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THE CRITICAL REPUTATION OF KATE CHOPIN

by

Anthony Paul Garitta

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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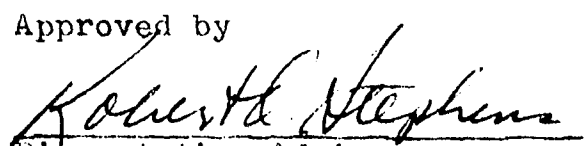

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APPROVAL PAGE

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GARITTA, ANTHONY PAUL. The Critical Reputation of Kate Chopin. (1978) Directed by: Dr. Robert O. Stephens. Pp. 228.

In the course of literary history, reviewers and critics alike have had through their by-products--the book review and the critical essay--a powerful impact upon the prosperities of many a literary career. One case in point was the aborted writing career of Kate O'Flaherty Chopin. Beginning with the mild recognition of her first literary effort At Fault in 1890 to the final critical post-mortems following her death in 1904, the reviewers and critics of her period not only gave impetus to her career, but were also largely responsible for terminating it. Nor has their influence subsided. At the moment, the impact of modern-day reviewers and critics is still very much in evidence as a significant Chopin revival is upon us. The highly responsible role played by both reviewers and critics in establishing the critical reputation of Kate Chopin is the focus of this study, along with a reassessment of the author's merit in light of modern scholarship.

The first four chapters of the study examine the response of reviewers and critics during the writer's own lifetime. Since the bulk of Chopin criticism came at this time in the form of the book review, special emphasis is placed upon the early reviews of her four major works and their influence upon her literary fortunes with considerable attention being

given to the very nature of the book review itself in the 1890's, the personal attitude of Kate Chopin toward reviews and reviewers, and the principles she herself incorporated into her own reviews. Inherent to this section will be a discussion of reviews either previously neglected or only slightly touched upon.

The final chapter concentrates on the Chopin revival and the concurrent reassessment of her critical reputation by offering an historical sketch of criticism from the time of her death up to the present. Once again, the influential role of reviewers and critics is stressed, noting particularly the dramatic response that followed the 1969 publication of Per Seyersted's two important contributions: Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography and The Complete Works of Kate Chopin. The study concludes with an overview of the author's critical reputation both past and present.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Robert O. Stephens, who directed by study and offered invaluable comments and suggestions. I also wish to thank the members of my advisory committee for their helpful remarks on stylistic improvements for the paper.

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I wish to thank my colleagues at Davidson County Community College, Mrs. Mary A. Hamil, reference librarian, and Mrs. Antoinette G. Wike, chairman of the Language and Fine Arts Department, for graciously answering my inquiries about matters related to my study.

I record my gratitude to Ms. Emily Toth, editor of Regionalism and the Female Imagination (formerly The Kate Chopin Newsletter), and Mrs. Frances H. Stadler, archivist of the Missouri Historical Society, both of whom led me to resources I might have otherwise overlooked.

Finally, I am indebted to Mr. Richard H. Potter of Roger Williams College, whose early checklist on Kate Chopin aided my study.

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CHAPTER I

THE KATE CHOPIN REVIVAL

The charge that American critics are more a hindrance than a help to American writers because of their inability to recognize the genius of their contemporaries often seems to gain credence in light of literary history. Too often American reviewers have allowed talented writers whose primary shortcoming was being out of tune with their times to fall into neglect and obscurity, only to have their critical successors "rediscover" and give them the belated recognition that should have been theirs in their own lifetimes. Herman Melville, Stephen Crane, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, and Nathaniel West are notable writers sharing such a fate. Critical reassessment had to occur before each received his rightful place in our literary heritage. Yet the optimist argues that in the long run justice is done, the unworthy dislodged, and literary order restored. Such an argument, however, places a heavy responsibility upon inheritors of the literary tradition, who must constantly review the literary scene to determine if there are still figures worthy of reviving. Yet should one of note be discovered, the phenomenon known as a "literary revival" takes place with all the passion and fervor of its religious counterpart. Such is the case of Kate O'Flaherty Chopin.

Katherine O'Flaherty was born in St. Louis in 1851. Her Irish father, Thomas O'Flaherty, became a prosperous St. Louis businessman after emigrating to America, first to New York and then to St. Louis in 1825. Of good breeding and intelligence, he married into an aristocratic family of French origin in 1839, but his wife died the following year in giving birth to a son, George. In 1844, Thomas O'Flaherty married Eliza Faris, who had roots in the French and Creole elite of St. Louis as the grand-daughter of Victoria Verdon Charleville, who probably descended from French families that had settled in America around 1700.

The O'Flahertys had three children. Thomas, Jr., born in 1848, was a drowning victim at twenty-five. Kate was the second child. Another daughter, born shortly after Kate, lived only a few years. Kate's half-brother George, whom she always spoke of with affection, died in 1862.

In 1855, Thomas O'Flaherty was killed in a train accident. After his death, Kate's great-grandmother, Mme. Victoria Charleville, became the dominating force in the young girl's life, engaging her with stories of the men and women who had pioneered the Louisiana territory. Mme. Charleville died in 1862.

As the daughter of socially prominent parents, Kate attended the St. Louis Academy of the Sacred Heart, the finest school for young women in the city. There she was exposed to

Catholic teachings, domestic skills, and intellectual rigors. An avid reader since her childhood, she further developed this habit at school. In 1868, Kate graduated from the academy and soon became one of the most popular belles in St. Louis, where for the next two years she participated in the social activities worthy of a person of her class.

On June 9, 1870, Kate married Oscar Chopin, whose prominent Creole family owned the McAlpin plantation at Cloutierville in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, purportedly the setting of Uncle Tom's Cabin. For ten years, the Chopins resided in New Orleans, where Oscar worked as a cotton factor. When the business failed in 1879, Oscar moved his family to Cloutierville to manage the plantation. In January, 1883, Oscar suddenly died of swamp fever, and Kate had to assume the duties of managing the plantation while caring for their six children. The Cloutierville period of Chopin's life closed in 1884 when she returned to her mother's home in St. Louis, but her business dealings on the plantation had provided her with an intimate knowledge of the bayou Creoles, Cajuns, and Negroes.

In June, 1885, Kate suffered another personal loss with the unexpected death of her mother. With all her immediate relatives deceased, she turned to writing for solace. Her first novel, At Fault, published in 1890, was followed by two collections of short stories, Bayou Folk in 1894 and A Night

in Acadie in 1897. Largely as a result of the short stories, she gained national acclaim as a masterful local colorist and the majority of her stories appeared in the popular and literary magazines of the period.

By 1899, Kate Chopin had written over eighty-five short stories, most of them collected in Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie; the novel At Fault; a number of short poems and essays; translations from Guy de Maupassant; a one-act play; a polka; and two personal diaries. Her literary future seemed assured. In 1899, however, she published The Awakening, a penetrating novel about womanhood, adultery, and death. The work was so far ahead of its time in its portrayal of woman's sensuality, that she was immediately condemned and her reputation destroyed. Highly discouraged and, perhaps, weakened in health by the harsh criticism of The Awakening, Kate Chopin wrote only one additional essay and eight more stories before her death. When she died in 1904, she was virtually a forgotten writer.[1]

Soon after her death, all of Kate Chopin's works went out of print, with the exception of "Désirée's Baby," a short

[1] Biographical sketch adapted from Per Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969). In her genealogical study of Chopin, Wilson refutes two of Seyersted's statements. She argues that 1850 is Chopin's true birthdate and that Thomas, Jr., did not drown but died of a broken neck after being thrown from a buggy. Mary Helen Wilson, "Kate Chopin's Family: Fallacies and Facts, Including Kate's True Birthdate," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 2 (Winter 1976-1977), 25-31.

story frequently anthologized because of its tragic racial theme. The only notice of any substance she received following her death occurred in 1932: Father Daniel S. Rankin's Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories, a book based upon his dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania. It received only six critical notices,[2] and except for several inconspicuous notices in literary histories and works about other authors, and two magazine articles, the name of Kate Chopin by the early 1950's had all but faded from memory. For the very few that did recall her, she remained a mystery.[3]

In 1953, the first glimmerings of a Chopin revival took place. That year Cyrille Arnavon, professor of American literature at the University of Lyon, "rediscovered" The

[2] Chronologically, they are as follows: Edward Larocque Tinker, "Southern Story Teller," New York Herald Tribune, December 4, 1932, Section X, p. 23; "New Books and Reprints," Times Literary Supplement, December 29, 1932, p. 991; "Kate Chopin," Boston Evening Transcript, December 31, 1932, Book Section, p. 3; "Kate Chopin," Springfield, Massachusetts Daily Republican, January 24, 1933, p. 8; Jay B. Hubbell, "Brief Mention," American Literature, 5 (March, 1933), 93; and Frederick Hard, "Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories," Modern Language Notes, 49 (March, 1934), 192-93.

[3] Fullerton states: "Mrs. Chopin's career was so brief, her manner so unusual and her work is generally so little known that a consensus of critical opinion regarding it is lacking." B. M. Fullerton, Selective Bibliography of American Literature 1775-1900 (New York: Dial Press, 1936), p. 52. Pattee adds: "Her two volumes of short tales, Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie, are still in their original editions and totally unread, and her name is forgotten save by a few . . . . " Fred Lewis Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1923), p. 325.

Awakening in his translation of the novel, entitled Edna. It contained an important "Introduction" based upon a previous essay in 1946, "Les Débuts du Roman Réaliste Américain et l'Influence Française" in which for the first time Chopin was treated as a serious novelist and realist instead of merely a regional writer. Despite Arnavon's effort to revive an interest in the author, Mrs. Chopin remained an unknown figure, as the Frenchman's work had limited circulation, particularly in the United States. But three years later, two other articles appeared that circulated in the United States: Kenneth Eble's "A Forgotten Novel: Kate Chopin's The Awakening," Western Humanities Review (Summer 1956), and Robert Cantwell's "The Awakening by Kate Chopin," Georgia Review (Winter 1956). Both highly praised the novel and thought it worthy of preservation. Eble in particular called for reconsideration of the author and her work. Three years later, a quirk of fate occurred that eventually brought about a renewed interest in the author. In 1959, Cyrille Arnavon himself came to the United States as a visiting professor at Harvard, and, while there, suggested a biographical study of Kate Chopin to one of his more industrious students, Per Seyersted, who, coincidentally, was a visiting student from Norway. Through this chance acquaintance, the "rediscovery" of Kate Chopin was to take place.

As Seyersted soon discovered while he looked for materials to compose his biography, Chopin was indeed a forgotten artist.

In an article published in January 1963 and written at the request of the Missouri Historical Society, which too was seeking information about the author, Seyersted commented: "Kate Chopin is one of the best-kept secrets of St. Louis and American literature."[4] Yet he prophesied that "With the present re-evaluation of American literature and the increasing interest in lesser known American authors, her turn will undoubtedly soon come."[5] In the 1969 bibliographical supplement to Louis D. Rubin's A Bibliographical Guide to the Studies of Southern Literature, Seyersted again remarked on the scarcity of materials: "So far, only one book [Rankin's] and some twenty-five articles, etc., of any importance have been devoted to Kate Chopin."[6] Furthermore, he observed, she was still being treated "almost solely as an outstanding Louisiana local colorist . . . "[7] including her treatment in the Literary History of the United States, the standard literary history by Robert Spiller and others. Nonetheless, 1969 proved the pivotal year in the literary fortunes of Kate Chopin. Late that

[4] Per Seyersted, "Kate Chopin: An Important St. Louis Writer Reconsidered," Missouri Historical Society Bulletin, 19 (January, 1963), 89.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Louis D. Rubin, A Bibliographical Guide to the Study of Southern Literature (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 174.

[7] Ibid.

year Seyersted published his long-awaited study, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, as well as The Complete Works of Kate Chopin in two volumes, both of which were soon to become landmarks in Chopin scholarship.

These two monumental works by Per Seyersted clearly mark the "Chopin revival," and the response to his effort came almost immediately. From February of 1970 to late 1971, fourteen reviews of Seyersted's two works were published compared to the six that had followed Rankin's.[8] Most of these reviews were laudatory and commended the Norwegian scholar for finally giving due recognition to a neglected artist and for having provided the first "definitive collection" of her works.[9] The most impressive response, however, came from the sudden

[8] Chronologically, they are as follows: Daniel Aaron, "The New York Times Book Review," New York Times, February 8, 1970, Section 7, pp. 5, 30; S. K. Oberbeck, "St. Louis Woman," Newsweek, 75 (February 23, 1970, 103-04; "Briefly Noted," New Yorker, 46 (March 14, 1970), 155; Richard Jones, "The Mood of the Times." The Times, March 28, 1970, p. 14; John R. Willingham, "Kate Chopin," Library Journal, 95 (May 1, 1970), 1744; "Kate Chopin," New York Times Book Review, June 7, 1970, p. 40; John Espey, "Reviews," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 25 (September, 1970), 242-47; Choice, 7 (September, 1970), 845; "Love in Louisiana: Kate Chopin: A Forgotten Southern Novelist," Times Literary Supplement, October, 1970, p. 1163; Lewis Leary, "Kate Chopin, Liberationist?" Southern Literary Journal (Fall, 1970), 138-44; George Arms, "Book Reviews," American Literature, 43 (March, 1971), 136-37; Daniel Aaron and Sigmund Skard, "Per Seversted: Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography," Edda (1971), 344-66; Jean Stafford, "Sensuous Women," New York Review of Books, 17 (September 23, 1971), 33-35; and Mary Lewis Chapman, "Kate Chopin," American Book Collector (Chicago), 22 (September, 1971), 33.

[9] The Complete Works of Kate Chopin is by no means "complete." Seyersted plans a Chopin Miscellany to cover omitted or newly discovered items.

influx of printed materials devoted to Chopin following Seyersted's contributions.

The flood of printed materials that followed clearly indicate Kate Chopin was well on her way to being "rediscovered." Of the materials published on Chopin prior to 1969, only Rankin's work and nine critical articles, including those by Arnavon and Seyersted, were chiefly devoted to the author; others merely mentioned her in passing. Since 1969 over thirty scholarly articles have appeared and several more have been listed as "forthcoming;" ten dissertations, three extended bibliographies, a continuing newsletter, and several editions of her works have also been published. American Literary Scholarship, a review of the year's work in American literature edited initially by James Woodress and later by J. Albert Robbins, also noted this substantial increase in Chopin criticism and the resultant revival. In 1966 ALS cited Kate Chopin for the very first time, identifying her as one of several "largely unexamined" artists. In 1969 following Seyersted's two works, it commented that "the inevitable revival of critical interest has already begun . . . ," and in the next two years it characterized the revival as being in "full bloom" and "moving ahead" as it reached its peak and then slowed down somewhat in 1972 and 1973, though several worthwhile articles and dissertations appeared.[10]

[10] Harry Finestone in American Literary Scholarship, ed. by James Woodress (Durham: Duke University Press), 1966,

Commentary for the succeeding years is not yet available, but there are numerous indications that the reading and study of Kate Chopin are increasingly popular.

To attest to this sustained interest, Emily Toth, the founder of The Kate Chopin Newsletter, in the Spring of 1975 described the first MLA Conference of Chopin Scholars held in December of '74 at New York:

> The expected attendance at such seminars is thirty-five; seventy-one people squeezed through the door long enough to sign the attendance sheet. Others could not get in for lack of room; there were people on the floor and in the aisles . . . . Per Seyersted . . . made the trek from Norway and attended the seminar.[11]

Some seventeen seminar papers on various aspects of Chopin's work were submitted, and because of the success of this conference, another Chopin seminar was held December 29, 1975 at the MLA Conference in San Francisco. "A small but enthusiastic group of Kate Chopin scholars, including her biographer, Per Seyersted," were in attendance.[12] In addition, there are several "Works in Progress" that promise important developments in Chopin scholarship. Per Seyersted is currently editing a

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p. 263; J. V. Ridgely in American Literary Scholarship, ed. by J. Albert Robbins, 1969, p 171; M. Thomas Inge in American Literary Scholarship, 1970, p. 187; Inge in American Literary Scholarship, 1971, p. 176; Inge in American Literary Scholarship, 1972, p. 192; Inge in American Literary Scholarship, 1973, p. 213.

[11] Emily Toth, ed. The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Spring, 1975), 4.

[12] Ibid., 5; and The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Winter, 1975-76), 31.

Kate Chopin Miscellany to serve as a supplement to his Complete Works of Kate Chopin. An edition of Chopin's translations of Maupassant, edited by Thomas Bonner, Jr., and Sandrum Banks, is underway. G. K. Hall of Boston has just published an updated bibliography of Chopin entitled Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin: A Reference Guide edited by Marlene Springer; and numerous scholarly articles on Chopin have been accepted for future publication. Moreover, a proposed film of the author's life is currently being negotiated by Kate Chopin, great-granddaughter of the author, with Jessee Buddenhagen of St. Louis, Missouri, and was scheduled for production in 1976. A film production of The Awakening has been planned.

Perhaps the greatest boon of the current revival is the availability of Chopin's works to students of literature and the general public. Discounting the frequent anthologizing of "Désirée's Baby" and some minor works published as part of Rankin's study, access to the author's works was quite limited before Seyersted's Complete Works in 1969. Except for the scarce original editions and the equally scarce reprints, not excluding Arnavon's French translation of The Awakening, Chopin's works were generally unavailable to the public until the 1960's. In 1964 Putnam's published The Awakening for reasons unknown to the present management, [13]

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[13] In reply to a request as to why Putnam's decided to reprint The Awakening in 1964, Jackie Flynn, Assistant to the Managing Editor, replied in a personal communication dated April 5, 1973 that "the printing of Kate Chopin's The

and reprints of Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie were published, the former by Gregg Press in 1967 and the latter by Garrett Press in 1968. Several followed Seyersted's "definitive edition" of 1969. In 1970 Holt, Rinehart, and Winston issued The Awakening and Other Stories, edited by Lewis Leary; and Garrett Press reprinted The Awakening and Bayou Folk, both with an "Introduction" by Warner Berthoff; in 1972 Avon put out its own paperback edition of The Awakening; Redbook magazine offered its readers an unabridged reprint of the novel in its November 1972 issue. The Feminist Press for 1974 published The Storm and Other Stories with The Awakening, edited with an "Introduction" by Per Seyersted. In 1976, the New American Library printed The Awakening and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin, edited and with an "Introduction" by Barbara Solomon, and W. W. Norton and Company, Inc. issued a Norton Critical Edition of The Awakening, edited by Margaret Culley. The Chopin Miscellany on which Seyersted is currently working will publish or republish the fugitive writings of Chopin omitted from his Complete Works.[14] Besides "Désirée's Baby," selected stories of Chopin have now found their way into reputable anthologies frequently used by academic institutions.[15]

Awakening was an editorial decision made by a man who is no longer with the company. Therefore, we have no way of knowing what his reasons may have been." The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Spring, 1975), 13.

[14] The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Spring, 1975), 1.

[15] "A Pair of Silk Stockings," in The American Tradition

The current revival assures that the name of Kate Chopin will not likely be subject to literary oblivion, compensation enough perhaps for the years of neglect. But it does not assume the critical reputation of Kate Chopin has been finally ascertained. To help achieve this, one must first examine the response of book reviewers and critics during her own lifetime so that contemporary criticism can be viewed in the proper perspective. To date, no such study has been made.

This study thus focuses upon the highly responsible role played by the reviewer and critic in establishing the critical reputation of Kate Chopin during her own lifetime and provides a brief account of their continuing role in the present in light of the Chopin revival. Beginning with the mild recognition of her first major literary effort At Fault in 1890 to the final critical postmortems following her death in 1904, the reviewers of her period not only gave impetus to her career, but were also largely responsible for terminating

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in Literature, ed. by Sculley Bradley and others (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1974), Vol. II, pp. 295-99; "A Respectable Woman," in American Literature: The Makers and the Making, ed. by Robert Penn Warren and others (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), Vol. II, pp. 1705-08; "Nég Créol," in Anthology of American Literature, ed. by George McMichael (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), Vol. II, pp. 219-25; "Athénaïse: A Story of a Temperament," in John C. Guilds, ed., Nineteenth-Century Southern Fiction (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 293-320; "The Story of an Hour," in Introduction to Literature, 6th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), pp. 29-31; and "The Story of an Hour," in Images of Women in Literature, 2nd edition, ed. by Mary Anne Ferguson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 385-87.

it. Nor has their influence subsided, as the current revival indicates.

The major part of the study examines the response of reviewers and critics during the writer's own lifetime. Since the bulk of Chopin criticism came at this time in the form of the book review, special emphasis is placed upon the early reviews of her four major works and their influence upon her literary fortunes, with considerable attention being given to the very nature of the book review itself in the 1890's, and the personal attitude of Kate Chopin toward reviews and reviewers. The literary milieu that produced such reviews and shaped the minds of the men who wrote them also comes under scrutiny.

The study concludes with an overview of the author's critical reputation in light of the early reviews and the continued influential role of the review in respect to modern criticism and the current revival, noting particularly the dramatic response that followed the 1969 publication of Per Seyersted's two important contributions. Throughout, the study adheres to the basic assumption of modern scholarship that "the passage of time is essential before a writer's achievement can be objectively viewed and assessed."[16]

[16] M. Thomas Inge, "General Editor's Preface" to Theodore Dreiser: The Critical Reception, ed. by Jack Salzman (New York: David Lewis, 1972), p. ix.

CHAPTER II

THE SOCIAL AND LITERARY MILIEU OF KATE CHOPIN

In March 1894, still virtually unknown, Kate Chopin published her second major work, Bayou Folk. Four years before, her first novel At Fault had received enough local attention to arouse her literary aspirations. Following this modest success, Kate Chopin succeeded in finding a limited market for her shorter fiction, first in local magazines and later in the more prestigious eastern magazines; yet, she grew impatient to have another work of substantial length in print. Bayou Folk, a collection of twenty-three tales and sketches of Louisiana life, ended that impatience. She now eagerly awaited the reviews of her latest production.

Mrs. Chopin did not have long to wait. By early April, a number of highly favorable reviews from all over the country welcomed her as a new and distinguished writer of local color stories. Her popularity grew overnight. Mrs. Sue V. Moore, the editor of St. Louis Life, a light magazine devoted to society news and some fiction, requested more of her stories on the strength of Bayou Folk alone. Other literary outlets opened to her, resulting in the publication of nearly forty additional stories between 1894 and 1897, the majority of which were collected in A Night in Acadie in 1897.[1] As might be expected, local society journals began running gossip

columns of her activities, stressing the fact that she was now a famous St. Louisan. Her home quickly became a favorite gathering place for literary and artistic visitors to the city, so that she built up an entourage of friends and her home became a virtual literary salon comparable in a modest way to that of the famous French writer, Mme. de Staël.[2] One of Mrs. Chopin's newspaper friends was later to write after her death that she was "Beyond doubt, the most brilliant, distinguished and interesting woman that has ever graced St. Louis . . . ."[3] More a society page recognition than notice of Mrs. Chopin's literary skills, the article notes her possession of the "grace and talent" needed to maintain "a brilliant social circle."

