret affairs instead of following marital rules. While Edna is discovering herself and wanting to break free from this control, Alcée tries to make their relationship just about cheating, using fake compliments, fake sensuality, and insincere devotion. “He admire[s] Edna extravagantly” (79). One day, when he hears Edna humming a song, Alcée flatters her saying “What a pity that so much talent has been neglected! but I must go” (80). There grows a kind of sensuous relation between them. “His presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her” (82). This phenomenon shows the tempting expression of Alcée towards Edna which becomes quite a diversion towards her goal.

The comparison between Edna Pontellier's journey in *The Awakening* and Santiago's journey in *The Alchemist* is significant as it reveals the profound impact of gender and societal context on the structure and outcome of the hero's journey. While both narratives employ Joseph Campbell's monomyth framework, the differences between them highlight how the traditional hero narrative shifts when applied to a female protagonist versus a male one. Santiago's journey allows him to explore his destiny and achieve self-fulfillment without the oppressive societal pressures that Edna faces. His quest is an outward one, involving physical and spiritual trials that lead to enlightenment and a return with newfound wisdom. In contrast, Edna's journey is inward, focused on self-discovery within a society that severely restricts her autonomy and choices.

The patriarchal nature of Campbell's hero myth becomes evident when we examine how it centers on a male hero who has access to resources, mentors, and opportunities that facilitate complete transformation and enlightenment. This structure assumes a level of freedom and support typically unavailable to female characters in a patriarchal society. Santiago's journey exemplifies this, as his mentors guide him through his trials, ultimately leading to his transformation and enlightenment. However, Edna faces insurmountable obstacles rooted in her gender and the societal expectations placed upon her. Unlike Santiago, her journey ends in tragedy rather than a triumphant return, highlighting the limitations imposed on her by her societal context.

Through *The Awakening*, Chopin appears to challenge the male-centric hero myth by presenting a female protagonist whose journey defies the traditional narrative. Edna's quest for independence and self-fulfillment ultimately leads to her death, suggesting that the path to

enlightenment and transformation, as outlined in Campbell's monomyth, is not universally accessible—especially for women constrained by societal norms. This divergence from the traditional hero's journey not only emphasizes the limitations of the myth when applied to female protagonists but also serves as a critique of the patriarchal underpinnings of the narrative structure itself.

In conclusion, the comparison between these two texts illustrates the different outcomes of the hero's journey based on gender and societal context. While Santiago's journey adheres to the traditional hero's path, Edna's journey challenges it, offering a critical examination of the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society. This contrast underscores the importance of considering gender in the analysis of literary narratives, as Chopin's *The Awakening* reveals how societal constraints can profoundly alter the course of a hero's journey, particularly for women.

### 5. Conclusion

In this way, both the protagonists' quest journey has some similarities and points of departure from the archetypal quest myth. Coelho's *The Alchemist* follows the pattern of classical quest myth; however, the hero's journey is actually the quest for the inner self, not for an external object, which is a deviation from the old ones. Chopin's *The Awakening* is, however, a rejection of traditional quest myth because the classics use the protagonist in the form of a male character but Edna is portrayed as the central character by Chopin around whom the narrative revolves. Furthermore, in the archetypal quest myth, the hero enjoys his achievement after returning to his homeland. However, Chopin's protagonist enjoys her sense of freedom by refusing to return to the ordinary world. She enjoys her eternal peace and freedom getting mixed up with nature.

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