This social notoriety coupled with continuing laudatory notices from reviewers brought about a personal dilemma for Mrs. Chopin. An unpretentious person, she loathed the invasion of privacy and influx of social parasites that came with her success; yet, she craved the fame and fortune that her literary aspirations, or "commercial interest" as she referred to it in her diary, bestowed upon her. Success was important to her, as she unabashedly admitted in an early

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[1] Per Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 68.

[2] [Vernon Knapp?] "Is There an Interesting Woman in St. Louis?" St. Louis Republic, September 11, 1910, Feature Section, Part V, p. 1.

[3] Ibid.

diary entry before the fate of Bayou Folk was known, commenting,"I want Bayou Folk to succeed."[4] At other times, she withdrew from the very success that had come to her. In a diary entry dated July 24, 1894, she commented:

> I am losing my interest in human beings; in the significance of their lives and actions-- I want neither books nor men. They make me suffer. Is there one of them can talk to me like the night--the summer night?[5]

These conflicting impulses resulted in a compromise by which she simultaneously tried to maintain her womanly modesty while trying to further her local and national success, admitting the latter to only her closest friends. Secretly desired or otherwise, success came to Mrs. Chopin rather quickly. Her biographer Per Seyersted affirms that by May 22, 1894, barely two months after the publication of Bayou Folk, Mrs. Chopin's national fame was an "acknowledged fact."[6]

This sudden ascent to fame is even more remarkable in view of Kate Chopin's belated entrance upon the literary scene at the age of thirty-nine. Fortunately for her, the intellectual climate and spirit of the age were favorable for a writer of her talents, particularly when those talents were seemingly dedicated to the local color story, a popular mode of fiction at the time. In 1884, a year after the death

[4] Seyersted, p. 59.

[5] Ibid., p. 68.

[6] Ibid., p. 58.

of her husband Oscar Chopin, she left Cloutierville to return to St. Louis, her birthplace. There she resided with her mother and renewed old family acquaintances. At this time, it seemed unlikely that Kate Chopin would seriously become involved with the world of letters. Her writing accomplishments to date consisted only of some personal diaries, several school poems and essays composed in a commonplace book between 1867 and 1870, and a short fable "Emancipation," probably written in 1869. It took another personal tragedy, this time the sudden death of her mother in June of 1885, before Kate Chopin's latent talents were to emerge. Filled with despair over the loss of her husband and mother in a span of three years, Mrs. Chopin gradually turned to writing stories for solace and comfort at the urging of her family doctor and close friend, Frederick Kolbenheyer.[7]

Dr. Kolbenheyer, formerly her obstetrician and now her family doctor, continued his acquaintance with Kate Chopin even after she moved in 1886 to the new, western part of the city. His visits to her new home were supplemented by frequent letters. An outspoken and radical thinker, he undoubtedly influenced the religious and philosophic leanings of Kate Chopin and encouraged her to continue her new-found interest in science. When Kolbenheyer reread the letters Chopin had written to him when she was in Louisiana, he was impressed

[7] Ibid., p. 49.

with the literary quality of her descriptions and suggested that she take up writing.[8]

The doctor's advice seemed to be taken to heart. By 1888 at least two stories were underway and two years later her first work At Fault was published. Though weakly constructed, the novel gained some local recognition from reviewers which encouraged her to continue her efforts. Subsequently, the short story collection Bayou Folk (1894) gained her national recognition, and the city of St. Louis eagerly celebrated Mrs. Chopin as a local figure of distinction who helped fulfill the city fathers' earlier prophecies of greatness for the city.

Kate Chopin's sudden fame revitalized the notion held by many St. Louisans that their city was destined to be the "Future Great City of the World," a vision spawned in the early 1880's by the city's seemingly endless population growth[9] and its likely attraction as the "Gateway to the West," in terms of both expansion and trade. Although this dream of greatness for St. Louis never materialized as railroads and trade kept passing it by, many local newspapers, including the influential St. Louis Globe and the Post-Dispatch, expounded and perpetuated this illusion of grandeur abetted by area

[8] Ibid.

[9] The enthusiasm was calculated on a premature basis, for while in 1840 the city's population had quadrupled and doubled each succeeding year, by 1880 it increased only 11%. Max Putzel, The Man in the Mirror (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 26.

culture groups such as the Philosophical Society, which instigated the "St. Louis Movement in Philosophy, Literature, and Education." Inspired by this vision, many members of the author's social circle and fellow St. Louisans wished to promote simultaneously Kate Chopin and their city and region.

One champion of Chopin who refused to subscribe to the notion of grandeur was the well-known St. Louisan William Marion Reedy,[10] editor of the Mirror. Humorist, critic, political satirist, and literary discoverer, Reedy transformed the Mirror over a period of years from a virtual scandal sheet to a reputable journal devoted to literature, art, society, and eventually anything of interest to thinking people. In 1894, Reedy became sole editor and the magazine soon became known as Reedy's Mirror. Though basically conservative,[11] Reedy did not hesitate to comment upon the controversial issues of the day--and one that raised his ire was the popular view of St. Louis as a cultural center. While most papers in the 1890's supported this popular view, Reedy's journal poked fun at the very idea, singling out the "St. Louis Movement" of the Philosophical Society as especially ridiculous,

[10] By 1916, Reedy was such a well-known figure that British editor Frank Harris' first words while stepping off a ship supposedly were: "Where can I find Reedy?" Putzel, p. vii.

[11] Putzel comments: "Until he was forty Reedy was an avowed conservative in politics and in literary taste," and although later circumstances forced him to more radical positions as an advocate of literary dissenters" . . . in essential ways he remained a conservative all his life . . . ." Putzel, p. 6.

and commented that it was " . . . as dated as St. Louis' pretensions to future greatness . . . ."[12] Reedy's commentary had considerable impact as he was beginning to emerge in the middle nineties as a nationally recognized critic. Moreover, subsequent to the change in format of his paper from gossip sheet to one devoted to the arts, he soon discovered talented writers others overlooked or underestimated. One such writer was Kate Chopin. By this time, she had embarked upon a promising writing career with the publication of At Fault in 1890. Four years later, when Mrs. Chopin won praise for the second work Bayou Folk, Reedy was one of its foremost admirers.[13] On several occasions thereafter, he invited the author to publish her stories in the Mirror, and even though he too would be repelled by the frankness of The Awakening, he remained one of Chopin's staunchest supporters throughout her career.

With Reedy's support and with St. Louis anxiously awaiting any figure of distinction to fulfill its cultural hopes, the sudden fame of Kate Chopin following the publication of Bayou Folk is not so surprising as it might have seemed at first, considering this was only her second major literary effort. And yet, the acclaim that Kate Chopin received for

[12] Ibid., p. 55.

[13] Two highly complimentary reviews of Chopin's Bayou Folk occurred in the Sunday Mirror, 4 (April 15, 1894), 4 and the Sunday Mirror, 4 (September 30, 1894), 4.

this work might have remained restricted to St. Louis had it not been for a significant change in the newspaper and magazine industry that had already made an impact upon the literary world by the time Mrs. Chopin began seriously writing in 1890.

Fortunately for Kate Chopin, her greatest period of literary development and productivity coincided with one of the most remarkable periods of development and productivity ever experienced by the publishing industry. The boom in publishing that occurred from 1870 to 1900 was a unique American phenomenon and greatly increased the chances of a new writer being published.[14] Previously, this privilege was restricted to the established writers, most of whom lived across the Atlantic, as the limited number of publishers in this country were reluctant to incur the risks involved with unproven talent. Nor was there a large reading public to draw upon, as political concerns had priority over literary ones during the period of sectional conflict. But when publishing became "big business," the mere mass of newspapers and magazines that

[14] Observing this American phenomenon, a somewhat startled English writer commented: "America is the classic soil of newspapers; everybody is reading; literature is permeating everywhere; publicity is sought for every interest and every order; no political party, no religious sect, no theological school, no literary or benevolent association, is without its particular organ; there is a universality of print." British Quarterly Review, 53 (January, 1871), 4. Cited in Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism, (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 405.

emerged now had the power of bringing a heretofore unknown writer before an American public that had suddenly acquired a taste for reading.

By 1870, the United States had about three times as many newspapers as the United Kingdom, and more than a third of all the newspapers in the world.[15] From 1870 to 1910, the circulation of daily newspapers increased nearly ninefold (from less than three million to more than 24 million), which was over three times as great as the increase in population.[16] In his noted study American Journalism, Frank Luther Mott estimates that in 1900 there were over 12,000 newspapers in the United States.[17] As a result of this incredible growth, newspaper journalism became a respected and lucrative business, rivaled only in its development by a similar explosion in the magazine industry.

From 1885 to 1905, nearly 11,000 periodicals were published, the greatest rate of increase of titles occurring between 1885 and 1900.[18] As with the newspaper, virtually every known discipline, school of philosophy, movement, profession, trade, and industry had a magazine to serve as its spokesman.

[15] Mott, pp. 404-05.

[16] Richard D. Current, The Essentials of American History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 224.

[17] Mott, p. 411.

[18] Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905 (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1957), pp. 11-12.

The February 6, 1892 issue of the Chicago Graphic gave its assessment of the happening:

> The development of the magazine in the last quarter of a century in the United States has been marvelous, and is paralleled by no literary movement in any country or in any time. Every field of human thought has been entered and as the field has broadened new magazines have arisen to occupy the territory, and the magazine has become not only a school of literature but of science, art and politics as well.[19]

In 1895 the Nation observed that magazines were being born "in numbers to make Malthus stare and gasp"[20] while two years later the National Magazine lamented: "Magazines, magazines, magazines! The news-stands are already groaning under the heavy load, and there are still more coming."[21] Magazines of all descriptions thus flooded the market; and while a number of these fell upon hard times, suffering abbreviated life expectancies, a far greater number found readers eagerly waiting to consume their contents.

Even more remarkable than the simultaneous development of the newspaper and magazine in the nineties was the unique friendship the two formed with one another, for the rise of one did not bring about the demise of the other. On the

[19] Graphic, 6 (February 6, 1892), 107. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 12.

[20] Nation, 61 (November 14, 1895), 342. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 11.

[21] National Magazine, 7 (November, 1897), 191. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 11.

contrary, they proved more complementary than competitive in their appeal to the reading public, causing George Pellew of the Critic to remark: "Literature and journalism have joined hands as never before . . . ."[22] Together, the newspaper and magazine comprised the bulk of reading material for most Americans during the period: and, coupled with a continuing interest in the longer forms of fiction, particularly the novel, their success helped transform the publishing business into a booming industry that found its center in New York by the end of the century.

This booming publishing industry was one of the more beneficial fruits of a new thriving economy that promised more wealth, which in turn, promised an expanding reading public. More wealth meant more facilities. New high schools,[23] colleges, and libraries were constructed across the land, giving impetus to an already growing reading public. More wealth also meant more leisure, especially for those of the urban middle and professional classes; and, consequently, reading became an affordable as well as a popular and fashionable means of passing time. Numerous literary clubs and cultural

[22] George Pellew, Critic, 18 (January 17, 1891), 29. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 110.

[23] Current, pp. 223-24. According to Current, in 1860 there were only 100 public high schools in the country, but by 1900 there were 6,000, though the greatest expansion occurred at the elementary grade school level. By 1900 compulsory school attendance laws were in effect in 31 states and territories but were not rigidly enforced.

organizations, such as the Chautaugua Literary and Scientific Club and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, came into vogue as men and women of wealth and leisure embraced the world of letters. As a result, literary "crazes" for certain books and authors swept the country, though not necessarily the same book and author for all regions. The 1890's truly marked a literary renaissance. Never before had the reading public been so large, or so enthusiastic, and never before had reading materials been so accessible, so varied.

The nineties thus had more to offer the professional writer than ever before. The mere mass of magazines and newspapers greatly enhanced the writer's chances of finding himself in print and, upon publication, he was virtually assured of reaching at least those who had become habitual patrons of their favorite magazine or newspaper. True, the powerful eastern publishing centers of Boston and New York dominated the literary market, but as long as the literary practitioner remained somewhere within the conventional standards of "good taste" and, one might add, "bad taste," his opportunities for obtaining some measure of success were never better.

Kate Chopin was one of the many American writers who benefited from the literary rejuvenation brought about by the tremendous growth of the publishing industry in the nineties. The advantages she accrued by writing during this time no doubt aided her dreams of gaining national recognition. Through the promotional powers of Houghton Mifflin of Boston, an

influential firm located in a major publishing center, Bayou Folk came to the attention of readers and critics well beyond St. Louis.[24] After the success of this work, Kate Chopin had little difficulty getting most of her work into print despite some occasional squabbles over subject matter. In the three years following her first short story collection, Chopin published frequently in a variety of newspapers and magazines including the Atlantic Monthly, Century, Youth's Companion, Vogue, American Jewess, Catholic Home Journal, Independent, New Orleans Times-Democrat, and the Shreveport Times.[25]

Chopin's preference for the short story as her favorite means of expression further aided her career. By its very length the short story was well-suited to the format of the magazine. From 1872 to 1897, short story fiction grew popular with the readers of the day as pointed out by the Kimball study for the Atlantic Monthly magazine, which found the increase of short fiction one of the major changes in the content of American magazines during this period.[26]

[24] In contrast, Chopin's next effort A Night in Acadie suffered in its popularity because the obscure company of Way & Williams did not have the promotional powers of Houghton Mifflin. Seyersted, pp. 73-74.

[25] Per Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), Vol. II, pp. 1004-29.

[26] Arthur Reed Kimball, Atlantic Monthly, 86 (July, 1900), 124. Tables are in annual Journal of the American Science Association, 1899. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 113.

Quite often the demand exceeded the supply--a fact noted by commentators for Ladies Home Journal, Literary World, and Life magazines.[27] Especially popular were local color stories that captured the peculiarities and eccentricities of a particular people and region. According to Howard Mumford Jones and Richard M. Ludwig, stories of this nature gained their widespread appeal during this period by fusing "provinciality . . . with a general philosophy of ideal conduct, typicality of human nature, and the dominance of universal moral standards, usually Christian."[28] Significantly, Kate Chopin's two most popular works Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie were short story collections written primarily in the local color vein.

Despite the numerous opportunities the nineties offered Kate Chopin and other writers like her, the period was not without its literary hazards. The massive consumption of prose fiction in both its shorter and longer forms by an ever-expanding reading public brought with it new concerns about the morality of literature. In an age that harbored contrasting value schemes, represented respectively by Mark Twain's The Gilded Age and George Santayana's The Genteel Tradition at Bay, conflicts inevitably arose over the purpose and nature of literature, particularly with respect to the novel.

[27] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 113.

[28] Howard Mumford Jones and Richard M. Ludwig. Guide to American Literature and Its Backgrounds Since 1890 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 139.

Previously, the typical romantic novel had offered idealized young ladies of virtue whose deportment reinforced the traditional values of society. But with the slowly developing trend toward realism, the young heroines of earlier novels became less and less ideal models of virtue. Even more disturbing, many of these so-called "novels of physical passion" came from the pens of feminine authors. Understandably, the war of words that ensued over the changing direction of the novel was primarily carried on through the magazine.[29]

As early as July 1888, the morally prudent Belford's Magazine sensed this change of direction and protested, "This country is flooded with a nasty literature that is not only crude, but as low in tone as it is atrocious in taste."[30] In 1894, the highly proper Amelia E. Barr, a novelist herself, took issue with the new literary trend in fiction in her essay "Modern Novel" for the North American Review. Barr argued that even the sensational novel had some dubious value as long as virtue triumphed in the end. However, she had little use for

[29] The periodical was undoubtedly the most influential vehicle of expression. In a comprehensive survey of American periodicals for the Andover Review in 1892, the young librarian-editor Emma Helen Blair concluded that periodical literature was " . . . exercising an almost incalculable influence upon the moral and intellectual development of individuals, upon home life, and upon public opinion." Emma Helen Blair, Andover Review, 18 (August, 1892), 154. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 14.

[30] "Reviews," Belford's Magazine, 1 (July, 1888), 263.

the profit-making "erotic-sensational novels" that taught only one vile lesson: "That we may sin, if we only sin neatly and take care not to be found out."[31] In contrast, she embraced the domestic novel of "fireside concerns" which upheld womanly virtues and those novels of "social power" which taught young ladies the beauty of helping the less fortunate. Barr became increasingly alarmed with the new heroine of many novels:

> She is not a nice girl. She talks too much, and talks in a slangy, jerky way, that is obviously vulgar. She is frank, too frank, on every subject and occasion. She is contemptuous of authority, even of parental authority, and behaves in a high-handed way about her love affairs. She is, alas! something of a Free-thinker![32]

Barr's protestations were echoed by her male counterpart, Charles Dudley Warner, a journalist and essayist saturated in the values of the genteel tradition.[33] Warner feared the moral deterioration of his fellow man in this new money-making land and saw literature as a means to offset it. In his essay "Modern Fiction," originally published in the April 1883 issue of the Atlantic Monthly, Warner maintained that the worst feature of modern fiction was its "so-called truth to

[31] Amelia E. Barr, "Modern Novel," North American Review, 159 (November, 1894), 593.

[32] Ibid., 598.

[33] Thomas R. Lounsberry, "Introduction" to The Complete Writings of Charles Dudley Warner (Hartford: The American Publishing Co., 1904), Vol. 15, pp. i-xxxviii.

nature." He countered that "art requires an idealization of nature" and that "bad art in literature is bad morals." To him, realism with its "wholly unidealized view of human society" represented social and moral degradation. The true purpose of art was to take readers away from the burdens and sordid conditions of life, not to immerse them in them. "Modern society is going to the dogs" was his assessment of the trend toward realism.[34] St. Louis editor Alexander N. DeMenil took a more moderate position. In his essay "The Character of Modern Fiction" for The Hesperian, DeMenil contended that fiction "may be realistic or idealistic, but it must portray the life of human beings with human natures, and living in a natural way."[35] These and other moralists tried to offset what they considered a dangerous decline in the moral calibre of fiction.

Some tried to blame this decline on "foreign influences." In "Our Unclean Fiction" for the New England Magazine, Joshua W. Caldwell attributed the development of the erotic novel "directly to Paris," to Balzac and Zola, and "Sardou and his high priestess of indecency, Sara Bernhardt."[36] Noting that

[34] Charles Dudley Warner, "Modern Fiction" in The Complete Writings of Charles Dudley Warner, ed. by Thomas R. Lounsberry (Hartford: The American Publishing Co., 1904), Vol. 15, pp. 151-69.

[35] Alexander N. DeMenil, "The Character of Modern Fiction," Hesperian, 4 (October-December, 1904), 387. DeMenil was an early associate of Kate Chopin, yet he too criticized The Awakening on moral grounds.

[36] Joshua Caldwell, "Our Unclean Fiction," New England Magazine, 3 (December, 1890), 436-39.

the populace of the two American centers of thought, Boston and New York, were largely composed of people of foreign extraction, he called for a halt to the assimilation of races and unlimited immigration responsible for weakening the naturally strong moral character of the Anglo-Saxon race. Likewise, Arlo Bates in Scribner's Magazine held the French contribution to literature in low esteem, commenting that "No Frenchman is able to feel himself fully sincere in fiction unless he is indelicate."[37] William A. Page found other outsiders responsible. In his essay for The Bauble, he exclaimed: "We are becoming sick of sin--the beautiful, the leprous, the Swinburney sin. It is the fashion nowadays, but the tide is already ebbing."[38]

Still others blamed the growing immorality of literature upon the nature of the reading public itself and the mere mass of fiction. Edmund Gosse in the July 1895 issue of the North American Review berated the readers of the day for having failed to cultivate taste, while Joshua Caldwell in the December 1890 issue of the New England Magazine concluded that one

[37] Arlo Bates, Scribner's Magazine, 2 (August, 1887), 244. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 122.

[38] William A. Page, The Bauble, 1 (July, 1895), 7-8. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, pp. 122-23. This may be a faulty citation on the part of Mott. In Mott's citation, the only reference to Swinburne is as follows: "We shall pay an immense sum to have a tomb-stone design by Aubrey Beardsley, and an 'In Memoriam,' full of wild waste light and stinging subtle fires and fearful caricatures of Sappho, by that verse-maker, Algeron Charles Swinburne." 8.

reason behind the demand for literature of little value was a reading public of "limited intelligence."[39] In June of that same year, Charles Dudley Warner in "The Novel and the Common School" reflected that, although the general intelligence of the population had been raised and the habit of reading had become more widespread than ever, too may readers were still blind followers of popular taste and consequently demanded works that were the least worthy. Warner further complained that many people read nothing but newspapers and magazines and that their editors did not always select the best "mental food" for their readers.[40] DeMenil reiterated the same sentiments in the 1904 issue of the Hesperian, noting that despite the continued advance in education, there was a marked decline in "solid reading."[41] In an 1897 article for the St. Louis Criterion, William Schuyler also cast aspersions at the "plain people of arrested development" who constituted the American reading public, but singled out women readers for being "notoriously fickle in their tastes," a matter of considerable consequence since they made up the "great majority" of those who read literature.[42]

[39] Edmund Gosse, North American Review, 161 (July, 1895), 80, 118. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 124; and Caldwell, 439.

[40] Charles Dudley Warner, "The Novel and the Common School" in The Complete Writings of Charles Dudley Warner, ed. by Thomas R. Lounsberry, (Hartford: The American Publishing Co., 1904) Vol. 15, pp. 252-56.

[41] DeMenil, 386-88.

On the other hand, Willa Cather was more disturbed by the mere "mass of fiction" than the intellectual capacities of the reading public. In her essay "The Literary Situation in 1895" for the Courier, she contended that perfection was no longer required to publish a novel and that out of the voluminous productions of the period many were "good" but none were "excellent." Excluding the works of Henry James, she viewed most novels as hasty efforts, without any originality:

> In all the literature of the last ten years, I have not found one burning conviction, one new and really confident truth wrested from the concealing elements.[43]

Seemingly, the increased interest in reading and literary productivity that resulted from the boom in the publishing industry now proved more detrimental than beneficial to public morality.

Despite these harsh criticisms, no other group was blamed more for the moral degradation of literature than the women novelists of the nineties who flooded the market with their productions. As early as 1888, Belford's Magazine noted this trend: The great stream that swells day by day in the form of prose fiction is simply appalling . . . . Every female born under the stars and stripes comes into the world prepared to write a novel."[44] Worse yet, many were accused of contributing

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[42] William Schuyler, "The American Reading Public," St. Louis The Criterion, 15 (August 7, 1897), 6-7.

[43] Willa Cather, "The Literary Situation in 1895," Lincoln Courier, November 16, 1895, p. 6.

more than their share of erotic-sensational novels. The popular comic magazine Puck scolded Mrs. Amelia Rives-Chamber for writing The Quick or the Dead "with a low necked pen," and Current Literature for December 1888 explicitly damned "the development of the novel of physical passion as written by young women," citing Laura Daintrey's Eros as an example of poor taste.[45] Defending her female contemporaries, Amelia Barr cynically remarked that many critics would have us believe the "sensational novel" was primarily the product of the feminine mind; yet, she pointed out, many men excelled in that form. True, women authors had written a number of these "pot boilers" but as a rule, Barr argued, " . . . it is likely that women will prove themselves to be just as good as men at their best, and just as dull as men at their worst."[46] Barr labeled men as the "doers" of society, women as "the born story-tellers of humanity." She felt the latter had the responsibility of maintaining high moral standards in fiction and of presenting high ideals unique to the experience of being a woman. Regardless of the sex of the writer, she felt that "the best novels are written by men and women who have seen

[44] Belford's Magazine, 2 (December, 1888), 102. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 111.

[45] Current Literature, 1 (July, 1888), 3; and Current Literature, 1 (December, 1888), 463. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 123.

[46] Barr, 599.

life in all its variations of joy and sorrow, triumph and failure."[47] Despite her energetic defense of the female writer, Barr conceded that many women had been negligent in upholding the proper ideals in their fiction. In a popular column for the New Orleans Times-Democrat, "Bab," an anonymous lady of letters, offered this final advice to women of her age aspiring to be writers:

> Stay at home and be something better than a great writer; be a good daughter, in time be a loving wife, and later on a mother. Work is a misfortune for a woman; that is, the work that takes her outside her home. This is the truth, and I know it, because as the years have gone by I have fallen by the wayside. I have seen a few, only a few fall into wicked ways; but I have seen a very, very great many simply drift along in life, picking up a little work here and a little there, getting just enough to keep them living without ambition, without hope, and saddest of all--alone. Think this all over before you start out into the workaday world, and try and conclude whether, after all, your work isn't that which is nearest to you. What I have written is in the kindest spirit but it is my answer to the hundreds of letters I have gotten--the answer that is forced from me by the knowledge gained during the experiences that I have come to. BAB [48]

Bab's reply clearly indicates the expected role of a woman in the nineties. Together the responses of Amelia Barr and Bab offer a composite picture of the woman writer of the day. To become a writer in a man's world was daring enough, but to

[47] Ibid., 596.

[48] "Would Be Writers," New Orleans Times-Democrat, May 27, 1894, p. 26.

fail to uphold the value of home and hearth in fiction was unthinkable. Nonetheless, women writers contributed their fair share of "scandalous productions" to the literary scene.

Many moralists and purists thus viewed the 1890's as a rather bleak period in American literature. Literary standards and moral precepts seemed to be crumbling before their very eyes. The magazine industry and the world of fiction blatantly catered to the decadent tastes of a largely female audience; even more alarmingly, women actively participated in the trend toward impropriety. Forecasts of doom and destruction could be heard across the land. Like Warner, these critics believed the world was "going to the dogs."

Yet not all overseers of literature shared in this pessimistic gloom. The 1890's also saw a strong reaction against the snobbish prudery of the moralists. Led by Theodore Dreiser, a growing number spoke out against the artificial high-mindedness of the day. Commenting upon the accusations of indecency plaguing the novelist, Dreiser retorted: "Immoral! Immoral! Under this cloak hide the vices of wealth as well as the vast unspoken blackness of poverty and ignorance; and between them must walk the little novelist."[49] Even advocates of traditional values became agitated over the absurdity of some of the charges. In November 1890, when New York teachers accused the dead Longfellow of "eroticism" in

[49] Theodore Dreiser, Booklovers' Magazine, 1 (February, 1903), 129. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 124.

"The Launching of the Ship," many contemporaries thought the complaint ludicrous. "These fault-finding opinions are getting to be about as ridiculous and tiresome as the trashy material complained of," bewailed Current Literature.[50] However, this change of attitude that was eventually to alter the course of fiction at the turn of the century came too late to benefit Kate Chopin or other early followers of the realistic mode.

At the time of Bayou Folk, Kate Chopin seemed an unlikely figure to become involved with the literary and moral controversies that characterized the period. Indeed, she was not even considered a "feminine novelist" upon whom most of the criticism now centered, having chosen instead the short story as her forte particularly after her second novel "Young Dr. Gosse" was turned down by the Chap-book in 1895. And although some of her shorter pieces such as "Mrs. Mobry's Reason," "A Shameful Affair," and "Miss McEnders" disturbed the editors with their daring subject matter, the majority of her short stories proved inoffensive.[51] Her first success Bayou Folk was succeeded three years later by another collection of short stories in a similar format entitled A Night in Acadie. Issued in November 1897 by the little-known company

[50] Current Literature. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 124.

[51] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 55.

of Way & Williams of Chicago, the collection received neither the publicity nor the critical acclaim of its predecessor, but overall, the work did little damage to the writer's popularity. Still, the number of questionable stories remained limited. R. W. Gilder of Century rejected "The Story of an Hour," "A Night in Acadie," and "Athénaïse" on ethical grounds; yet these stories found other publishers. Several editors looked upon "Lilacs" and "A Vocation and a Voice" with disfavor before the stories came into print, but "Two Portraits" never did find a willing publisher. Other stories featuring Chopin's more passionate heroines aroused objections from editors, but once again were usually accepted by the first magazine she sent them to with Vogue, Century, and the Atlantic Monthly the most frequent recipients.[52]

Meantime, Kate Chopin sent Houghton Mifflin, the publishers of Bayou Folk, another group of stories called "A Vocation and a Voice." But early in 1897, Horace E. Scudder, associated with Houghton Mifflin as editor of the Atlantic Monthly, asked: "Have you never felt moved to write a downright novel? The chance of success in such a case is much greater than with a collection of short stories."[53] Intrigued at the possibilities Scudder's suggestion offered, Mrs. Chopin began writing a novel, probably in June 1897, and completed

[52] Ibid., p. 73.

[53] Ibid. Letter from Houghton Mifflin dated January 20, 1897.

it early the next year. She first offered the novel to Way & Williams but by November 1898 this company had gone out of business and all its titles were transferred to the Herbert S. Stone Co. The novel was eventually published by this firm on April 22, 1899 as The Awakening. Anticipating great things from this venture into the longer form of fiction, Mrs. Chopin anxiously awaited reaction to the book from the public and the critics alike. She apparently had no idea that her literary fortunes were about to undergo a complete reversal.

Reaction to the book was both swift and devastating. One harsh review followed another and almost concurrently the public turned against Kate Chopin. No social invitations followed the publication of The Awakening. Those St. Louisans who five years before applauded the writer as a local heroine, now admonished Chopin and shunned her work. To add to her ignominy, the novel was barred from the city's public libraries. Practically overnight Mrs. Chopin felt herself ostracized by the people of St. Louis. Nor were there comforting remarks coming from the critics. Those reviewers who had praised and encouraged her previous efforts, now damned and belittled the novel, labeling it "poison" and unfit for public consumption. Even the staunch Reedy recoiled at this story of an American lady who broke her marriage vows for sensuous pleasures. Though still proclaiming Kate Chopin "among the first writers of the day," he found the novel's heroine unacceptable.[54] Many others, their moral sensibilities offended,

simply refused to review the book.

Stunned by this unexpected turn of events and the general condemnation of the novel, Kate Chopin attempted to defend her work in the July issue of Book News, but the effort failed to halt the flood of demeaning reviews. Deeply hurt, she eventually refused to discuss the subject, now confident that she had lost all chance of becoming a literary success. Describing her emotional state at the time, a close friend observed: "It was unbelievable how she was crushed as it [The Awakening] was truth as she saw it and people would not see."[55] Spending part of October in Wisconsin, possibly to escape the hostile atmosphere of St. Louis, she soon returned home. Friends and followers tried once again to bring her out of her gloom and encouraged her to write again. On November 29, 1899, ladies of the elite Wednesday Club invited her to be their guest at a special program where some of her "songs" were set to music and performed and where she read "Ti Démon." This invitation took some of the sting out of the club's exclusion of her name from the "American Prose Writers" series and helped to restore her to social favor. But the harmful effects of the novel's reception were never fully removed and may have even damaged her health. Though she wrote

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[54] "Society." St. Louis Mirror, 9 (November 30, 1899), 10.

[55] Statement of an "unnamed friend" taken by Rankin in an interview. Cited in Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 178.

several more short pieces following The Awakening, she never regained her popularity and recognition. Weakened in health, she became increasingly ill after attending the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 and died two days later, already a forgotten literary figure.

How can we account for this dramatic reversal of fortune for this once highly esteemed writer? The answer lies in terms of the very foundation upon which Kate Chopin built her reputation. First, the literary atmosphere of the 1890's was extremely conducive to receiving new writers of merit, particularly women whose works had continued to attract a large following. Moreover, the ever-expanding reading public had made the publishing business a very profitable one, which in turn, provided more outlets than ever for literary talent. And, when that talent took the form of the already immensely popular short story found in the countless magazines of the day, the chances for publication and recognition became all the greater. Secondly, the city of St. Louis particularly longed for a figure of distinction to fulfill its cultural aspirations; as a native St. Louisan, Kate Chopin easily fitted into the scheme of things.

Finally, and most notable of all, the literary critics and reviewers of the period not only encouraged Mrs. Chopin to continue her efforts, but also called her to the attention of the general public, first on a local level and then on a national one. More importantly, they were instrumental in

establishing her critical reputation. At first, the majority of them bestowed their critical favors upon her, viewing the author as an exceptionally skillful practitioner in the local color vein despite her own vigorous protestations about being so labeled. However, when Mrs. Chopin departed from this vein, or, at least, subordinated its elements to other themes in The Awakening, she shocked and alienated a good many of these same critics and found herself at odds with the moral prudery of the day.

CHAPTER III

REVIEWS AND REVIEWERS

Undoubtedly the literary milieu of the nineties accounts for much of the power of the book reviewers. With the possible exception of editors and publishers, no other group of individuals wielded such an influence upon the literary fortunes of aspiring writers during the nineties. In great demand as a result of the influx of periodical publications that marked the period, the reviewers reached a wide but not especially sophisticated literary audience which was still dependent upon others for discerning what was palatable material for consumption. Critical commentary of the reviewers thus had tremendous impact, and taking everything else into consideration, they were primarily responsible for Kate Chopin's rise and demise as a writer of fiction.

During the ten-year period of Kate Chopin's major work, the book review also became extremely popular. In 1899, John Burroughs commented in the North American Review that "The criticism of criticism is one of the marked literary characteristics of the last ten or fifteen years."[1] In A History of American Magazines, Frank L. Mott adds that from 1885 to 1905 " . . . there was more writing in the magazines

[1] John Burroughs, "Recent Phases of Literary Criticism," North American Review, 168 (January 1899), 42.

about books, literary figures, the drama, and publishing than ever before."[2] Along with this hunger for criticism came the important development of the "best seller list," which exerted its influence throughout the period and served as an index of popular taste. Some early periodicals disdained the very notion of a best seller list, while others, such as the Boston Literary World and Chicago Dial, viewed a book selected as a "best seller" as a certain sign of its mediocrity. Nonetheless, the concept of a best seller list was made popular by the New York Bookman, which was founded in 1895 and quickly adopted the practice of its London counterpart, the London Bookman, of listing the most demanded books based on reports from leading bookstores.[3]

[2] Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905 (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1957), p. 122.

[3] In surveying the best seller lists of the period, Frank Luther Mott assessed the criteria by which a book found its way on the list: "Each book in the list is believed to have had a total sale equal to one percent of the population of continental United States--for the decade in which it was published." For the period 1890-1899, this entailed a sale of 625,000 copies, although not all magazines strictly adhered to this magic number. According to Mott, "Half the top best sellers of the years 1894-1902 were novels of the high romance." Bookman's best seller list for 1894 alone included Anthony Hope's The Prisoner of Zenda, Stanley J. Weyman's Under the Red Robe, George W. Cable's John March, Southerner, and Captain Charles King's Waring's Peril. The domestic novel was next in popularity and is represented by such works as Francis Marion Crawford's A Cigarette Maker's Romance (1890); Thomas Bailey Aldrich's Two Bites at a Cherry (1894); and Kate Douglas Wiggin's Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (1903). Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), pp. 207, 303. For a detailed discussion of Mott's criteria for selecting "best sellers," see his chapter entitled "What is a Best Seller?" pp. 6-11.

The growth of literary reviewing and the success of the "best seller list" were definite indications that American readers, still insecure in their own literary judgements, sought guidance in selecting their reading material. Unfortunately, the mere bulk of criticism, the majority of which took on the form of the book review, did not guarantee quality. In fact, large magazine circulations led to conservative editorial policies in reviewing to avoid possible offense. This policy led to reviews often mild in tone and devoid of substance.

The trend toward shallow, conservative reviewing brought cries of disdain from literary connoisseurs and critics alike, who felt the value of the review was being demeaned, though they often disagreed as to where to place the blame. Some accused public-conscious editors who bent before the demands of a less than discriminating reading public. In 1897, Norman Hapgood in his article "American Art Criticism" for Bookman voiced the common complaint bluntly: "How many editors frankly tell contributors that literary excellence is nothing; that popularity of subject is everything!"[4] Although there were now more readers in this country than in any other, Hapgood contended that " . . . in no country of importance is the current comment on books more lacking in thought and workmanship"[5]--a direct consequence of giving the masses what

[4] Norman Hapgood, "American Art Criticism," Bookman, 6 (September, 1897), 45.

they wanted. In "The Book Review, Past and Present" for the Atlantic Monthly, J. S. Tunison further charged that reviews of novels were "purely a bid for money" and nothing more.[6]

Others blamed the shallow literary acumen of the reviewer himself. Arthur Waugh in The Critic lamented:

> In all the wilderness of reviewing, how seldom it is that we encounter a real review. I do not allude for the moment to the increasing venality of editors, which is manifested every week by eulogies and attacks based upon personal bias, or the animosities of newspaper proprietors; for these things carry their own ridicule with them. But how many conscientious reviews do we find that are better than a "tasting," or running analysis of the contents, eked out by unhelpful comment? How many books in a year are treated to sound criticism from a man who really knows more about the subject that the writer he is estimating? There is very little such reviewing nowadays . . . .[7]

Similarly, Tunison in his detailed study of reviews for the Atlantic Monthly accused the reviewer of writing on topics with "meagre authority" and ridiculed his claims of "originality":

> The reviewer falls back upon what he is pleased to call his originality as a critic, eked out frequently by the earlier originality of another. This leads him in a curve which ultimately closes, and he is therefore constantly

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[5] Ibid.

[6] J. S. Tunison, "The Book Review, Past and Present," Atlantic Monthly, 84 (September, 1899), 318.

[7] Arthur Waugh, "London Letters," The Critic, 28 (June 6, 1896), 413.

> engaged in repeating, with verbal changes, the group of opinions which he had at the outset. Add to these considerations a third, that a large number of the prominent novels of the year have already been subjected piecemeal in magazine and newspaper syndicates to the judgment of readers, and it must be obvious that to this branch of criticism, if to any, applies in full force the Roman proverb about carrying fagots to the forest.[8]

Commenting on another tendency, the editor of Belford's Magazine took exception to the moral hypocrisy of reviewers. Noting the general condemnation of Edgar Saltus' The Truth about Tristrem Varick, the editor proclaimed that he indeed lived in "an odd age" where works dealing with murder, theft, burglary, or any other hideous offense escaped criticism, but let an author merely touch upon the subject of adultery and "he is gone," damned forever by "indignant reviewers." According to this exasperated editor, " . . . the world never saw such a deluge of lascivious works and such a number of critical pen-drivers who advertise what they condemn."[9] He thought the fears of "these sorely-disturbed guardians of public morals" to be totally "absurd." Finally, Percival Pollard, a noted journalist and literary critic of the late nineties, found fault with both publisher and reviewer, claiming the former had succumbed to money-making while the latter lacked the courage of his own convictions. Pollard claimed that publishers had "coddled a breed of reviewer who conceives

[8] Tunison, 317; 318-19.

[9] "Reviews." Belford's Magazine, 1 (July, 1888), 264.

his mission as that of a barker at Coney Island, rather than as an austere keeper of the Gate of Letters."[10]

In short, American reviewers and reviews were often held in low esteem in the nineties, despite their popularity. Yet the jaundiced outlook upon the profession was not newly founded. As early as 1836, Edward S. Gould in a lecture in New York cited six reasons for the lack of quality in American reviews: (1) gifts of complimentary copies; (2) indulgence of personal friends; (3) lenience toward colleagues on the same journal; (4) fear of offending the author's admirers; (5) desire to encourage American literature; and (6) indolence.[11]

Of course, much of the contempt toward the reviewer could be attributed to the very newness of literary concerns in America and the inexperience of a critical spokesman who suddenly found his work in demand and under public scrutiny. Added to this, the reviewer found himself under continuous pressure from magazine and newspaper publishers who often made their influence felt in the very business offices that controlled the reviewer. The instability and short life span

[10] Percival Pollard, Their Day in Court (New York: Neale, 1909), p.xvi. Pollard's own criticism was tainted by an aristocratic bias resulting from a cosmopolitan upbringing. Douglas C. Stevenson, "Introduction" to Their Day in Court, p. v.

[11] Published in the Literary and Theological Review for April 9, 1836. Cited in Hugh W. Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p. 15.

of many American magazines, with the resultant changes in staff and editorial policy, caused further compromises in the integrity of the reviewer. The reviewer of the nineties--assuming that he and the editor were not one and the same--found himself in an awkward and paradoxical situation: he was a publicly powerful and influential man in a personally powerless position, caught between the monetary desires of publisher and editors who could readily replace him and the expected adherence to high literary standards demanded of him by the nature of his trade. Meantime, his product had tremendous impact upon the reading preferences of the general public, reinforced by the new-found popularity of the "best seller list" concept. Assuredly, many reviewers were guilty of the accusations thrust upon them, but these were discomfiting times to be a member of that profession. It is a sad irony that during a period when the magazine and newspaper industries flourished and literary appetites were whetted, the quality of the review diminished, falling short of the literary dicta established earlier by the Young America critics--notably, Evert Duyckinck and William Alfred Jones,--and later Edgar Allan Poe. In the nineties, when such expertise was perhaps needed most, the supply of skilled critical commentators failed to meet the demand.

In spite of its mediocrity, the book review was a definite force in the literary world and its characteristics deserve notice. Even as late as the nineties, the anonymity

surrounding the review remains its most salient feature.[12] This was the customary practice in England, and American reviews readily adopted it. The cloak of mystery concerning authorship meant that the editors assumed responsibility for the opinions expressed in the review; unfortunately, many editors used this practice as a pretext for revamping contributions, thus making them more suitable to their own tastes. By mid-century some American commentators rebelled against this practice as a means of expressing their literary independence from the mother-country, but many reputable magazines, including the Atlantic and Putnam's, carried on the tradition of masking the identity of the reviewer. However, the employment of extensive quoting so popular in English reviews did not become a habit on this side of the Atlantic, though key passages were often cited verbatim. More often than not, the nature of the review was dictated

[12] This cloak of anonymity has caused numerous problems for researchers and students of literature. Some inroads have been made in establishing authorship, but most efforts have resulted in limited rewards. Commenting on this problem in Melville's Reviewers, the dedicated "harvester" Hugh W. Hetherington acknowledges his own limited success in identifying the reviewers of Melville: "In my dissertation I made a very few breaks in the great wall of anonymity surrounding the reviews. Jay Leyda made many more, and was able to give with certainty the identities of a number and to suggest plausibly the identities of many others--I have found out who wrote others. Many of the old reviewers will always remain, I fear, unknown, but far more acquaintanceship with these gentlemen has been gained than at first seemed possible." Hetherington, p. ix. One thing can be safely assumed about the anonymous reviewers of the period--they were predominantly male.

by the space available in newspapers and magazines. As a result, the long review article of twelve to fifteen pages soon gave way to those three or four pages or less in length. Opinion varies as to the merits of this brevity, some arguing that the review was now more to the point while others complained of its shallow contents. The main result--desirable or otherwise--was that most reviews were easily digested by the reading public.[13]

Besides length, the review was also slightly altered in function. Previously, it had been thought of as merely a substitute for the highly priced book that few could afford, but with the increased purchasing power of middle class families and the lower cost of books resulting from mass production, readers now looked upon the review as a "consumer's guide" that would assist them in deciding on which books their money could best be spent. As a result, the "modern advertising" of books was begun, causing J. S. Tunison to comment cynically that most reviews were "written more like advertisements than otherwise."[14] As a good review often meant more sales, it became an integral part of the selling process and subject to the pressures of those who used it only as a means of promoting a product. "Puffery," by which the reviewer served up "empty compliments" to please both

[13] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 13.

[14] Tunison, 314.

publisher and author, became common practice in the review.

Because of commercial pressures, American reviews fell short of the professionalism that characterized the British review, from which the former sprang. British reviews tended to be expertly written, analytical, and sincerely motivated by aesthetic values. In contrast, American reviews were often written by those who obviously, or even admittedly, had read only a few pages of the work under consideration and whose sketchy commentary more often than not was placed before and after the plot summary of a work and was frequently preceded by a thumbnail sketch of the author.[15] Analysis was rare and aesthetic concerns were too frequently subjugated to business interests.

As most reviews of the period were superficial in both contents and intent, they often revealed the inadequacies of the reviewer more than of the work. A few critics such as J. S. Tunison engaged in wishful thinking in attempting to discount the influence of the book review. Defending his position, Tunison states:

> Yet that it [the book review] has grown stronger or more popular would be rash to assert. On the contrary, the influence which the writer attributes to the great reviews three generations ago seems a mere reminiscence now. Is this because everybody has caught the truth of putting an opinion about a book? . . . Literature . . . has shifted its ground,

[15] Hetherington, "Reviewers British and American," Melville's Reviewers, p. 14.

> so that in great part it is no longer amenable to formal criticism, whether this be laudatory or the reverse.[16]

In his argument, Tunison speaks of the value of the review to those in academic and knowledgeable circles--"the genuine bookworm"--and in reference to this limited group he has a valid point. But most critics and writers recognized the review as a powerful catalyst in generating literary popularity and affecting literary reputations outside of scholarly circles. F. L. Mott attests to this in Golden Multitudes, where he speaks of the influence of reviews upon the "best seller" lists of the nineties and other periods. He concludes that: "The influence of reviews on the early distribution of a book is important. They help to get it talked about. Probably all publishers, and certainly all authors, prefer favorable reviews; but unfavorable reviews of a controversial book may have a favorable effect on sales."[17] The review, therefore, remained a powerful force in the nineties as it affected the reading habits of the general populace.

Long before the critical turmoil that followed the publication of The Awakening, Kate Chopin was acutely aware of the reviewer and his influence. Very early in her career she recognized the importance of getting published in eastern

[16] Tunison, 315.

[17] Mott, Golden Multitudes, p. 293.

magazines because such notice would bring additional recognition, and a good review would expand the potential literary outlets for her work. Her secret longing for success prompted her to pay close attention to the notices she received in newspapers and magazines. Just how keenly she scrutinized the reviews of her works is indicated by her letter to the editor-reviewer of The Republic, who objected to her use of the word "depot" for railway station and "store" for shop in a review of her early work At Fault, dated October 18, 1890.[18] That same day, Mrs. Chopin wrote this retort:

> To the Editor of The Republic
> St. Louis, Oct. 18--Will you kindly permit me through the columns of your paper to set The Republic book reviewer right in a matter which touches me closely concerning the use and misuse of words? I cannot recall an instance, in or out of fiction, in which an American "country store" has been alluded to as a "shop," unless by some unregenerate Englishman. The use of the word depot or station is optional. Wm. Dean Howells employs the former to indicate a "railway station," and so I am hardly ready to believe the value of "At Fault" marred by following so safe a precedent.
> Very respectfully yours.
> KATE CHOPIN[19]

[18] "Literary News and New Books." The Republic (St. Louis), October 18, 1890, p. 10.

[19] "Literary News and New Books." The Republic (St. Louis), October 25, 1890, p. 10. In Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories, Rankin cites this letter as being published in the October 19, 1890 issue of The Republic, but this is in error. The "Literary News and New Books" was a once-a-week news feature that occurred every Saturday. The review was printed in the October 18 issue and Mrs. Chopin wrote and dated her letter of response that very same day. However,

Even though this was a strong reply for a newcomer on the literary scene, this firm independence of mind and willingness to speak out when she felt a reviewer lacked perception characterized most of Mrs. Chopin's exchanges with the followers of this profession.

Even upon receiving favorable reviews of her second work Bayou Folk, Kate Chopin demanded keen criticism. In a diary entry for June 7, 1894, she complained:

> In looking over more than a hundred press notices of "Bayou Folk" which have already been sent to me, I am surprised at the very small number which show anything like a worthy critical faculty. They might be counted on the fingers of one hand. I had no idea the genuine book critic was so rare a bird. And yet I receive congratulations from my publishers upon the character of press notices.[20]

This entry is significant in that it illustrates the author's proclivity to mull over the reviews of her work while maintaining an objective point of view; it also re-emphasizes the dearth of quality reviewing.

The inadequacy of reviews of her work was also apparent to others. William Schuyler, a close friend of Kate Chopin and a critically astute observer, noted the misguided comments of some of those reviewing Bayou Folk. In an August

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the letter was not printed the next day--the 19th--but one week later on Saturday, the 25th of October. For Rankin's reference, see Daniel S. Rankin, Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), p. 129.

[20] Per Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), pp. 56-57.

article for The Writer that reported the success of Bayou Folk. Schuyler chided the reviewers for calling the now-widowed authoress a young woman--an error resulting from their own ignorance of Mrs. Chopin's background. Schuyler corrects the reviewers' faulty notion by commenting: "Mrs. Kate Chopin . . . was born in St. Louis in the early 'fifties and, as can be readily calculated, is not the 'young person' that many of her reviewers are bent on thinking her to be."[21] Schuyler adds that though Mrs. Chopin finds this error flattering, it is one she would like to see corrected. Despite the weaknesses of the review so apparent to Mrs. Chopin and to her friend Schuyler, the publisher and the public were both prone to judge writers by the number of press notices they received--a practice that later proved fatal to Chopin's The Awakening when the notices became derogatory.

Yet before the fatal reception of The Awakening, Kate Chopin became involved with the review from another perspective. For a brief period she reversed roles and practiced the craft herself. Following the success of Bayou Folk,

[21] William Schuyler, "Kate Chopin," The Writer (Boston), 7 (August, 1894), 115. In this essay, Schuyler refers to a second novel entitled "Young Dr. Gosse" by Chopin. No copy of this work has ever been found and it was probably destroyed by the author. Schuyler comments: "Mrs. Chopin has also written a second novel, which a few favored friends have been permitted to read, and which, in the estimation of some, is her very strongest work." Schuyler, 117.

Henry Dumay, editor of The Criterion, requested her to "exploit her opinions upon books and writers, and matters and things pertaining thereto."[22] The result was a series of six undated essays published in the St. Louis Criterion under the title "As You Like It," running from February 13, 1897 to March 27, 1897.[23] Although the essays are not strictly "reviews," bordering somewhere between the book review and the critical essay, they serve as dramatic examples of Kate Chopin's own literary standards and values, particularly in terms of what she considered a knowledgeable review. By examining the principles Mrs. Chopin incorporated into her own "reviews," we can better account for the shock and displeasure she experienced in reading over the superficial and untutored commentaries that were eventually to ruin her career.

Kate Chopin treasured objectivity more than any other principle in her role as a reviewer. In her second essay in the series "As You Like It," she alludes to the editor's

[22] Per Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), Vol. II, p. 709.

[23] The following are the opening lines and dates of publication of the six individual essays representing "As You Like It" that were published in The Criterion:
I "I have a young friend . . ." (February 13, 1897)
II "It has lately been . . . " (February 20, 1897)
III "Several years ago . . . " (February 27, 1897)
IV "A while ago . . . " (March 13, 1897)
V "A good many of us . . . " (March 20, 1897)
VI "We are told . . . " (March 27, 1897)
Cited in Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 1030.

previous request for her "opinions upon books and writers;" she then remarks that the editor might have been in error in his request by assuming that she had opinions, commenting:

> Very long ago I could do nothing with them; they were not self-supporting, and perished of inanition. Since then I have sometimes thought of cultivating a few--a batch of sound, marketable opinions, in anticipation of just such an emergency, but I neglected to do so. Of course, there are such things as transplanted opinions; then one may know them, even steal them; there are lots of ways; but what is the use? I did not tell all this to the editor of THE CRITERION beforehand, because I might have lost the opportunity of telling it to the public.[24]

This tongue-in-cheek reply, expressing her opinion of opinions, indicates Chopin's refusal to subjugate herself to the pretentious and commercial aspects of opinion-giving. Discussing the stories of Alexander Kielland in the same essay, she again expresses her reluctance to force her viewpoint upon others: "I am not going to advise anyone to read his stories; I would not be guilty of advising anyone to do anything."[25] She then casually points out the finer qualities of Kielland's stories, noting that there is no great demand for his stories. Chopin never enjoins her audience to read the book; instead, she demands only that her readers reaffirm their own objectivity. In the essay, she adds: "It is essential, in order to enjoy the tales of Kielland, to distrust our own point of

[24] Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 709.

[25] Ibid.

view; to set aside all prejudices as to nicety of technique; to abandon ourselves to the spirit of the narrator, and project ourselves into the very atmosphere of the subject."[26] For Chopin, setting aside personal preferences was a prerequisite to a sound review.

And when she was called upon to set aside her own personal preferences to evaluate Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure, Kate Chopin was equal to the task. In her review of Hardy's novel in Part IV of "As You Like It," she found the work "detestably bad," "unpardonably dull," and of dubious value to the young readers of the day. Still, she maintains her objectivity. In a cleverly conceived anecdote, a youth asks her if Hardy's book is any good. Rather than damning it, she merely replies that to her the work is "unutterably tiresome;" yet she is quick to add that the youth "might like it" and that he should not be condemned for the "investigating spirit" that leads him to such books.[27] This same open-mindedness is apparent in another remark Chopin made while perusing a manuscript someone had suddenly thrust upon her: "I never pick up a MS but with the hope that I am about to fall upon a hidden talent."[28] Chopin also appreciated this

[26] Ibid., p. 710.

[27] Admittedly, Chopin is applying some reverse psychology here. By not discouraging the youth from this terrible book, she is actually doing this very thing as the youth now loses interest, whereas if the opposite approach were taken, the youth would presumably become more inquisitive about a work he had best not read.

[28] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 88.

trait when she found it in others. In Part III of "As You Like It," Chopin praises Ruth McEnery Stuart's novelette Carlotta's Intended, and then alludes to Mrs. Stuart's impartiality, stating: "I fancy there are no sharp edges to this woman's soul, no unsheathed prejudices dwelling therein wherewith to inflict wound--upon her fellow-man or woman. Mrs. Stuart in fact is a delightful womanly woman."[29]

Perhaps the most vivid illustration of Chopin's objectivity occurs in her review of Emile Zola's Lourdes that appeared in St. Louis Life for November 17, 1894. Though Mrs. Chopin considered the work a "mistake," she felt the Frenchman exhibited sincerity in his production, and setting aside her own personal inclinations, she voiced her respect for differences of opinion: "I am yet not at all times ready to admit its truth, which is only equivalent to saying that our points of view differ, that truth rests upon a shifting basis and is apt to be kaleidoscopic."[30]

Truth may very likely be "kaleidoscopic" as Chopin acknowledges in her remark on Zola; yet, should a work fall short of embodying truth, everchanging as it might be, it elicits her strongest objections. To Chopin, truth meant a faithful portrayal of human nature which she felt was unchanging. In a review of Hamlin Garland's Crumbling Idols

[29] Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 712.

[30] Ibid., p. 697.

published in St. Louis Life, October 6, 1894, she wrote:

> Human impulses do not change and can not so long as men and women continue to stand in the relation to one another which they have occupied since our knowledge of their existence began. It is why Aeschylus is true, and Shakespeare is true to-day, and Ibsen will not be true in some remote tomorrow, however forcible and representative he may be for the hour, because he takes for his themes social problems which by their very nature are mutable.[31]

The constancy she attributed to human nature and the mutability she assigned to social themes set her apart from Garland. Chopin argued that in Crumbling Idols Garland undervalued the past in art and overemphasized the importance of the present, particularly in favoring sociological themes over those of love. While Garland claimed that in real life people did not speak of love, Chopin refused to dismiss man's basic drives--love being one of the most important--from her literary scale of values. Instead, she argued that, by writing of man's enduring drives, the artist produced literature of a lasting value, and she protested that " . . . notwithstanding Mr. Garland's opinion to the contrary, social environments, local color and the rest of it are not of themselves motives to insure the survival of a writer who employs them."[32] From her perspective, Garland was a man who, by denying man's basic drives, had not yet "lived and who founded his work upon a distorted concept of

[31] Ibid., p. 693.

[32] Ibid.

art--a concept that failed to deal with "the truth."

Despite this clash of viewpoint, Chopin offers the reader a balanced review. She praises the sincerity of an impressionistic chapter in Garland's work and closes by recommending his book to her readers, referring to the author as a "representative man of letters." Similarly, in examining Zola's Lourdes, she found much to criticize for what she considered a distortion of the truth. To her, the story was saturated with offensive and nauseous description made more burdensome by the Frenchman's excess of sentimentality and moral instruction. She further deemed it "unpardonable" for Zola to identify himself with the main character whose chief function was to expose clerical abuses. Still, she admired the French writer's "masterly" style and spoke of him as "the great French realist," though maintaining he took life "too clumsily and seriously."[33] Again in a review of Sister Jane by Joel Chandler Harris in the "As You Like It" series, Chopin's commentary remains symmetrical. Viewing Harris as "a man of genius" but trapped in this work by an effort to make "an external suggestion his own," she deliberately avoids dwelling upon the often melodramatic and disjointed plot of the novel in favor of those elements that reflect Harris' talents. She notes that the "real characters" in the novel have little to do with the advancement of the

33 Schuyler, 117 and Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 698.

plot; they are instead "the author's own" and vivid examples of his creativity. "Free Betsy Runs the Cards," "Two Old Friends and Another," and "Jincy in the New Ground" are three chapters that catch Chopin's fancy. Her main point in the review is that Harris is not a novelist; he lacks the "vision" for it, nor is the form suited to his genius. Instead, he has "the quaint and fanciful imagination of the poet," and, in his power to depict character in its outward manifestations, he is "unsurpassed by any American writer of the present day and equalled by few."[34] This delicately balanced flow of criticism, always offsetting the negative with the positive, is another marked characteristic of the reviews written by Chopin.

Besides infringements upon the truth of basic human concerns, the only other irritants to the otherwise congenial tone of Chopin's reviews were the attempts by some to censor literary works. Irked by the pretentious moralism of the philistines and the rush toward social reform that marked the period, she stood apart from her age in affirming the artist's right to freedom of literary expression, even when such expression offended her own sensibilities. Though still a relative newcomer to the literary scene, she revealed independence of character in her response to a conference she attended in Indiana conducted by the Western

[34] Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 720.

Association of Writers, a group unabashedly dedicated to "the development of a true and healthy American literature." Mrs. Chopin saw them as a misguided, if not morally pretentious, assemblage of writers, ignorant of the ways of the world and of the values of high art and whose only contribution thus far to a "true and healthy American literature" was an inferior collection of sentimental songs. In the July 7th issue of The Critic, she bluntly stated her case against the Western Association of Writers:

> [In their] garden of Eden--the disturbing fruit of the tree of knowledge still hangs unplucked. The cry of the dying century has not reached this body of workers, or else it has not been comprehended. There is no doubt in their souls, no unrest . . . .
>
> There is a very, very big world lying not wholly in northern Indiana, nor does it lie at the antipodes, either. It is human existence in its sublte, complex, true meaning, stripped of the veil with which ethical and conventional standards have draped it. When the Western Association of Writers shall have developed into students of true life and true art, who knows but they may produce a genius such as America has not yet known.[35]

Chopin abhorred mere convention and tradition and, more often than not, openly discarded the period's mask of morality and defended in her reviews the artist's right to express himself freely.

When Emile Zola wrote Lourdes, his main interest was

[35] Rankin felt that Chopin's criticism of the Western Association of Writers was "unfortunate." Rankin, p. 142. For Chopin's comments on the Western Association of Writers, see Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 720.

to disclose the clerical abuses of the Catholic Church, and he did so by employing the main character of the work as his mouthpiece. This approach disturbed the Church fathers and they immediately labeled the book forbidden fruit for their members. As already noted, Chopin too had her differences with Zola's work. But she stopped short of condemnation and openly opposed the decision of the Church to ban the book, thinking it a work which "a good Catholic would greatly enjoy reading . . . " if he were to set aside the author's viewpoint " . . . and color the facts with his own."[36] She assumed a similar attitude toward Hardy's Jude the Obscure, a book which she personally disdained. In an ironic foreshadowing of what was later to be the fate of her own novel The Awakening, the public libraries of St. Louis removed Hardy's work from circulation, declaring it unfit for youthful readers. In response to this action of the public libraries, Chopin begins her review of Hardy's novel with an anecdote. She has the censored book lying

[36] Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 698. Chopin was raised in the Catholic faith but her religious opinions were later influenced by Dr. Kolbenheyer. Rankin comments: "The Doctor's insinuating conversations carried conviction to Kate Chopin, to the extent at least that she no longer remained a Catholic in any real or practical way. No doubt there were other influences. But to trace the course of this yielding of her faith is unquestionably difficult . . . . Whatever the combination of influences that united to exert a strong power over Kate Chopin's mind, she became, within a year after her mother's death, a Catholic in name only. She never openly repudiated the faith of her youth; she remained merely indifferent to the practical duties of the Catholic religion." Rankin, pp. 89, 106.

openly on her table. A visiting lady friend then scolds her for keeping such a book in plain view with so many young people about. This exchange evokes a long discourse on the hazards of censorship by Chopin; for she sees such measures as " . . . robbing youth of its privilege to gather wisdom as the bee gathers honey."[37] Instead, she argues there is nothing inherently "seductive" about the work, which would have been more likely to escape the eyes of the innocent had the reviewers and librarians seen fit to let the novel "work out its own damnation" instead of calling greater attention to it through their protestations.[38]

Reviewers of the nineties might have done well to model their own efforts after those of Kate Chopin. In her brief, but successful, venture into reviewing, Chopin brought a rare sensitivity and a sense of professionalism to the printed page. Refusing to play the role of a literary god, she neither commanded her audience to read or to ignore another writer's efforts, but hoped instead to encourage readers to sharpen their own perceptions in discriminating among books. Her openminded, objective approach is surprisingly "modern" in terms of what we value today in a conscientious review. The biographical padding and superfluous

[37] Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 713.

[38] Ibid., pp. 713-14.

remarks common to her age are thankfully absent from her endeavors. In assessing the reviews, essays, and diaries of Kate Chopin in his landmark biography Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, Per Seyersted concludes: "The picture we get of Kate Chopin . . . is that of an unusually well-read and very intelligent critic whose moderation and balance cannot hide her sharply defined profile."[39] Chopin's ideal reviewer was the invisible and impersonal critic who wrote with an objectivity coupled with knowledge and sympathy--the one who projects himself "into the very atmosphere of the subject." Even during the nadir of her career, when The Awakening came under severe attack, she demanded perceptive criticism. In a letter to Herbert S. Stone, the publisher of the ill-fated novel, she enclosed a copy of a review of The Awakening written by C. L. Deyo for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and commented to Stone: "It seems so able and intelligent by contrast with some of the drivel I have run across that I thought I should like to have you read it when you have the time."[40] Although Deyo harshly criticized The Awakening in the review, claiming it contained "positively unseemly" truths, he accepted the spirit of the work--even if illogically, as Seyersted maintains--stating that he

[39] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 89.

[40] Letter dated June 7, 1899. Cited in Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 175.

was impressed with its "searching vision into the recesses of the heart" and with its masterful handling of difficult subject matter.[41] More significantly, he attempted to set aside his own personal prejudices in order to project himself into the very atmosphere of the work as he evaluated it. In other words, Deyo closely approached the ideal reviewer Chopin described. As a consequence, she found his comments noteworthy.

Unfortunately, the majority of the reviewers in the nineties fell far short of the prescriptions Chopin set forth and actually put into practice in her own reviews. Had it been otherwise, the literary career of Kate Chopin might have continued well beyond The Awakening. In the history of belles-lettres only a handful of other writers experienced the dramatic reversal of critical favor that befell the once popular Chopin. And since this reversal can best be understood by examining the commentaries of those responsible, the reviewers of Kate Chopin will now come under scrutiny.

[41] C. L. Deyo, "The Newest Books," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, May 20, 1899, p. 4.

CHAPTER IV

THE REVIEWERS AND KATE CHOPIN

In 1886 when Dr. Kolbenheyer first prompted Kate Chopin to pursue a writing career as a means of alleviating the grief she felt over the loss of her husband and mother, even he could not have anticipated the success the then despondent widow would soon achieve. Two years later, Kate Chopin began to write. Her first effort was "If It Might Be," an undated poem possibly expressing a deathwish to join her deceased husband. The poem was later published in a progressive Chicago magazine America on January 10, 1889, marking the first time Kate Chopin's work appeared in print. Another poem "Psyche's Lament" was probably written in 1890 but remained out of print until Daniel Rankin published it in Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories.[1] Meanwhile, she composed two short stories, the first of which was "Euphrasie." This story was put aside in favor of "Unfinished Story--Grand Isle--30,000 Words," a story she soon destroyed probably as a result of coming under the influence of Guy de Maupassant.[2] Chopin became so enamored

[1] Kate Chopin, "Psyche's Lament" in Daniel S. Rankin, Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), p. 189.

[2] Per Seyersted refers to a previously unknown manuscript from 1896 entitled "Confidences" in which Chopin writes: "About eight years ago there fell accidentally into

of the Frenchman's story-telling that she looked upon her early writings as "crude and unformed."[3] Determined to improve her own style, Chopin shows in comments on a neighbor's manuscript suggestions of other authors who probably influenced her:

> If she [the neighbor] were younger I would tell her to study critically some of the best of our short stories. I know of no one better than Miss Jewett to study for technique and nicety of construction. I don't mention Mary E. Wilkins [Freeman] for she is a great genius and genius is not to be studied.[4]

Whether or not Mrs. Chopin felt she had improved her own literary technique by the time she submitted her next story, "A Poor Girl," to Home Magazine in May 1889, is impossible

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my hands a volume of Maupassant's tales. These were new to me. I had been in the wood, in the fields, groping around; looking for something big, satisfying, convincing, and finding nothing but myself; a something neither big nor satisfying, but wholly convincing. It was at this period of my emerging from the vast solitude in which I had been making my own acquaintance, that I stumbled upon Maupassant. I read his stories and marvelled at them. Here was life, not fiction; for where were the plots, the old fashioned mechanism and stage trapping that in a vague, unthinking way I had fancied were essential to the art of story-making. Here was a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who, in a direct and simple way, told us what he saw. When a man does this, he gives us the best that he can; something valuable for it is genuine and spontaneous... . . He has never seemed to me to belong to the multitude but rather to the individual. . . . Someday I like to cherish the delusion that he has spoken to no one else so directly, so intimately as he does to me." Per Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 51.

[3] William Schuyler, "Kate Chopin," The Writer, 7 (August, 1894), 117.

[4] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 52.

to determine. The story met with a mixed reception from the magazine's editor, as Chopin's comments in a personal notebook indicate: "Objection to incident--not desirable--to be handled--remarks 'well written--full of interest'--would consider if changed."[5] Unhappy with this reaction to the story, Chopin them showed it to her friend John Dillon, co-founder and editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Although Dillon was noted for his liberal outlook on literature, he too gave the story "damning praise," scorning her subject matter but encouraging her efforts. Soon after, Chopin destroyed the story. The offensive subject matter that disturbed her contemporaries still remains a mystery. Chopin had better results with her next two stories. "Wiser than a God" and "A Point at Issue" were both published late in 1889, the former in a magazine, the Philadelphia Journal, and the latter in a newspaper, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

At Fault

On July 5, 1889, Kate Chopin began work on the most ambitious undertaking of her new literary career. On April 20, 1890, approximately nine months later, she completed her first novel, soon to be entitled At Fault. She could hardly wait to get the work into print and before the eyes

[5] Ibid.

of nationally prominent critics.[6] In June 1890 she discussed the manuscript with C. L. Deyo, a journalist friend from the Post-Dispatch. But the first publisher she approached did not share her enthusiasm for the work and refused it. That September Chopin paid the small St. Louis firm of Nixon-Jones Printing Company an unspecified amount to publish the work. On September 27, 1890, one thousand copies of At Fault were issued in pale green paper covers.[7] She personally promoted the work by sending copies to newspapers and magazines. She also sent a copy to William Dean Howells, whom she admired, but Howells never commented upon the work.[8]

In spite of the author's personal promotional campaign, At Fault gained limited recognition. Only a handful of reviews related to this work have been discovered; the majority of them originated in St. Louis, and indicate that the novel attracted largely local attention. The first known review appeared in the October 4 issue of the obscure St. Louis Spectator, about one week after the publication of At Fault.

[6] Schuyler, 117.

[7] At Fault was never reissued and today copies of the original edition are scarce. Only two surviving copies can be found in institutional collections: one at Yale University and the other at the Library of Congress. Another copy at the St. Louis Public Library served as the text for Seyersted's The Complete Works of Kate Chopin. Per Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), Volume II, p. 1032; and Lewis Leary, "Kate Chopin's Other Novel," The Southern Literary Journal, 1 (Autumn, 1968), 60.

[8] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 207, n. 21.

The brief review thought the work well-written and the characters believable.[9]

A day later the influential St. Louis Post-Dispatch printed what was to be the most extensive review of the novel. The thoughtful consideration At Fault received from the Post-Dispatch is not surprising, as its editor John Dillon had been entrusted to comment upon her earlier effort, "A Poor Girl." Although there is no documentary evidence, it is probable Dillon was one of the first to receive a complimentary copy of At Fault from Chopin. Whether or not Dillon himself reviewed the work or assigned it to one of the paper's critics is unknown. The review, however, was not especially favorable. The critic did not share the author's contention that we should take people as they are and not try to make them over. Nor did he approve of the main character's use of "shut up" in speaking to his drunken wife or to the frequent references to the numerous engagements of the main character's sister, even if true. On the other hand, the reviewer praised Chopin for keeping her own presence out of the book and for abstaining from excessive moralizing, a practice common to the period.[10]

On October 11, 1890, a review of At Fault appeared as

[9] St. Louis Spectator, 11 (October 4, 1890), 55.

[10] "A St. Louis Novelist," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 5, 1890, p. 31.

part of the gossip column in another local publication, St. Louis Life, a magazine edited by Mrs. Sue V. Moore, soon to become a close acquaintance of Chopin.[11] The magazine's commentator--in all probability Mrs. Moore herself--referred to At Fault as a "charming story" that had been "very favorably received by several St. Louis journals." The phrasing strongly suggests that other laudatory reviews of the work are yet to be discovered, since the reviews from the St. Louis Spectator and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch are the only known local commentaries to precede the one in St. Louis Life.[12] Contending that Mrs. Chopin possessed "an intuitive perception of what is fitting and artistic," the St. Louis Life reviewer was further attracted to the seemingly effortless skill with which Chopin composed this "pleasing" and "well-told" story in contrast to "the crudity of the majority

[11] Both Sue V. Moore and John Dillon eventually became prominent members of Kate Chopin's "literary salon." Mrs. Moore's magazine St. Louis Life later evolved into The Criterion headed by Henry Dumay, another salon associate, who requested Chopin to write the "As You Like It" series for his magazine. Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 64.

[12] Unquestionably, there are other reviews from local newspapers and magazines yet to be discovered. However, Richard H. Potter, compiler of the first extensive bibliography on Chopin, aptly described the impracticality, if not the impossibility, of locating every possible review: "As you undoubtedly know, nearly every town of any size had its own independent daily or weekly during this period, and it was a common practice to review current books on a regular basis in many of these papers. I know of no central source that has indexed these dailies and weeklies; many of them are not even locally indexed." Letter from Richard H. Potter of Roger Williams College, dated September 3, 1975.

of first books." The closing line of the review unknowingly prophesied the fate of At Fault: "The book will have a wide circulation if it receives its deserts."[13]

But the work was never reissued. The limited promotional facilities of the little-known Nixon-Jones Printing Company, coupled with the impractical efforts of the author to publicize her own work, did little to extend the popularity of the work beyond St. Louis.

The first review from other than one of the St. Louis presses appeared in the October 12th issue of the New Orleans Daily Picayune under "Recent Publications." The paragraph-length review did little to enhance the fortunes of the author. The newspaper critic was more interested in appealing to local interests than in passing judgment upon the work. In the three-sentence review, two are devoted to recalling that Mrs. Chopin was the widow of the late Oscar Chopin, who had served as a commission merchant in New Orleans for ten years. The reviewer offered only one sparse comment on the novel: "The life of a handsome Creole widow of 30 is charmingly related in the book."[14]

Outside of this review, only local notices followed. On Saturday, October 18, the St. Louis Republic acknowledged the author's skill as a local color writer, an observation

[13] "People We Know," St. Louis Life, 2 (October 11, 1890), 8.

[14] "Recent Publications," New Orleans Daily Picayune, October 12, 1890, p. 15.

that was to be often repeated by those who later spoke of Chopin. Calling the work "a clever romance of Louisiana life," the reviewer for the paper thought the French Creole accent of the English-speaking characters "well-caught" and some of the secondary characters "particularly well-drawn." Yet he objected to the drinking habits and the profanity of Fanny, whom he felt the author had made more reprehensible than she might have intended. He further disapproved of the author's use of "depot" and "store," which prompted a response that same day from Mrs. Chopin.[15]

By December, another local magazine, Fashion and Fancy, predicted a bright future for the native St. Louisan: " . . . we trust Mrs. Chopin will attain a permanent place in that bright galaxy of Southern and Western writers who hold to-day the foremost rank in America's authors." Though the book at times revealed an "amateur's hand" and suffered from a surplus of secondary characters, Fashion and Fancy found it "a very meritorious one" with "unmistakable indications of strength."[16]

Approximately one year following the date of its publication, At Fault finally elicited comment from one of the more influential Eastern presses when a one-paragraph review

[15] "Literary News and New Books," St. Louis Republic, October 18, 1890, p. 10; and "Literary News and New Books," St. Louis Republic, October 25, 1890, p. 10. See Chapter III, pp. 55-56.

[16] "Literary Gossip," Fashion and Fancy, 5 (December, 1890), 60.

appeared in The Nation for October 1, 1891. The New York review criticized the author for the book's nebulous title, arguing that several characters could lay claim to being 'At Fault:'

> There is the lady who drinks and the gentleman who gets a divorce from her, the widow who loves and is beloved by him, but who persuades him to remarry his divorced partner and bring her to the Louisiana plantation, where she (the widow) may have a fostering care of the two and help them do their duty to each other. There is also the young lady of many arrangements, the negro who commits arson, the young gentleman who shoots him, the Colonel who shoots the young gentleman, the St. Louis lady who goes to matinees and runs off with the matinée-going gentleman.

Piqued over the endless possibilities, The Nation suggested that it would not be amiss in deciding who is "At Fault" to include as well "the claims of the author, the publisher, and the reader."

The Nation did, however, commend the author for her "graphic description" of life on a cotton plantation and cited her skill in reproducing the dialects of whites and blacks and in perceiving and defining character. Yet the review concluded that "the array of disagreeables" penned by Mrs. Chopin were born "rather of literary crudity than of want of refinement" on the part of Chopin herself since this was her first publication.[17]

Some three years later, William Schuyler wrote the first

[17] "Recent Fiction," The Nation, 53 (October 1, 1891), 264.

critical essay of significance on the career of Kate Chopin for the August 1894 issue of The Writer, published in Boston. In the essay Schuyler did not neglect this early effort of Chopin's, calling At Fault a "somewhat imperfect work" but one in which could be seen "the germs of all she has done since." The St. Louis editor Alexander N. DeMenil declared in 1904--the year of Chopin's death--that this first effort was "somewhat crude" but afforded "pleasant reading." In contrast to Schuyler, DeMenil contended that "in no way did it [At Fault] foreshadow her future work." Most modern-day criticism of At Fault focuses upon the contentions of these two contemporaries of Chopin.[18]

From the reviewer's chair, At Fault was only a moderate success. The St. Louis publications applauded her descriptive artistry and literary style but questioned the morality and the very number of her secondary characters, though they admitted some were very well drawn. The sole Eastern review similarly disdained the large canvas of characters who were morally "At Fault," yet praised the author for her descriptions and characterizations. But the major drawback of At Fault may have been more with the restricted distribution of the book than with the unpolished skills of its author. In a review of Bayou Folk printed in St. Louis Life on June 9, 1894, Sue V. Moore thought it necessary to point out

[18] Schuyler, 115-117; and Alexander N. DeMenil, The Literature of the Louisiana Territory (St. Louis: St. Louis News, 1904), p. 257.

that At Fault, not Bayou Folk, was Chopin's first major endeavor and that despite being "a very clever story" and having "much of the grace and diction and faculty for word painting" exhibited in her later work, the book suffered from lack of publicity:

> . . . as the book was published in St. Louis, and was not pushed after the manner known to the trade, it had a purely local circulation and added nothing to the author's fame outside the limited circle of her own acquaintance.19

Mrs. Moore's assessment was further confirmed by the fleeting notice At Fault received in a critical summary of Kate Chopin's career featured as a major headline story for the November 26, 1899 edition of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, shortly after the publication of The Awakening. Entitled "A St. Louis Woman Who Has Won Fame in Literature," the article passes off At Fault as merely "a story of St. Louis and Louisiana life" while extending praise to the other works that followed.[20]

Nonetheless, the local plaudits Kate Chopin received from her fellow St. Louisans proved encouragement enough to continue her efforts. She had already begun a second novel "Young Dr. Gosse" and by January 1891 had submitted the work to several publishers. But no one wanted it and Chopin later

[19] [Sue V. Moore] "Mrs. Kate Chopin," St. Louis Life, 9 (June 9, 1894), 11.

[20] "A St. Louis Woman Who Has Won Fame in Literature," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 26, 1899, Part IV, p. 1.

destroyed it, probably in 1896.[21] She then turned to shorter fiction, writing over forty stories, sketches, and vignettes in the next three years, the majority of which were published in such local magazines as the Spectator, Fashion and Fancy, St. Louis Magazine, and St. Louis Life. Still, she sought out the more prestigious Eastern magazines. In 1891 she succeeded, as several of her stories for children were accepted by Youth's Companion and Harper's Young People. Meanwhile, William Dean Howells, then editor of Harper's, sent her a letter of praise for "Boulôt and Boulotte" and requested more of the same.[22] Finally in July 1892, the Boston magazine Two Tales published one of her stories for adults, and soon after additional stories appeared in such nationally recognized magazines as Vogue, The Atlantic, and Century. The praise At Fault had received from local reviewers had served to encourage the author to continue her writing.

[21] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 54.

[22] Chopin admired Howells to the extent that she referred to him in her defense of using "depot" for railroad station in At Fault. Howells was also one of the first to receive a complimentary copy of At Fault from the author. Howells' letter to Chopin is now lost and remains the only known contact between them. Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 54.

Bayou Folk

Having finally removed the stigma of being merely a popular local writer with the publication of her stories in Eastern magazines after At Fault, Kate Chopin continued to find numerous literary outlets both inside and outside of St. Louis. Yet ironically she attained the national recognition and fame she longed for through "Euphrasie," a story she put aside in favor of another in 1888, long before the moderate success of At Fault. In 1890, she showed the neglected tale to her close friend Dr. Kolbenheyer. Later she rewrote it from January 24 to February 24, 1891 and renamed it "A No-Account Creole."[23] In May 1891 she sent the story to Richard Watson Gilder, the influential editor of Century magazine, but Gilder refused to accept the story unless some changes were made.[24] Eager to appear in the Century, Chopin acquiesced: "The weakness which you found in 'A No-Account Creole' is the one which I felt. I thank you more than I can say, for your letter. My first and strongest feelings upon rereading it, was a desire to

[23] Per Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), Vol. II, p. 1004; and Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 55.

[24] In describing Gilder's character, Seyersted states: "As editor of the most widely read magazine of its kind in English, he wielded an influence equal to that of Howells. He insisted that realism be softened by idealism and did not hesitate to turn down a book like Stephen Crane's Maggie or to temper the writings of Mark Twain." Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 68.

clasp your hand. I hope I have succeeded in making the girl's character clearer."[25] Apparently she did, as Gilder accepted the story on August 3 of that year with "very sincere pleasure."[26] But two years later, the story remained unpublished; and in May 1893, after publishing in Vogue again, Chopin grew impatient and personally journeyed to New York where she tried to interest Gilder and other publishers in a second novel and a collection of short stories.[27] Her efforts proved fruitless.

Three months later, however, Houghton Mifflin of Boston accepted the volume of short stories which included the much-traveled "A No-Account Creole." In March 1894, the work was published as Bayou Folk. Oddly enough, its publication was preceded by the appearance of "A No-Account Creole" in the January issue of Century magazine for the same year. "Euphrasie" in its altered form had finally found its hearing.

Bayou Folk, a collection of twenty-three tales and sketches all set in Louisiana, mainly Natchitoches Parish, immediately caught the attention of reviewers. In early April the notices began coming in and did not slacken until late in June. Nor did they spring chiefly from the friendly local

[25] Ibid., p. 56.

[26] Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), p. 335.

[27] Letter to Gilder, dated [New York] May 10, 1893. Cited in Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 207.

and regional presses of St. Louis and New Orleans, as with At Fault. Critics from New York, Boston, Hartford, Providence, and San Francisco responded to the work and, for the most part, in a very favorable manner.

The earliest known dated review of Bayou Folk appeared in the April 1 edition of the New York Times, located in the heart of the publishing industry.[28] However, the reviewer for the paper gave more space to the history and personality of the Acadians than he did to the work. Noting the colorful character and quaint language of the Acadians in a painterly manner, he reasoned that such an atmosphere lent itself to "a thousand and one tales." In the only two sentences devoted directly to Bayou Folk, he surmised: "A writer needs only the art to let these stories tell themselves. It is not an art easily acquired, but Kate Chopin has practised it with force and charm in the several stories of her agreeable book."[29]

In a much more enthusiastic commentary upon the work for April 8, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reflected the social concerns of most hometown reviews by patronizing the author, and her city and region as much as her works. The

[28] According to Mott, "The history of the New York Times from the death of [Henry J.] Raymond in 1869 to its purchase by [Adolph S.] Ochs in 1896 is the story of the decline of a powerful and profitable newspaper." Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 428.

[29] "Living Tales from Acadian Life," New York Times, April 1, 1894, p. 23.

lengthy five-paragraph review begins with a series of accolades on various aspects of the work and closes with a proud declaration of Chopin's origins. " . . . There is not a weak line, or a page which will not improve with every reading," opens the reviewer. Although most of the stories in the collection have already been published, this does not mar the value of the book. Upon rereading these stories in collective form, one finds "an added charm" in the structural unity of the work that could not be experienced if the stories were read separately: "There is a unity, a completeness here, which gives the impression of a single picture, a connected narrative. . . ."

Chopin's portrayal of the inhabitants of Natchitoches Parish comes in for praise too. She goes "straight to the hearts of the Natchitoches folk" who are at first strangers to us, yet become "old friends" as we progress through the collection of stories. The Negroes, Mulattoes, Creoles, and 'Cadians are depicted as "real and human" and compose a primitive community "where simplicity is still the rule and nature is not obscured by the veneer of civilization."

Nor did her artistry go unnoticed. Chopin treats her subject matter with a "delicacy of touch" and a "sureness of handling" indicative of "a perfect confidence and an earnest of power only half-displayed." The "economy of expression" coupled with the direct and natural manner in which the stories are told helps the author avoid the excesses of

sentimentality that blemish similar works, for these are " . . . simple stories simply told." In addition, the dialect employed is "intelligibly rendered" in melodic tones.

The Post-Dispatch reviewer had difficulty choosing a favorite among so many stories of high quality. "Désirée's Baby" and "Ma'ame Pélagie" have the power to "make one weep." "Love on the Bon Dieu" and the "'Cadian Ball" are "tense with feeling." "In Sabine" is "full of humor" while "A Lady of Bayou St. John" is "a psychological study of the recesses of a woman's heart." "A No-Account Creole," the longest story in the collection, is "perhaps the strongest." All the stories are "true and wholesome" and have a touch of humor, either grave or light. The most striking feature of these stories is the author's "clear perception of the essential characteristics of her subject" and "the good understanding of her people."

The reviewer concludes with an assessment of Chopin that takes into consideration the regional and local concerns of his readers: "That Mrs. Chopin is a Southern woman and a St. Louisan is another source of gratification while reading this book. The South is now the inspiration of most that is original and not traditional in American literature, and Southern writers are pre-eminent. It is pleasant to know that in St. Louis is one, not the least, of the famous group."[30]

[30] "The Book Table," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 8, 1894, p. 32.

On April 12, Public Opinion, a weekly news magazine in Washington with a "simultaneous edition" in New York,[31] printed a much briefer but no less enthusiastic one-paragraph review of Bayou Folk. Unaffected by either local or regional concerns, the reviewer valued Bayou Folk solely for its contents and style. Chopin has given the reader over twenty "delightful stories" of the Creole character of Louisiana written in a "fresh and lively style." She is "thoroughly familiar" and "thoroughly at home" with her subject matter and characters. The stories are so structurally interwoven that one feels "things come out right." "This volume will but sharpen the appetite of the reader for more of the same kind," concludes Public Opinion.[32]

Three reviews of Bayou Folk occurred on April 15, all applauding the work. Once again, the convincing depiction of the Creole life and character provoked the greatest comment, followed closely behind by notices of the author's fluid, easy-going style and effective use of dialect and humor. The New Orleans Times-Picayune thought " . . . the great charm of the book . . . " lay in the delicate, tender, and

[31] Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905 (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1957), p. 649.

[32] "Book Reviews," Public Opinion, 17 (April 12, 1894), 35. Sue V. Moore, editor of St. Louis Life, cynically concurred with Public Opinion two months later: "And certainly every one who has read these charming tales will agree that, for once, Public Opinion is right." [Sue V. Moore] "Mrs. Kate Chopin," St. Louis Life, 9 (June 9, 1894), 11.

appreciative way in which the author treated the manners, customs, and habits of the Louisiana natives. This assessment was echoed by the Providence Sunday Journal, which added that such a work was refreshing, given the harsh, cruel world of today: "The book is another welcome witness to the picturesqueness and novelty that are to be found in this decried and crude New World, and to the increasing number of eyes anointed to their recognition."

In commenting upon the local color aspects of the work, William Marion Reedy of the St. Louis Sunday Mirror became the first critic to assert that Mrs. Chopin was "cleverer than Cable," a claim that was to be repeated often thereafter. Bayou Folk did not suffer from the over-idealized and melodramatic characters found in Cable; they were instead "human and lovable." Nor does the author "strain after effect" or possess a "floridity of style" that has characterized Southern writing ever since the days of Augusta Evans. She is also "a much stronger delineator than Miss [Mary Noailles] Murfree." Though Chopin is a "master of dialect," she uses it sparingly so that it does not dominate her stories as it does when employed by many other writers of "tawdry" local color stories. In addition she possesses a sense of humor that leaves the reader "half way between a chuckle and a laugh." But most importantly, her talent is not of "the quality that is confined to the portrayal of the life of a section," exclaimed Reedy.

All three publications eagerly endorsed the work and its author in their own fashion. The Picayune judged Bayou Folk "well worth reading" and contended that the work would help popularize the author throughout the state of Louisiana. The Providence Sunday Journal applauded the skill of this literary newcomer: "A new name is signed to the sketches of 'Cajun life that make up this volume, but if they are the work of an unpracticed hand they are marvellous in the finished artlessness of their art." Proclaiming Bayou Folk as "the best literary work that has come out of the Southland in a long time," the outspoken Reedy reminded his readers that here was an author of their own soil: "I would commend 'Bayou Folk' to St. Louisans, the greater number of whom are unaware that the talented authoress thereof resides in this city."[33]

In the West on April 16, The Argonaut of San Francisco lauded the "quaint charm" of each story and cited "A No-Account Creole" as the "most ambitious" of the tales. The author is the latest of the new Southern storytellers but stands apart from the others because of her originality: " . . . her tales of the 'Cadians are as fresh and novel as if no one had ever pictured such type scenes before."[34]

[33] "Recent Publications," New Orleans Times-Picayune April 15, 1894, p. 14; "Brief Comment," Providence Sunday Journal, April 15, 1894, p. 13; and "Bayou Folk," Sunday Mirror, 4 (April 15, 1894), 4.

[34] "New Publications," The Argonaut, 34 (April 16, 1894), 8.

Three days later, Bayou Folk attracted attention in the East again. The April 19th Hartford Daily Courant reiterated the claims that here was indeed a successful local colorist who possessed an "intimate knowledge" of her subject. But the Courant also saw the tales had a "special value." Since the 'Cadian country had for the most part gone unnoticed in fiction and since these tales furnished "faithful, artistic transcripts of picturesque local life," they would not only serve to enrich American literature but in time would be of value as "historic documents."[35]

Another Eastern publication, The Literary World of Boston, described as one of the most important journals of the period devoted to criticism of current literature,[36] offered a mixed reaction to Bayou Folk in a one-paragraph review on April 21. The reviewer divided the stories into two levels. The first he labeled croquis or those that contain "just a brief incident of idea sketched in with a few rapid strokes and left to the imagination of the reader to be materialized . . . ." The second level of stories consisted of those of a longer length and greater finish. Unfortunately, the reviewer failed to provide representative stories for each level, though by implication, he preferred the latter group. Yet he

[35] "Literary Notices," Hartford Daily Courant, April 19, 1894, p. 10.

[36] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 124.

concludes that all the stories possess a distinct attraction: " . . . all are full of that subtle, alien quality which holds the Creole apart from the Anglo-Saxon--a quality we do not quite understand and can never reproduce, but which is full of fascination to us from the very fact that it is so unlike ourselves."[37]

In an undated review for April, the Atlantic Monthly of Boston, which stood "more distinctly for culture than any other American magazine,"[38] according to Mott, highly praised Bayou Folk for its style, simplicity, dialect, and humor much in the manner of the previous notices. Like Reedy, the reviewer for the Atlantic envisioned Chopin as much more than just another talented Southern writer of local color stories. It is "something" that she hails from the South, but her skill is not restricted to locality, for she does not merely try to show peculiarities of a people of a specific region. Rather, she simply deals with what is familiar to her. "Art makes her free of literature," noted the reviewer, and "in this writer we have a genuine and delightful addition to the ranks of our story-tellers." Furthermore, her promise as a writer has yet to be fulfilled: "Now and then she strikes a passionate note, and the naturalness and ease with which she does it impresses one as characteristic

[37] "Fiction," Literary World, 25 (April 21, 1894), 121.

[38] Dial, 13 (October 1, 1892), 204. Cited in Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 44.

of power awaiting opportunity."[39]

These April reviews of Bayou Folk firmly established Kate Chopin as a master of the local color story. This talented "new Southern writer"--a designation by many a reviewer which seemingly cast aside any knowledge of her previous modest success with At Fault--had captured in a realistic manner the life and character of the Louisiana people in a fresh and lively style, supplemented by deft touches of dialect and humor. These oft-sung praises of her work were to be repeated again and again--perhaps too much so--for they tended to stereotype her as a regional writer. But notably, Reedy of the Mirror and the reviewer for the Atlantic predicted a bright future for Chopin that went beyond the narrow role of a regional writer. In addition, Reedy's bold declaration that Chopin surpassed Cable help set a precedent for others to follow.

Although most of the April reviews categorize Chopin as a regionalist, the notices themselves were not all regional in origin. The national acclaim that had escaped Chopin with At Fault had now been realized. Assuredly, the local reviews tended to be more enthusiastic and less objective than those from the outside. The raves of Reedy's Mirror and the Post-Dispatch stood in contrast to the bland review of the New York Times that stressed the historical background of the

[39] "Recent Fiction," Atlantic Monthly, 73 (April, 1894), 559.

Acadians over the work itself and the guarded review of The Literary World that suggested a cleavage in quality by dividing the stories into two levels. Yet the ten reviews that appeared in April could all be safely termed "positive" in their response to Bayou Folk.

The reviews for the month of May, though not as numerous, reiterated the observations of their predecessors. On Saturday, May 5, a short one-paragraph review in the Boston Beacon described the tales as "very charming in their delicacy of portraiture and felicity of coloring . . . . " Books such as this, it continued, " . . . are to be reckoned as among the choicest productions of our native literature."[40]

That same day, The Critic printed a fairly lengthy review of almost 500 words on Bayou Folk. This New York monthly was edited by Jeanette Gilder, the daughter of Richard Watson Gilder, the man whose hesitancy to publish "A No-Account Creole" in his Century led indirectly to the publication of the stories now under review when the frustrated Chopin sought out other avenues. The prudence of the elder Gilder undoubtedly had its effect upon the daughter, for The Critic was known as the mouthpiece for genteelism, featuring articles that were "cultivated, varied, and gossipy."[41] However, The

[40] "Bayou Folk," Boston Beacon, May 5, 1894, p. 3.

[41] Howard Mumford Jones and Richard M. Ludwig, Guide to American Literature and Its Backgrounds Since 1890 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 102; and Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 124.

Critic failed to find any objectionable subject matter in this "unpretentious, unheralded little book." "Beyond the Bayou," "The Return of Alcibeade," "A Rude Awakening," and "For Marse Chouchoute" are like "rude cartoons" but their very rudeness produces a "vivid effect." The colorful picturesque quality of Chopin's descriptive passages of Middle-Upper Louisiana provide an exquisite setting for her "little dramas." "Désirée's Baby" and "Love on the Bon-Dieu" are particularly colorful. Though Chopin has her shortcomings when compared to other local colorists, she is saved by her individuality of style:

> There is not the langorous grace of Miss King, or the subtlety of Cable, or the delicious humor of Ruth McEnery Stuart, but there is photographic realism, shrewdness of observation and a fine eye for picturesque situations: which is only saying that Miss Chopin is herself, and nobody else.

By this remark, The Critic like Reedy instigated further comparisons between Chopin and other local colorists.[42]

Some two weeks later, the May 20th edition of the St. Louis Republic reminded its readers in "Some Late Books" that the author of this "interesting little volume of Louisiana folk tales" was a fellow St. Louisan. It also made a safe prediction: "Mrs. Chopin's book has been favorably received in the East and it should be in the West. Of course, it will be in Louisiana." The reviewer should have felt secure in

[42] "Bayou Folk," The Critic, 24 (May 5, 1894), 300.

adding St. Louis.[43]

On Sunday, May 27, the New Orleans Times-Democrat appraised the work as being true to the spirit, if not the letter, of life. Unlike the majority of his colleagues who had commented before him, the Times-Democrat critic cared little for "A No-Account Creole," favoring instead such brief, impressionistic stories as "In Sabine," "Madame Célestin's Divorce," and "A Gentleman of Bayou Têche," where the author had the dialect "down fine."[44]

Two undated reviews of Bayou Folk were published in May. They provided few additional insights into the author's work. The Cottage Hearth, a cheap mail-order home journal published by W. A. Wilde & Co. of Boston, devoted a one-paragraph review to Bayou Folk. However, Chopin's work was given some measure of distinction by being the lead review for its "Books of the Month" feature section. Although the commentator for the decorative home journal thought the work a "charming collection" that was "exceedingly well-written," he seemed more enamored over the book's appearance than its contents: "The book is simply, though beautifully bound in dark green and gold, and will be an addition to any library."[45]

[43] "Some Late Books," St. Louis Republic, May 20, 1894, p. 16.

[44] "New Publications," New Orleans Times-Democrat, May 27, 1894, p. 26.

[45] "Books of the Month," Cottage Hearth, 20 (May, 1894), 250.

The second notice came from the pages of the Review of Reviews, a New York monthly modeled after its London counterpart of the same name but superior to it in every respect according to Mott.[46] The Review of Reviews likewise repeated the plaudits heard often before: the author has an "intimate knowledge" of the Creole and Negro; she has a style that is "exceedingly direct;" she has written "one of the best volumes of short stories" we have seen in some time. The Review of Reviews made one unique contribution in being one of the first to note the technical similarities between the stories of Chopin and Guy de Maupassant, an indebtedness Chopin herself later acknowledged in an 1896 manuscript.[47]

By the end of May, the reviewers had more than met their obligation. The rising number of favorable reviews had brought Bayou Folk to the attention of the reading public. Consequently, a reaction set in. Now that the public had been introduced to the virtues of Bayou Folk, its curiosity arose as to the nature of its author. "Who is Kate Chopin?" "Is Kate Chopin her real name?"--these questions and others led to a series of "gossipy reviews" that focused upon the author's private life as much as on her work. To quench the public's thirst for details about her personal

[46] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 659.

[47] "The New Books," Review of Reviews, 9 (May, 1894), 625; and Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 51.

life, Kate Chopin reluctantly consented to have St. Louis Life print an "authorized" sketch of her life accompanied by a self-portrait in the June 9th issue of the magazine.

Entitled "Mrs. Kate Chopin," the two-page article was more than likely written by the editor, Sue V. Moore.[48] Previously Mrs. Moore had responded enthusiastically to At Fault, and, upon reading Bayou Folk, had encouraged Chopin to submit similar stories for publication in her magazine. In composing the authorized sketch, Mrs. Moore did more than fulfill the public's need to know about the author, for the sketch is preceded by a concise critical summary of the reception of Bayou Folk. After acknowledging the "general curiosity" of the reading public to know more about the author of these "charming tales" and appealing to the pride of her fellow St. Louisans by noting that a local favorite was now "one of the foremost writers of American fiction," Mrs. Moore reminded readers that At Fault, not Bayou Folk, was the author's first work, but had suffered limited circulation because of the nature of its publication.

Mrs. Moore then pointed to the highly favorable reception of the author's second work: "The reviewers of Bayou Folk have been unanimous in awarding its author the highest praise for her work, and unhesitatingly place her beside Miss

[48] Seyersted makes the same assumption. Seyersted, "Secondary Sources," Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 236; and "Mrs. Kate Chopin," St. Louis Life, 9 (June 9, 1894), 11-12.

Wilkins, Grace King, George W. Cable and other American authors of acknowledged fame." Space does not permit her to quote all the wonderful things said about the work but in citing a long passage from the prestigious Atlantic Monthly and brief complimentary notices from other periodicals, she supports her contention that Bayou Folk had captured the hearts of the reviewers--"that most difficult of feats for a new writer."[49] Most reviewers, she surmises, comment upon "the felicity and exactness with which Mrs. Chopin handles the Creole dialect and the fidelity of her descriptions of that strange, remote life on the Louisiana bayou." Wholeheartedly in agreement with these observations, Mrs. Moore adds one of her own: Mrs. Chopin herself is Creole by marriage, having through her late husband allied herself with the famous families of Benoist and Sanguinet, and by setting, having

[49] Mrs. Moore quotes from the following reviews: Review of Reviews (May, 1894); Providence Sunday Journal (April 15, 1894); Boston Beacon (May 5, 1894); The Argonaut (April 16, 1894); Hartford Daily Courant (April 19, 1894); Public Opinion (April 12, 1894); Portland Transcript; and Pittsburgh Bulletin. All of these reviews have been covered with the exception of the last two which had to occur somewhere between the publication of Bayou Folk in March and June 9th, the date of Mrs. Moore's article. Recent bibliographies of Chopin fail to mention either review. My own efforts to locate these two reviews have likewise proved fruitless and so the only comments from the two reviews we have are those quoted in St. Louis Life. They are as follows: Portland Transcript: "These Creole and Acadian tales are so fine that no words save 'charming' and 'fascinating' will serve to describe them;" and from the Pittsburgh Bulletin: "Her observations of people and places seem to have been made after Flaubert's advice to his great pupil, De Maupassant, and her dramatic effects are worthy of that artist." [Sue V. Moore] "Mrs. Kate Chopin," St. Louis Life, 9 (June 9, 1894), 11.

spent most of her adult life in New Orleans and Natchitoches Parish. Early in life she became proficient in the Creole dialect by listening to her maternal grandmother, Madame Athénaïse Charleville Faris, and other members of her family. [50]

This creditable overview of Chopin's reception, supplemented by the authorized sketch and self-portrait, proved quite popular. It was later reprinted in the August 1894 issue of Current Literature under the heading "General Gossip of Authors and Writers," and again approximately a year later in the September 1895 issue of Book News Monthly under its original title.[51] "Mrs. Kate Chopin" of St. Louis Life also marked the end of the steady flow of reviews on Bayou Folk. Only three additional notices of the work appeared for that year: one in The Nation, a New York weekly; another in the form of a critical essay written by William Schuyler for the Boston Writer; and the third from Reedy of the Mirror.

The highly reputable Nation, called by Mott "the best journal of opinion" from 1865-1885,[52] added little to what had already been stated about the short story collection in its June 28th issue. Yet, it struck a strong positive note:

[50] Ibid.

[51] "General Gossip of Authors and Writers," Current Literature, 16 (August, 1894), 105-09; and "Mrs. Kate Chopin," Book News Monthly, 14 (September, 1895), 6.

[52] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1865-1885, p. 40.

"Hers is good work, and as interesting as the good often is not."[53]

William Schuyler's critical essay in the August Boston Writer reviewed Chopin's career up to Bayou Folk. A close friend of Chopin, Schuyler preferred to note the tribute the people of Natchitoches Parish paid to the now famous author upon her return visits to that area: "That people of Natchitoches always receive her enthusiastically, since they thoroughly endorse her artistic presentation of their locality and its population; for Mrs. Chopin is not, like most prophets, without honor in her own country." Unlike Cable, who was often accused of inaccuracies by the very Creoles he wrote about, Chopin had won their confidence with the "fidelity" of her work.[54]

Although the reviewers and the general public had already given Bayou Folk rare praise, the tenacious Reedy was still not satisfied. In the September 30th issue of his Sunday Mirror, Reedy voiced his discontent: "From all I can learn I am led to believe that Mrs. Chopin's book has not received the attention from the local reading public that it deserves, and I feel fully justified in giving a taste of the author's quality." The "taste" Reedy gave to his readers in that issue was a reprinting of "Désirée's Baby," which he

[53] "Recent Novels," The Nation, 58 (June 28, 1894), 488.

[54] Schuyler, 117.

considered "the most powerful of all the very clever short stories." Admittedly, the theme was an old one, but the story had a "pathetic turn" that was unique. Repeating his earlier contention that Chopin's stories were superior to Cable's, Reedy added: "One story like 'Désirée's Baby' . . . ought to be sufficient to make a reputation in the realm of short fiction." Reedy's declaration proved prophetic. "Désirée's Baby" became the only story for which the author was known during the period of later neglect. Only recently have the critics and the general public discovered that Kate Chopin composed other stories of merit besides this one "classic." Had Reedy known the literary "tasting" he had offered his readers would lead not to a further sampling of the author's product but to a restricted diet, he no doubt would have been appalled.[55]

In 1895, approximately one year after its publication, Bayou Folk drew the attention of Godey's, which along with Peterson's and Arthur's composed the trio of once-famous women's magazines that began in Philadelphia and later relocated in New York in the nineties in hopes of finding prosperity again.[56] In a brief sixty-two word review for the April issue of Godey's, Maibelle Justice merely reaffirmed

[55] "Bayou Folk," Sunday Mirror, 4 (September 30, 1894), 4.

[56] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 87.

the observations of those who came before her. There was "not a dull page" in the book; it possessed "crispness of dialogue;" and it successfully captured "the intensity and passion of the Creole race." Although these were familiar remarks, indeed, they indicated that the reviewer for Godey's thought the work appropriate for the feminine readers of the day. This review was the last one Bayou Folk would provoke in the author's lifetime.[57]

Unlike At Fault, which was never reprinted, Bayou Folk was reissued several times, another indication of the importance of receiving good reviews. According to Houghton Mifflin, besides the original printing of 1,250 copies, there were 500 additional copies printed in 1895; 150 in 1906, and 150 in 1911.[58] Obviously, Bayou Folk was a clear critical success. All of the twenty-one known reviews are favorable.[59]

[57] Maibelle Justice, "Book Reviews," Godey's, 130 (April 1895), 432. One other review of Bayou Folk appeared some twenty-one years after the author's death. The review served as a guide to stories on Louisiana and listed Bayou Folk among the entries, merely indicating that it was a series of stories and sketches of descendants of Acadian refugees. However, the notice is significant in that it occurred well before the "Chopin revival" and even before Daniel S. Rankin's Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories published in 1932. "Readers Guide," Saturday Review of Literature (March 28, 1925), 637.

[58] Letter dated June 21, 1968. Cited in Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 210.

[59] This number excludes the unlocated Portland Transcript and Pittsburgh Bulletin, though the brief excerpts from them are favorable, and reprints of "Mrs. Kate Chopin" that first appeared in St. Louis Life for June 9.

More significantly, most of the reviews originated from outside of St. Louis: thirteen from the East; one from the West: and two from the Southwest. Only five came from St. Louis presses and of those, two were written by Reedy. The majority sprang from the literary-conscious East, harboring the two major publishing centers of the nation. The stigma of being merely a popular St. Louis writer was broken. By late May, scarcely two months after the publication of Bayou Folk, Kate Chopin had progressed from a local favorite to a nationally reputable local color writer of unlimited promise. The reviewers had made their impact.

Outside of the discontent she expressed in a June diary entry regarding the dearth of quality reviews on Bayou Folk,[60] Kate Chopin seems to have enjoyed the sudden rise to fame brought about by the flood of favorable reviews. Notably, in that same diary entry, she recognized the power of sheer numbers, even if most of the reviews lacked perception. Understandably, she preferred those that suggested she was more than just another "dialect writer" or "famous St. Louisan." She was particularly fond of Schuyler's essay in the Writer: "I don't know who could have . . . better told in so short a space the story of my growth into a writer of stories."[61] Of course, she still had to contend with the loss of privacy

[60] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 56-57.

[61] Ibid., p. 59.

that such recognition brings, but despite occasional lapses into melancholy, she was content with the national recognition she had received. As her biographer Per Seyersted notes, her new-found fortune "gave her a certain release from what she evidently felt as repression or frustration, thereby freeing forces that had lain dormant in her."[62] These forces eventually led to another collection of short stories three years later.

A Night in Acadie

After the success of Bayou Folk, Kate Chopin experienced her most productive period, composing nearly forty stories in a three-year span. One of these was "A Night in Acadie" written in March 1896. The story met much the same fate as that of "Euphrasie," later retitled "A No-Account Creole." Chopin submitted "A Night in Acadie" to Richard Watson Gilder of the Century, but as he had done with "Euphrasie," Gilder rejected the story and recommended some changes. This time the prudish editor was offended by one of the main characters, in all likelihood, Zaïda, a strong-willed girl who passively watches in her bridal gown as two Creoles fight brutally over her. After reworking "A Night in Acadie" in 1897, Chopin wrote Gilder: "I have made certain alterations which you thought the story required to give it artistic or ethical

[62] Ibid., p. 58.

value . . . . The marriage is omitted, and the character softened and tempered by her rude experience."[63] Still Gilder refused this milder version of the story.

For the most part, Chopin had had little difficulty getting her stories published following the success of Bayou Folk. The few that did encounter resistance because of their passionate heroines eventually found publishers. Only "Two Portraits" failed to do so. Another work that met with disapproval indirectly led to her second short story collection. In 1895, Chopin began translating a volume of "Mad Stories" by Maupassant and offered it to Houghton Mifflin, the publishers of Bayou Folk. But when the firm balked at this volume, Chopin suggested another collection of short stories, only to be told to bring the matter up again later. Instead, she submitted the short story collection to Stone & Kimball, but had to be content to have it published by Way & Williams, a little-known Chicago firm. Finally in November 1897, the collection appeared as A Night in Acadie, taking its title from the very story Gilder had refused.

In essence, A Night in Acadie was a sequel to Bayou Folk; in fact, it was set in the same Louisiana locale and reintroduced many of the same characters. The striking similarities between the two works and the fact that it was issued by an obscure publishing firm caused the work to receive far less

[63] Letter to Gilder dated January 5, 1897. Cited in Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 68-69.

notice than its predecessor. The reviews, though favorable, were less enthusiastic, and some reflected a growing concern about the sensuous quality of Chopin's work.

Not unexpectedly, the first notice came from a local periodical and, quite understandably, from the pen of the staunch Chopin supporter, William Reedy. In the November 25 issue of the Mirror, Reedy proclaimed the work "a volume of delight," whether or not the prospective reader was acquainted with Chopin's style and stories. Here was one of "the very few women" to excel in the short story medium, and literary minded St. Louisans "should be interested more or less in the work of a home author" of merit. To Reedy, the work possessed a universal quality. Though the men and women were bayou folk, the "touches of life" presented were typical of " . . . the same old human nature that is as old as mankind and as puzzling and new to-day as when the first murderous instinct awoke to life in the heart of Cain or the first grand passion of love entered Eden and sent a man and woman from thence to be the one compensation left for all that temptation had lost them." Obviously, Reedy was not repelled by any glimpses of passion he detected in the work. Citing "Athénaïse" as an example of Chopin's "delicious" style, wherein she makes an interesting story out of a few simple happenings, he urged his readers to sample the other stories in the volume as he saw " . . . each one abounding in Mrs. Chopin's own peculiar charm of manner . . . ."[64]

A Night in Acadie next caught the attention of The Independent of New York, a weekly miscellany that began as a religious journal.[65] Its commentary for December 16 closely resembled that given to Bayou Folk. The Acadian stories were "exquisitely told" and the reality and romance of rural Louisiana were "never . . . better sketched." All the stories are "good" and have "a flavor and a fragrance purely Creole."[66]

More than a week later, the December 26 issue of the New Orleans Times-Picayune made the obvious comparison to Bayou Folk and failed to find any "falling off" of quality from one collection to the other. The Picayune also rekindled the comparison between Chopin and Cable. She has "a keener insight into the character of the Creole than Mr. Cable" because she both loves and understands him. Her literary ability is comparable to that of Cable's while her sympathy exceeds his for the Creole people.

Oddly enough, in light of New Orleans critics' censure of Cable's depictions of Creoles and Acadians, no distinction is made between the two groups in the Times-Picayune review of A Night in Acadie. Creoles are of aristocratic French

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64 "A Night in Acadie," St. Louis Mirror, 7 (November 25, 1897), 5-6.

65 Mott, American Journalism, pp. 378, 513; and Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, pp. 10, 59.

66 "A Night in Acadie," The Independent, 49 (December 16, 1897), 1662.

or Spanish descent, born in Louisiana. They are of the highest society and tend to be conservative. The term is often incorrectly applied to any one born and living in New Orleans and its vicinity. Acadians ("'Cadians" or "Cajuns") are of French Canadian background. They are descendants of the settlers who were expelled from Canada in the mid-eighteenth century for refusing to swear allegiance to the King and who settled in large numbers in the bayou country of Louisiana, where they retained their French ways. In Chopin's stories, the Creole is proud, graceful, and aristocratic, though prone to irrational behavior in matters of love and honor; the Cajun is simple, honest, and God-fearing. Her short stories are mostly about Cajuns, but The Awakening is about Creoles. She definitely had in mind the differences in social class and customs of the two. Unfortunately, many early commentators either made no such distinction or used the terms loosely.[67]

Early the next year, The Hesperian printed what was to be the most detailed review of the work. A "modest critical quarterly" from St. Louis that was largely written, as well

[67] "Recent Publications," New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 26, 1897, p. 9. As Emily Toth points out, even as late as 1956, Robert Cantwell in "The Awakening by Kate Chopin," for the Georgia Review fails to make this distinction. See Emily Toth, "Some Problems in Kate Chopin Scholarship," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall 1975), 30; Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 76-80; and Mary L. Shaffter, "Creole Women," The Awakening, ed. by Margaret Culley (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), p. 119.

as edited and published by Alexander N. DeMenil,[68] The Hesperian likewise found that the stories in this collection compared "very favorably" with those of Bayou Folk. It too favored Chopin over Cable: "Her touch is far more deft . . . ; her insight is more femininely subtle. . . . " Although not wanting to discount the importance of Cable and his contribution to the Creole race, The Hesperian frankly admits that " . . . the soul of sympathy is wanting in his pages . . . " while Chopin is the "sympathetic historian" of the Creole.

The Creole, argued The Hesperian, is a type of noble savage. A race and life are pictured "as innocent of the refinements and knowledge of higher civilization as it is possible for an exclusive strongly opinionated, and self-isolated people clinging to the forms and traditions of a past civilization, and surrounded by American push, energy, and ambition, to be." The Creoles possess a "humanity," a "self-forgetting love," an "inward sense of courage," yet they are pathetic individuals because of "the uncouthness of their language" and "the density of their ignorance."

These stories are "studies of life" with a "vein of quiet humor"; they are "typographically beautiful." Although many of them have already appeared in leading Eastern magazines before becoming part of this collection, "the critics have not as yet understood the full excellence of

[68] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 72.

her work."[69]

In February, the hometown St. Louis Star-Times made casual reference to the stories of Chopin in a gossip column "Round About St. Louis." "St. Louis is gradually acquiring a working literary colony worthy of her culture and size," and "we have probably the most talented writer of Creole stories in the person of Mrs. Kate Chopin." Whether the Star-Times was specifically referring to A Night in Acadie or to both short story collections in general is a matter of conjecture, but the notice shows the continuing effort to promote Chopin as a famous St. Louisan by local papers.[70]

On April 16, 1898, The Critic commented upon individual stories within the collection. "Athénaïse," the longest of the stories, exhibits a "delicacy and understanding" of both sexes and is marred in only one or two instances by some "slight and unnecessary coarsenesses." "Regret" is "a charming story," while "A Dresden Lady in Dixie" is a "touching account" of the devotion and self-sacrifice of an old Negro. "Polydore" and "Mamouche" attest to the author's "knowledge of the human heart." Though "all the stories are worth reading," there is a sameness: " . . . there is even a slight feeling after reading about six of the stories, that one has read

[69] "Current Literary Topics," The Hesperian, 2 (January-March, 1898), 171-72.

[70] "Round About St. Louis," St. Louis Star-Times, 13, February, 1896, p. 6.

something very like the seventh before . . . . " Despite its final recommendation of the work, The Critic was the first to reproach Chopin for some indelicacies in this collection. The verdict was not surprising if one recalls that the magazine was edited by Gilder's daughter.[71]

The last review of A Night in Acadie came from the influential Nation on June 9, 1898. In a one-paragraph notice, the Eastern publication suggested that the work had an overly sensuous atmosphere. Yet it admired the author's technical skills: she "tells a story like a poet and reproduces the spirit of a landscape like a painter." Her stories are to Louisiana as Mary Wilkins' are to New York. They possess enough of what is artistic "in the best sense" to hold the reader's interest and to transport him into "a region of fierce passions, mediaeval chivalry, combined with rags and bad grammar, soft, sliding Creole accent, and the tragedies and comedies that loom with special meanings in a sparsely settled country."[72]

The reception of A Night in Acadie pales before that of Bayou Folk. The work drew only three notices from Eastern presses, none from the West, and only seven in all. This

[71] "Mrs. Chopin's 'Night in Acadie,'" The Critic, 32 (April 16, 1898), 266.

[72] "More Novels," The Nation, 66 (June 9, 1898), 447. Some seventy-nine years later, A Night in Acadie was cited by Choice. Choice, 7 (September, 1970), 839.

lack of interest was in part due to the work's resemblance to Bayou Folk. The other reason was the inability of Way & Williams to promote the work; in fact, in 1898 the small Chicago firm sold out to the larger Herbert S. Stone Co., formerly Stone & Kimball, which reissued A Night in Acadie in 1899 without any great success.[73]

Nonetheless, in 1897 and the year after, Kate Chopin remained a popular figure, even if she had not as yet fulfilled the promises of future greatness predicted by several reviewers of Bayou Folk. She still enjoyed a tremendous local following and her national reputation, though not enhanced by A Night in Acadie, had not been tarnished. And she had had a highly productive decade: since 1888 she had written nearly a hundred stories and sketches, some essays and poems, a one-act play, and two novels. Still, the majority of reviewers and the general public saw her mainly as a talented regional writer of short stories. But now she had hopes of enhancing her reputation and fulfilling those predictions of greatness by returning to a form she had long neglected--the novel.

Early in 1897 after sending Horace E. Scudder of

[73] The 1899 edition seems to have been an identical reprinting of the 1897 issue only with "Second Edition" added to the title page. A copy of the second edition is at Harvard University. Seyersted's personal copy of the first edition served as the text for The Complete Works of Kate Chopin. Sidney Kramer, A History of Stone & Kimball and Herbert S. Stone Co. (Chicago: Norman W. Forgue, 1940), p. 298; and Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 1003.

Houghton Mifflin a group of stories entitled "A Vocation and a Voice," which encountered resistance, she became intrigued by Scudder's suggestion that she write a novel. Attracted to the artistic and financial prospects of such an undertaking, she began work on the novel probably in June of that year, even before the November publication of A Night in Acadie, and completed it in January of the following year. She apparently did not realize that the subtle undertones of discontent expressed by some of the reviewers over the sensuous quality of A Night in Acadie would turn into outspoken rage with the publication of her next novel.

The Awakening

Apparently following Horace E. Scudder's advice to write a "downright novel," Kate Chopin returned to a form she had avoided ever since the failure of "Young Dr. Gosse" in 1891. Although her first novel At Fault had met with some success, Kate Chopin did not feel confident in this medium. In 1894, she wrote, "The novel does not seem to me now to be my natural form of expression. However, should the theme of a novel present itself I should of course try to use it. I do not consider one form of more value than another."[74] Seemingly, she found such a theme,

[74] Letter to Waitman Barbe, dated October 2, 1894. Cited in Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 132.

for she began working on The Awakening in June 1897, approximately four months after Scudder's suggestion. Encouraged by the favorable reception of A Night in Acadie after its publication in November, Chopin continued to work intently upon the novel and finally submitted it to Way & Williams on January 21, 1898. The Awakening had taken less than a year to complete, and the large space between entries in her notebooks during this period indicates the author committed herself solely to writing this work.[75]

Upon completing The Awakening, Chopin resumed such activities as giving readings and submitting stories to editors. She even requested a list of literary agents from Richard Watson Gilder, so great was her desire for further publication. The summer of 1898 seemed to mark a new high point in her literary career. Not only had Way & Williams accepted The Awakening but also her short story collection "A Vocation and a Voice." Chopin by now had had three books in print and two more about to be published. Her literary future seemed assured. On July 18, 1898, she completed another short story "The Storm," but recognizing its frankness, never attempted to get it published.[76] With the exception of two more short stories and several insignificant poems, she wrote no further, but anxiously awaited the

[75] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 164.

[76] Ibid.

official publication of The Awakening. Meanwhile, Way & Williams went out of business and in November, 1898, all its titles were transferred to the Herbert S. Stone Co., formerly Stone & Kimball.[77] The company readily accepted The Awakening for publication without any changes[78] and by

[77] In 1893 amidst the depression, two Harvard students--Herbert S. Stone, the twenty-two year old son of the prominent journalist Melville Stone, and Hannibal Ingalls Kimball, the nineteen year old son of a wealthy Chicago family, --formed the company of Stone & Kimball with the intent of publishing only books of "high literary merit." Their list of achievements for the succeeding three years included a revised edition of Hamlin Garland's Main Traveled Roads and Prairie Folks, a lavishly illustrated edition of Poe's collected works edited by E. C. Stedman and G. E. Woodberry; The Chap-Book; and Harold Frederic's Theron Ware. In August 1894, the two young publishers had returned home to Chicago after leaving Harvard to continue their business. In 1896, Kimball bought out his partner and moved to New York, but in 1897, the firm closed, though Kimball later founded the Cheltenham Press. Meantime, Stone had continued to publish in Chicago under his own name as the Herbert S. Stone Co. and after the liquidation of Stone & Kimball in 1897, he acquired that firm's booklist from his former partner. In 1898, the Herbert S. Stone Co. bought out the small Chicago firm of Way & Williams, acquiring its booklist, which included Chopin's The Awakening and "A Vocation and a Voice." In 1906, Stone sold his book department to Fox, Duffield and Company (1903-1906) and limited his activities to periodicals. Fox, Duffield and Company soon became Duffield & Co. (1906-1924); then Duffield and Green (1924-1934). In 1934, the latter was purchased by Dodd, Mead & Co., which is still in existence today. In speaking of Stone and Kimball, Frederick G. Melcher in 1934 wrote: "Theirs was a [book] list never to be forgotten by collectors and lovers of books and a record of imaginative creative publishing and the application of taste to production that should be re-examined by each new generation of publishers." Charles A. Madison, Book Publishing in America (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1974), pp. 151-53; and Sidney Kramer, A History of Stone & Kimball and Herbert S. Stone & Co. (Chicago: Norman W. Forgue, 1940), pp. xxi-xxii; 114-15.

February 1899, Chopin was reading proofs of the novel. Outside of the poem "The Haunted Chamber" composed that same month, she did little else but anticipate the publication of the novel. Early in April, Scribner's Book Buyer, a small booksellers' journal that furnished reliable information about book publication, cited The Awakening as "forthcoming" with the brief comment: "The story is said to be analytical and finespun, and of peculiar interest to women."[79] On April 22, 1899, The Awakening was published.

The anxiety Chopin experienced while awaiting the publication of the novel was now transferred to the book's reception and, if anything, had increased. Her biographer Per Seyersted infers her state of mind as she awaited the reception of her work: "No doubt sensing how success engendered her growth as a writer, she must have awaited the public's reception of her book with an intensity which is found only in natures as deep as her own."[80] Though she

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[78] The only change may have been in the book's title. Originally, the title was "A Solitary Soul." According to a book review in the St. Louis Republic (Rankin dates the review May 20, 1899, but the review does not appear in that issue nor has it been located elsewhere), it was suggested that the publisher had supplied the new title. This cannot be verified. When Chopin added "The Awakening" on top of "A Solitary Soul" in her notebook, she did not cancel out the original title as was her custom, which indicates she possibly thought of keeping it as a subtitle. Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 1032.

[79] "The Rambler." Book Buyer, 18 (April, 1899), 186; and Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 126.

had foreseen that "The Storm" was too frank for publication, she did not suspect the same of The Awakening. As a popular writer, she was emotionally unprepared for the harsh reception her work would receive.[81]

The theme of The Awakening--that of a passionate woman openly seeking sexual fulfillment outside of marriage--immediately caught the attention of the reviewers. As with A Night in Acadie, the first review of the book came from the local St. Louis Mirror. This time, however, Reedy did not personally cover the book but assigned the task to his assistant editor Frances Porcher, an ambitious woman who harbored literary aspirations of her own. Her ambitions, according to Seyersted, may have given her reason to thwart Reedy from printing more of Chopin's stories in his magazine.[82] Whether Mrs. Porcher's own ambitions colored her literary criticism of Chopin is merely conjecture, yet her review of The Awakening in the May 4 issue of the Mirror, twelve days after the novel's appearance, set the tone for most of the commentary that followed.

Openly admiring Chopin's other works and delighting in the fame of a fellow St. Louisan, Porcher candidly admits she wished Kate Chopin had never written the novel. She

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[80] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 173.

[81] Ibid., p. 174.

[82] Ibid., p. 64.

was particularly distraught over the book's heroine, Edna Pontellier, who she felt should have been satisfied with her marriage, since her husband Léonce had given her everything, including personal freedom. Had Edna been awakened by a "gentle touch of Love, pure and simple," we might not judge her so harshly, but instead she surrenders to a "purely sensual enjoyment" and thus " . . . it was a demon which awoke, not a misdirected, wandering god." Edna eventually commits suicide not because of an "over-burdened heart, torn by complicating duties," but because she senses she owes something to her children whom she can neither escape nor confront, and because she fears her adulterous love for Robert Lebrun might too succumb to fickle passion. The possibility that the world harbors other Ednas, says Porcher, is not a comforting thought, for the work shows what "an ugly, cruel, loathsome monster Passion can be when it awakens." Technically and artistically the work is sound, yet the subject matter "leaves one sick of human nature and so one feels--cui bono!"[83]

This terse review from a magazine that had previously championed the author's works was particularly shocking. Yet Chopin seemed undaunted. Six days following the review, she wrote, "Life," a short poem expressing her ability to cope with life's disappointments:

[83] Frances Porcher, "The Awakening," St. Louis Mirror, 9 (May 4, 1899), 6.

A day with a splash of sunlight,
Some mist and a little rain.
A life with a dash of love-light,
Some dreams and a touch of pain.
To love a little and then to die!
To live a little and never know why!

Unfortunately, Porcher's review was succeeded by others similar in kind.

On May 13, the St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat, an influential paper possessing the largest circulation in St. Louis up to the close of the century,[84] gave the novel top billing in its review section with a by-line that read "Mrs. Chopin's Surprising Novel." The surprise was Mrs. Chopin's deviation from the local color mode and the frankness of her subject matter. The Globe-Democrat professed to leave the decision to the reader whether or not the surprise was a pleasant one, yet its position was clear: the novel was not "a healthy book," as a moral lesson could not be ascertained by reading about Edna's experience. True, the novel dealt with "existent conditions," being "a romance of to-day" in which Edna, seemingly suffering from a hereditary "poison of passion," discovers she does not love her husband and is then beset with temptations of her own making when she becomes "violently" attracted to her new love, Robert Lebrun. She is a woman of "all heart" but "without balance" --her love for Lebrun makes her miserable. After Lebrun

[84] Mott, American Journalism, p. 432.

returns home from Mexico, they mutually declare their love for one another, but at this very moment, Edna is summoned to the bedside of a woman friend in the midst of childbirth. This experience makes her think of her own children and she becomes torn between her "unholy love" for Robert and her "motherly love" for her children. But no moral solution is provided, as she is not forced to make a decision. Robert soon runs away and shortly thereafter she commits suicide. If this were not enough, the novel abounds in sensuality: "much of the story is brought out while a lot of people are bathing, or on the way to the beach or returning in the moonlight." In short, the novel treats a problem that occurs too frequently in the social life of people "with whom the question of food and clothing is not the all absorbing one."

This last squeamish allusion to sex on the part of the Globe-Democrat indicates why the frankness of The Awakening was not to be accepted, especially if void of a moral maxim. Consequently, the Globe-Democrat could find little to praise in the work outside of those elements reminiscent of Chopin's local color stories. There are "some pretty bits of description of Louisiana Creole life" and some minor characters are drawn with a "deft hand" but neither of the main characters "claims admiration or sympathy." In essence, the Globe Democrat censured the work: "It is a morbid book, and the thought suggests itself that the author herself would probably like nothing better than to 'tear it to

pieces' by criticism if only some other had written it."[85]

On the same day, May 13, Publisher's Weekly, a New York weekly soon to become the nation's leading book trade journal, listed The Awakening in its pages. The primary aim of Publisher's Weekly was to list current publications in the United States for a given year, not provide detailed criticism. Hence, it offered only this sparse comment on The Awakening: "The descriptions of Creole summer pastimes, the hotel life, the flirtations, chiefly occupy the author." It did add that the story had a "tragical ending."[86]

One week later, two other prominent St. Louis newspapers, the Republic and Post-Dispatch, cast disparaging remarks upon The Awakening.[87] The Republic considered the

[85] "Notes from Bookland," St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat, May 13, 1899, p. 5.

[86] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1865-1885, pp. 235, 491-94; and "Weekly Record of New Publications," Publisher's Weekly, 55 (May 13, 1899), 772.

[87] The St. Louis Republic, originally known as the Missouri Republican before 1888, was "for nearly a century, the most influential paper in its state." By 1888, it had lost influence but was "rejuvenated and renamed" by Colonel Charles H. Jones, a Georgian journalist. In 1893 the Republic was purchased by Ex-governor David R. Francis and in 1919 was absorbed by the Globe-Democrat. Still headed by Joseph Pulitzer, the Post-Dispatch was on the decline in 1895, but still ahead of the powerful Globe-Democrat in circulation increases in 1896. Under Charles H. Jones and George S. Johns, new editors appointed by the elder Pulitzer after 1896, the Post-Dispatch became the first St. Louis newspaper to reach 100,000 in circulation in 1903, followed a few years later by the Globe-Democrat. Mott, American Journalism, pp. 362, 565.

novel like most of Chopin's other works "too strong drink for moral babes, and should be labeled 'poison.'" Though the newspaper recognized Chopin's artistic skills and "instinctive" knowledge of the human soul, it maintained that in her creations she had committed "unutterable crimes against polite society."[88]

The May 20th Post-Dispatch review was penned by C. L. Deyo, the journalist friend of Chopin who had been confided in to read the original manuscript of At Fault and who later became a member of Chopin's social circle.[89] Despite his close association with the author, Deyo likewise found the novel too strong. It is not for "the young person," not that he would be harmed by reading it, but that more than likely, he could not understand it. Rather, the work was for "seasoned souls," for those individuals

> . . . who have lived, who have ripened under the gracious or ungracious sun of experience and learned that realities do not show themselves on the outside of things where they can be seen and heard, weighed, measured and valued like the

[88] This is the famous "lost review" cited by Rankin as appearing in the St. Louis Republic for May 20, 1899. Modern scholarship has been unable to locate the source of the review. It may have appeared in another edition of the Republic on another date, or Rankin may have cited the wrong publication as well as the incorrect date. For the contents of the review, see Rankin, Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories, p. 173.

[89] In a diary entry by Chopin, Deyo is cited as having qualities similar to Ruth McEnery Stuart, a writer Chopin admired. Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 53, 64, 89.

> sugar of commerce, but treasured within the heart, hidden away, never to be known perhaps save when exposed by temptation or called out by occasions of great pith and moment.

Indeed, the work was hardly suitable for the elderly unless they could withstand "unpleasant truths." For such persons and for the young "there is much that is very improper in it, not to say positively unseemly."

Edna Pontellier again attracted most of the criticism. Here was a woman, wrote Deyo, who was told to be courageous, to dare, to defy, to be a great sinner; yet great sinners are those who sin for a pure, even if unlawful, motive. Edna was neither courageous nor a great sinner, for she was not brave enough to sin, but merely offended; thus she failed to gain the pity allotted to the tragic heroine. If she were brave, she would have set aside passion for love. But as "a poor, helpless offender," she was neither "good enough for heaven" nor "wicked enough for hell."

In spite of his distaste for Edna, Deyo approved of the spirit of the work with its "searching vision into the recesses of the heart." He further praised the mastery with which the difficult subject matter had been treated: "There is no uncertainty in the lines . . . . Nothing is wanting to make a complete artistic whole." No matter how opinions may vary as to other aspects of the work, "all must concede its flawless art."

Deyo's mixed feelings about the novel are reflected

in his closing statement: "It is sad and mad and bad, but it is all consummate art. The theme is difficult, but it is handled with a cunning craft. The work is more than unusual. It is unique . . . . "[90]

Discounting the inconsequential notice in Publisher's Weekly, the May reviews of The Awakening were particularly ominous as they sprang from the presses of four major St. Louis publications, three of which had previously endorsed her work and promoted the author as a distinguished St. Louisan. Only the Globe-Democrat had failed to respond to her earlier works. Other local critics simply refused to review the book, the most notable being Alexander N. DeMenil, the genteel St. Louis editor who had known Chopin since childhood, and William Schuyler, her close friend and admirer who had pleased her with his critical essay in the Writer.[91] Undoubtedly shaken by this harsh treatment, Chopin pondered over the book's future. "What are the prospects for the book?" she asked its publisher Herbert S. Stone. At the same time she furnished Stone with a copy of Deyo's review from the Post-Dispatch, considering it to be "able and intelligent"

[90] C. L. Deyo, "The Newest Books," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, May 20, 1899, p. 4.

[91] DeMenil possessed a genteel snobbery that caused him to look down upon "the uncritical masses" and to proclaim proudly that his magazine The Hesperian was "devoted entirely to the higher literature." Obviously, The Awakening was too frank for a man of his disposition. Putzel, The Man in the Mirror, p. 53; and Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 175-77.

in contrast to some of the other "drivel" she had read.[92] Having read the severe criticism Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's Pembroke had received, Chopin was not ignorant of the ways of the reviewers, yet she seemed totally unprepared to have one of her own works judged so harshly. Her discomposure must have been obvious to her friends as she received several letters from them in praise of the novel. One man found the story a moral one, citing its "sermon against un-naturalness and Edna's marriage." A woman friend lamented that both fiction and life defeated those who dared to defy "the trammels of convention," but realized that to provide the novel with a happy ending would have been alien to Chopin's nature, for she was "as realistic as Zola." Another female acquaintance welcomed the novel's "revelation of a potential woman by a woman" and further commented: "I wish you believed that the Ednas will . . . somehow grow into a spiritual harmony to which the splendor of their frailty will contribute beauty." Her friend Sue V. Moore, formerly editor of the now defunct St. Louis Life,[93] termed the book "great" and claimed she was "so proud to know 'the

[92] Letter dated June 7, 1899. Cited in Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 175.

[93] Sue V. Moore edited St. Louis Life from December 14, 1889 to January 4, 1896. On September 5, 1896, its new editor G. L. Davidson changed the name to the Criterion. Rankin, Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories, p. 158; and Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 64.

artist with the courageous soul that dares and defies.'" Another contemporary noted that "there was a lot of jealousy" involved in some of the negative criticism.[94]

These conciliatory letters may have temporarily assuaged the feelings of the author, but they did little to curb the number of unfavorable reviews. In June, eleven more reviews appeared, of which only two could be termed somewhat favorable. Basically, they repeated the complaints set forth in the St. Louis publications: the novel was a strange departure from the author's usual work; the heroine was not to be admired; the novel closed on an unhappy note and failed to teach a moral lesson; the imagery was overly sensuous and the theme unwholesome. Any compliments received were usually confined to the lingering local color aspects of the work or to the technical and artistic skills of the author.

On June 1, The Chicago Times-Herald, possessing the second largest circulation of the Chicago papers,[95] accused Chopin of entering "the overworked field of sex fiction." The many admirers of her previous work will most likely be "disagreeably" surprised at her latest offering, noted the

[94] The contents of these letters are quoted from Seyersted, who does not provide the letters with dates. Perhaps they were undated. The letters themselves are at the Missouri Historical Society. Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 174-75.

[95] Mott, American Journalism, p. 467.

reviewer. That the author has "a keen knowledge of certain phases of feminine character" cannot be denied. But only "the contrast between the heroine and another character who is devoted to her husband and her family" saves the work from "utter gloom" and provides the reader with "a glimpse of the real Miss Chopin, who is at her best as a creator of sweet and lovable characters."[96]

Two days later, The Outlook of New York, which began as a religious periodical and eventually was transformed into a journal of opinion with a circulation of over 30,000, likewise found the novel repugnant as the journal was opposed to the "ogre of realism."[97] Reminding its readers that the author was well-known for her "faithful" stories of Louisiana life, The Outlook conceded that The Awakening too was "faithful enough in its presentation of certain phases of human passion and downward drift of character," yet argued "the story was not really worth telling," and found its "disagreeable glimpses of sensuality . . . repellent."[98]

The Providence Sunday Journal for June 4 chastized the author for employing a bold realism "that fairly out

[96] "Books of the Day," Chicago Times-Herald, June 1, 1899, p. 9.

[97] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1865-1885, pp. 423-30.

[98] "Books and Authors," The Outlook, 62 (June 3, 1899), 314.

Zolas Zola," a curt assessment from a newspaper that had previously lauded Bayou Folk for the "artlessness of its art." Mrs. Chopin is a "clever woman," but she has put her cleverness to "very bad use" in writing a story about a woman who lives amiably with her husband but without actually loving him and who with "animal instinct" falls into the arms of the first man she meets. Perhaps, thought the Journal, Mrs. Chopin herself did not know what she was doing when she composed the work.

Worse yet is the harmful effect such stories have upon the youth of the age. They can lead them "to dwell on things only matured persons can understand" and are likely to promote "unholy imaginations and unclean desires." "It is nauseating to remember that those who object to the bluntness of our older writers will excuse and justify the gilded dirt of these later days," closed the Sunday Journal.[99]

Two weeks passed before The Awakening provoked comment again. On June 18, the New Orleans Times-Democrat, which earlier had found Bayou Folk "fresh and charming," now exclaimed that The Awakening did not strike one as "a very happy title" for Chopin's latest story. The Times-Democrat took issue with Edna Pontellier, seriously questioning whether she was indeed "fully awake." "Poor bad, silly Edna" has an "awakening" which is confined "solely to the senses;" all

[99] "Books of the Week," Providence Sunday Journal, June 4, 1899, p. 15.

the higher faculties that govern conduct fall into a "slumber." The assumption that Edna's "crude mental operations" had any sort of divine sanction from the Holy Ghost as suggested by the author "cannot be too strongly protested against." In a civilized society, the right of the individual to engage in his or her "caprices" must be subject to restrictions. A woman who has willingly accepted the love and devotion of a man, even if without loving in kind, and who has become his wife and mother of his children, has presumably incurred certain moral obligations which forbid her from openly seeking out an independent existence as if she were an unmarried woman. It is not clear whether or not this is the doctrine Mrs. Chopin wishes to teach, but "certainly there is throughout the story, an undercurrent of sympathy for Edna, and nowhere a single note of censure of her totally unjustifiable conduct."[100]

Soon another publication that had enthusiastically endorsed Bayou Folk took exception to Chopin's newest work. In its issue for June 22, Public Opinion attacked the character of Edna Pontellier, doubting her veracity. It is highly unlikely that a woman of "solid old Presbyterian Kentucky stock" would conduct herself at all like Mrs. Edna Pontellier, who has a long list of lesser loves and one all absorbing

[100] "New Publications," New Orleans Times-Democrat, June 18, 1899, pp. 14-15.

passion, yet has given herself to the only man for whom she felt not the least affection--her husband. Like most commentators, Public Opinion could not sympathize with the plight of Edna Pontellier: "If the author had secured our sympathy for this unpleasant person it would not have been a small victory, but we are well satisfied when Mrs. Pontellier deliberately swims out to her death in the waters of the Gulf."[101]

One day later, Literature of New York concurred that Edna's suicide was a fitting end for "one who has drifted from all right moorings, and has not the grace to repent." The periodical truly regretted that Mrs. Chopin wasted "so beautiful a style and so much refinement of taste" upon "an essentially vulgar story."[102]

Three publications voiced their opinion of The Awakening on June 24. Surprisingly, all three praised some aspects of the novel and two even discovered something of value in the heroine--a startling departure from previous reviews. The New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art spoke most strongly in favor of the novel. Mrs. Chopin has "a clever way of managing a difficult subject, and wisely tempers the emotional elements found in the situation." In fact, she

[101] "Book Reviews," Public Opinion, 26 (June 22, 1899), 794.

[102] "Fiction," Literature, 4 (June 23, 1899), 570.

handles the story so cleverly "that you feel pity for the most unfortunate of her sex." This rare statement of sympathy for Edna Pontellier was not quite echoed by the Boston Beacon, but the society journal did glean a moral lesson from Edna's experience. Although the book was definitely not for young people and often approached impropriety, the story warned of the "immorality of a marriage of convenience." Edna possesses an "inborn sense of duty" and independence of mind that makes her struggle against a loveless marriage. In turn, the marriage makes it impossible for her to be herself and to seek out her own "affinity." But the "pure affection" of her new lover saves the heroine from disgrace. The book points out " . . . that the normal woman is capable without sin of experiencing a full awakening of the entire human nature."[103]

In his "prelude" to a review of The Awakening for the Baltimore News, E. A. U. Valentine viewed the time as the "silly season" for books by which he was compelled to review minor works of dubious quality because a supply of notable new books was lacking. Seemingly ignorant of the tone of most of the early reviews, Valentine declared that, based on the reputation the author gained from Bayou Folk and A

[103] "100 Books for Summer Reading," New York Times, Saturday Review of Books and Art, June 24, 1899, p. 408; and "Books and Authors," Boston Beacon, 16 (June 24, 1899), 4.

Night in Acadie, The Awakening should receive "a cordial reception from readers interested in Louisiana life." Disregarding Edna Pontellier for the most part, Valentine was captivated by the "voluptuous atmosphere" of the work. The reader will not have to complain, as so often is the case with Cable, that the author does not do justice to Creole life; here "it glows with a rich exotic beauty." Despite the vividness of the book, Valentine considered the theme not "altogether wholesome" and added that most of the day's "erotic novels" were written by women. Nonetheless, the work could be worth reading for "its attractive mise-en-scène."[104]

On June 25, the Los Angeles Times again pondered the character of Edna Pontellier. Reflecting the two strains of thought apparent in the earlier reviews, the Times could not determine whether or not Mrs. Chopin had simply tried to make "an intimate, analytical study of the character of a selfish, capricious woman" or was endorsing "the right of the individual to have what he wants," no matter what the consequences. Scattered sentences throughout the text suggested that Chopin supported the concept of the "fool woman"--that is, a woman who learns nothing from her experience because her vision is restricted to her immediate desires. Such a story is "unhealthily introspective and morbid in

[104] E. A. U. Valentine, "Literature," Baltimore News, June 24, 1899, p. 4.

feeling," argued the Times. The author's skills have been employed on a theme "unworthy of them" and hopefully in her next effort, she will choose one that is "more healthful and sweeter of smell."[105]

In an undated review for June, Book News, an older periodical of excellent quality that furnished plot outlines and reviews for readers' clubs in the nineties,[106] could not concur with the harsh assessments of The Awakening. Mrs. Chopin has composed "a very remarkable novel" that is likely to cause "considerable sensation." It relates the moral, mental, and emotional development of a woman in a manner that has wide appeal. "The style is curiously analytical and feminine," and yet maintains such force "as to make the final scene very effective." Undoubtedly, it is "essentially a story for women."[107]

The eleven reviews for June, all originating outside of St. Louis, though predominantly negative, were somewhat surprisingly more tolerant as a whole of the novel than those springing from the author's hometown in May. A few even

[105] "The Awakening," Los Angeles Times, June 25, 1899, p. 12.

[106] The publication was originally titled Book News: A Monthly Survey, but in 1906 it changed to Book News Monthly. Falcott Williams headed the review department from 1889-1908. Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1865-1885, p. 235; and Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 127.

[107] "Descriptive List," Book News, 17 (June, 1899), 592.

supported the actions of Edna, while others suggested they could have accepted her had her passion served a didactic purpose. Several singled out Chopin's artistry, though they were discontented with the book's theme. Unfortunately, these faint praises could not overcome the cumulative effect of those reviews that continued to damn the book as unwholesome.

Only one review of The Awakening appeared in July, though it proved to be a memorable one, coming from a contemporary woman writer of stature. On July 8, Willa Cather reviewed the novel for the "Books and Magazines" section of the obscure Pittsburgh Leader and a month later the same review was reprinted in the August 26 issue of the Lincoln Courier. For a time, Cather was a regular contributor to both the Leader and the Courier and in 1899, the last year in which she served in this capacity, she discussed "nearly a hundred books." Yet she did not review some of the romantic best sellers of that year, notably David Harum and When Knighthood Was in Flower, because "she could not take these kinds of books seriously." Instead, her choices for commentary in 1899 comprised "a cross section of the work being published by representative American, English, and French writers at the turn of the century." In several columns and articles, she had already voiced her opinion that she had "not much faith" in women fiction writers, though she admired the "great Georges," Charlotte Bronte, and Jane

Austen. It was quite remarkable then that she should select Kate Chopin's The Awakening for review, a "non-representative work" composed by a woman writer. Yet The Awakening evoked "one of Cather's most interesting critical statements."[108]

In her review, Cather was the first critic to compare The Awakening to Flaubert's Madame Bovary, labeling the former "a Creole Bovary." Edna Pontellier and Emma Bovary "are studies of the same feminine type"; they represent a class of women who unrealistically expect love to satisfy all their needs. Staking all their hopes on an "over-idealization of love," they lose out and their awakening to it leads to suicide--in Emma's case, a dose of arsenic; in Edna's case, a "fanciful and romantic" dip into the sea. Though Cather praised Chopin's style as "light, flexible, subtle, and capable of producing telling effects directly and simply," she saw little need for a second Bovary and wondered why the author wasted her talents on "so trite and sordid a theme" instead of devoting them "to a better cause." However, unlike most critics, Cather did not attack the novel on moral grounds but rather disdained the "presence of sexual passion" more than the adulterous activities of the heroine, as Sharon O'Brien notes in her study of Cather's review.[109]

[108] William M. Curtin, ed. The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893-1902 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), Vol. II, pp. 693-94.

[109] [Willa Cather] "Books and Magazines," Pittsburgh Leader, July 8, 1899, p. 6; and Willa Cather, "The Passing Show," Lincoln Courier, August 26, 1899, pp. 3-4. The

In August, five more reviews appeared, none of which were local in origin or laudatory in nature. On August 1, The Dial of Chicago, owning "a high reputation for honest and conservative criticism,"[110] stopped short of damning the novel outright. Its reviewer William Morton Payne asserted that from a rather conventional plot and a few trifling details of everyday life in New Orleans, Chopin had produced "a poignant spiritual tragedy." Marrying a man who cares too much for the conventions of life, a young woman discovers too late that these very conventions which she conceived as barriers to her personality in the midst of her "awakening" are now the only means of her salvation. But because of her "distraught thinking," she views suicide as the only way out. Like several critics before him, Payne saw Edna as emotionally and mentally unstable. Yet he closed on an ambivalent note: "The story is a simple one, not without charm, but not altogether wholesome in its tendency."[111]

Having previously reviewed both Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie, finding the former clever and charming but

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review is reprinted in Curtin's The World and the Parish, Vol. II, pp. 697-99. For Sharon O'Brien's comments on the review, see Sharon O'Brien, "The Limits of Passion: Willa Cather's Review of The Awakening," Women and Literature, 3 (Fall, 1975), 10-20.

[110] Mott, A History of American Literature: 1865-1885, p. 539.

[111] William Morton Payne, "Recent Fiction," The Dial, 37 (August 1, 1899), 75.

insinuating the latter had too sensuous an atmosphere, the Nation placed The Awakening under scrutiny on August 3. The influential Eastern publication immediately expressed great disappointment in this latest book from a writer whose previous work promised great things. "The recording reviewer drops a tear over one more clever author gone wrong," said the bereaved commentator. The craftmanship is still there, but it is marred by the dismal subject matter.

The Nation denounced Edna as a Southern lady who "wanted to do what she wanted to do" regardless of the consequences. Perhaps she would have done well to heed William James' advice "to do one thing a day one does not want to"--and in her Creole surroundings, adds the Nation cynically, two would be better. Edna should have flirted less, looked after her children more, and practiced self-denial; thereby freeing us of the "unpleasantries" of reading about her temptations. Neither "literature nor the criticism of life" benefits from such a detailed account of a woman's love affairs. And so it is hoped " . . . as Edna swims out to sea in the end . . . that her example may lie forever undredged."[112]

On August 12, the Boston Herald printed nearly a facsimile of the review that had appeared in the Nation, though the Herald was original in its error, calling The Awakening Chopin's "first novel." As for construction and

[112] "Recent Novels," The Nation, 69 (August 3, 1899), 96.

plot, the novel exhibits the same "marked ability" of her stories, yet the author should have chosen "a more agreeable theme." Echoing the Nation, the Herald labeled Edna as a woman who wanted to do just what she wanted to do and would have been wise to channel her energies in other directions. The story is told with a "mechanism of genius" but fails to teach a lesson and cannot be considered "profitable reading."[113]

Two days later, the Indianapolis Journal responded to the novel's heroine with mixed emotions. Setting aside the other characters as simply "Southern summer resort people," the Journal thought Edna "a weak and emotional but interesting young married woman" who is "unhappy without knowing why and naughty without intending wrong." She foolishly falls in love with a man unworthy of her attention and ignores a husband who worships her. Her "awakening" is no more than her recognition of love for a man not her husband. Unlike most critics who were startled by the novel's unusual theme, the Journal categorized it as "a society story of the conventional, frivolous sort," which accounts for its readability. Although the story is "clever" and realistic, it is not "a healthy story" to read. Furthermore, it has an abrupt closing which leaves the reader "hanging in midair."[114]

[113] "Current Literature," Boston Herald, August 12, 1899, p. 7.

[114] "Recent Publications," Indianapolis Journal, August 14, 1899, p. 4.

The final review for August came from the Boston Congregationalist. Like other religious weeklies that evolved into journals of opinion, the Congregationalist became distinquished for its literary contents in the nineties under the able guidance of its editor, Albert E. Dunning.[115] But it too found Chopin's novel of dubious value: "It is a langorous, passionate story of New Orleans and vicinity, hinging on the gradual yielding of a wife to the attractions of other men than her husband. It is a brilliant piece of writing, but unwholesome in its influence. We cannot commend it." In this succinct three-sentence commentary, the Congregationalist aptly reflected the critical feeling of most of those who examined The Awakening in August.[116]

The August reviews had been harsh indeed. Yet they paled somewhat before the affront given to the work by The Critic, the genteel magazine edited by Gilder's daughter. Previously, The Critic had favorably reviewed both Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie. But in an undated biographical sketch of Chopin that appeared in its feature section "The Lounger," for August, the magazine refrained from mentioning The Awakening, already in print for some three months, though citing all her other works. Obviously, The Critic

[115] Mott, A History of American Magazines: 1885-1905, p. 292.

[116] "Book Reviews," The Congregationalist, 84 (August 24, 1899), 256.

deemed the work too scandalous for comment. Apparently so did the Atlantic Monthly, for the prestigious magazine never reviewed the book.[117]

Further indignities befell the author and her work. The harsh reviews soon gave rise to a public outcry against the "offensive" novel and resulted in the book's being withdrawn from the Mercantile and St. Louis Public Libraries.[118] According to C. E. Miller, then an apprentice at the Mercantile Library and later its head librarian, Chopin visited the library one day with a female acquaintance just to prove to her friend that the book had been banned. Evidently, Chopin already knew the book had been withdrawn from circulation because after being so informed, she walked away without anger.[119] To add to her frustrations, she now became snubbed socially, even by some close friends. The St. Louis Fine Arts Club apparently rejected her membership and the Wednesday Club left her out of the "American Prose

[117] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 176; and "The Lounger," The Critic, 35 (August, 1899), 677.

[118] Felix Chopin is quoted as stating the book was "withdrawn from the Mercantile and St. Louis Public Libraries, later being restored to the Central Public Library in a 1906 reprint edition." According to Seyersted, The Awakening is still not in the Mercantile Library. "Books and Authors," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 5, 1953, p. 4c; and Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 224.

[119] Interview with C. E. Miller, St. Louis, 1961. Miller ascribed the withdrawal of The Awakening to the "bigoted people on the book-committee." Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 224.

Writers" series, while including lesser authors.[120] According to her friend Orrick Johns, Chopin felt she was being "persecuted" by her contemporaries.[121]

At the urging of friends, Chopin finally published a defense of The Awakening in the national periodical Book News under "Aims and Autographs of Authors." Though dated May 28, 1899, Chopin's statement was not published until August, a firm indication of her reluctance to do so. The statement itself represents a tongue-in-cheek concession to those who looked with disfavor upon her heroine Edna Pontellier:

> Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was over and it was then too late. St. Louis, Mo., May 28, 1899. signed: KATE CHOPIN[122]

[120] Rankin, p. 173. According to Seyersted, no document has been found to substantiate the existence of the St. Louis Fine Arts Club, but it may have existed or Rankin's source had in mind the St. Louis Artist Guild. Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 224-25.

[121] Orrick Johns, "The 'Cadians," St. Louis Mirror, 20 (July 20, 1911), 5.

[122] "Aims and Autographs of Authors," Book News, 17 (August, 1899), 612. Seyersted argues somewhat nebulously that the casual use of "mess of things" by Chopin indicates she was not bowing to the critics' view of Edna as an indelicate character and by saying such " . . . she indirectly indicates her disapproval of the whole guild of literary critics." Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 176.

This rejoinder, however, did little to alleviate the controversy the novel had provoked and the once popular writer became a social and literary outcast.

Stunned by the sudden turn of events, Chopin refused to discuss the matter with anyone. The great expectations she had held for The Awakening had gone completely awry and with it all hope of literary success. "It was unbelievable how she was crushed as it was truth as she saw it and people would not see," recorded one of her friends.[123] "She had poured herself--thoughts and feelings--into the novel with utmost honesty," added John Dillon of the Post-Dispatch who earlier had befriended her by reading some of her manuscripts.[124] In October, Chopin traveled to Wisconsin--in all probability to escape the social unpleasantries of her St. Louis environment--only to return home shortly thereafter. But little had changed.

Amidst all this gloom, the author suddenly received some unexpected encouragement from two Londoners. Lady Janet Scammon Young wrote her, enclosing a second letter by a Dr. Dunrobin Thomson, whom she called "the greatest consulting physician of England" and "one of the purest and best of men." Both proclaimed The Awakening the novel of the year and thought that along with the works of the popular

[123] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 178.

[124] Ibid.

Dutch poet Maarten Maarteens, it was worthy of translation. Graciously, Lady Jane offered Chopin assistance in contacting "publishers, translators, and c."[125]

Although the letters appear genuine, the two Londoners purported to write them are not included in the lists of gentry and the Medical Registry as one might expect by their titles, and so their existence cannot be verified. The Dutch poet Maarten Maartens was in London in October, 1899, but no comments by him related to Chopin have been discovered. Seyersted hypothesizes that the letters were either a hoax or were written by London relatives of Dr. Kolbenheyer in hopes of restoring Chopin's confidence in her writing ability.[126]

Even though it is likely that these so-called "London Letters" were a hoax written to uplift the author's spirit, they had the desired effect. Chopin eagerly showed them to her friends. Soon she agreed to write a personal essay for the Post-Dispatch as part of a feature article that would include a critical summary of her career. Entitled "A St. Louis Woman Who Has Won Fame in Literature," the feature article served as a major headline story on the front page of Section IV of the Post-Dispatch for November 26, 1899.

[125] The so called "London Letters" are currently part of the holdings of the Missouri Historical Society. Ibid.

[126] Ibid., pp. 178-79.

Besides the critical summary and Chopin's untitled essay "undoubtedly written in November," according to Seyersted,[127] the article was accompanied by three pictures of the author and one of her childhood home. The article bore the subheading: "Mrs. Kate Chopin, Whose Stories of Bayou Folk of St. Louis and Louisiana and Whose Latest Novel Has Been Recommended by the Dutch Poet and Novelist, Maarten Maarteens, for Translation Into European Languages."

In commenting on Chopin's career, the Post-Dispatch carefully avoided the controversy surrounding the publication of The Awakening. After admitting that Chopin's Awakening had not as yet "had the vogue of Winston Churchill's 'Richard Carvel,'" although it had already "aroused more discussion and probably deeper interest," the Post-Dispatch discreetly ignored further mention of the novel, preferring instead to repeat the familiar generalizations regarding her artistic abilities. As a fiction writer, Mrs. Chopin "appeals to the finer taste, sacrificing all else, even pecuniary profit to her artistic conscience." She possesses a clear, concise, but seemingly effortless style reinforced by a nicety of construction. The Post-Dispatch closed on a positive note:

> Mrs. Chopin has been called a southern writer, but she appeals to the universal sense in a way not excelled by any other American

[127] Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 1030.

> author. She is not sectional or provincial, nor even national, which is to say that she is an artist, who is not bound by the idiosyncracies of place, race or creed.

These final words, now sadly reminiscent of the predictions of future greatness bestowed upon her when Bayou Folk was reviewed, were followed by Chopin's untitled essay.

Within the essay, the Post-Dispatch placed an insert, which briefly reviewed the highlights of Chopin's career up to The Awakening. It recalled that "Euphrasie" had been the author's "first venture" into literature but that this little story had never been published in its original form because Chopin's "critical instinct" told her the work did not satisfy "the requirements of the best art." It was succeeded by At Fault, "a story of St. Louis and Louisiana life," the highly successful Bayou Folk, "immediately recognized as the work of a sure-handed artist," A Night in Acadie, "marked by the same finish and classic quality," and The Awakening, "Mrs. Chopin's latest book," published only a few months ago. About her last novel, the Post-Dispatch insert added: "The perfection of its art is acknowledged in this country and even more cordially in England, Maarten Maarteens recommending its translation into the continental languages of Europe." These guarded comments by the Post-Dispatch in both the insert and preceding critical summary upon The Awakening reflect the sensitive nature of the work. This wariness becomes even more apparent in Chopin's essay where she carefully refrains from discussing The Awakening.

In her untitled essay--later to be named "On Certain Brisk, Bright Days" by her biographer Per Seyersted-- Chopin evokes a series of rhetorical questions that suggest hidden antagonism toward those who had placed literary restrictions upon her work. In response to the question she poses for herself--"What do I write?"--she replies: "Well, not everything that comes into my head, but much of what I have written lies between the covers of my books." This subtle retort to the charge she treated unwholesome subject matter in her work leads her to a statement of her literary credo, prompted by the next question: "What do I write?" In reply, Chopin frankly admits she prefers "the integrity of crudities to artificialities." Soon after, she complains of not being taken seriously: "How hard it is for one's acquaintances and friends to realize that one's books are to be taken seriously . . . . " Obviously, Chopin had the harsh criticism of The Awakening in mind when she proposed her questions and answers, yet only indirectly does she refer to the novel. She states that her son is "wroth" when the question is asked: "Where can I find your mother's book?" "The very next time any one asks me that question," he exclaims, "I am going to tell them to try the stock yards!" "I hope he won't," muses Chopin. "He might thus offend a possible buyer." Chopin then remarks that she too has been asked that question by friends and politely replies, "My latest book? Why, you will find it, no doubt, at the bookseller's or the libraries."

"The libraries! Oh, no, they don't keep it," counters a friend. This sullen allusion to the fate of The Awakening unfortunately gathered few sympathizers. The hostile attitude toward the novel remained.[128]

The Post-Dispatch feature story of November 26 marked an end to the flood of demeaning reviews. Not one of the local reviews had proved favorable. Inexplicably, the very few that did came from publications outside of St. Louis. Yet these did little to offset the preponderance of unfavorable notices that The Awakening had received. Seven months after the novel's publication, local admiration had been displaced by social ostracism; national acclaim by nationwide outrage. Predictions of future greatness were forgotten. Obviously, the nation was not yet ready to accept a frank novel about female passion, no matter how truthful or artistic.

Outside of the questionable "London Letters" and efforts by friends to restore the writer's confidence, Chopin received no further encouragement. Even the outspoken Reedy, though still proclaiming her "among the first writers of the day" remained silent in defense of The Awakening.[129]

[128] "A St. Louis Woman Who Has Won Fame in Literature," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 26, 1899, Part IV, p. 1. Chopin's untitled essay is reprinted in Seyersted's The Complete Works of Kate Chopin under the name "On Certain Brisk, Bright Days." Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, pp. 721-23.

Other friends completely abandoned her. Alexander N. DeMenil no longer championed her works, and only two of her many friends--Orrick Johns and Vernon Knapp--cared to write of her later, implicitly suggesting the shame most felt over the author of The Awakening.[130] Nor was the book a financial success. According to Chopin's notebooks, she received only $102 in royalties in 1899; $40 in 1900; and $3 in 1901.[131] Despite this adversity, Chopin apparently never regretted publishing the novel, as her defense in Book News and the essay in the November Post-Dispatch

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[129] The brief note reads: "Several entertainments are to be given in honor of Miss Lelia Chopin, who is one of the season's debutantes and the only daughter of Mrs. Kate Chopin, who stands now among the first writers of the day." "Society," St. Louis Mirror, 9 (November 30, 1899), 10.

[130] Orrick Johns in "The 'Cadians" spoke of Chopin's "persecution" following the reception of The Awakening and was one of the first to cry out: "Does anyone nowadays ever read the stories of Mrs. Kate Chopin in her books "Bayou Folk" and "A Night in Acady [Acadie] ?" Orrick Johns, "The 'Cadians," St. Louis Mirror, 20 (July 20, 1911), 5. Later in Time of Our Lives, Johns alluded to "the beautiful and exquisite writer of the 'Cadians" and in another passage cited Kate Chopin and Florence Haywood as "our town's advanced literary ladies at that time." Orrick Johns, Time of Our Lives (New York: Stockpole Sons, 1937), pp. 88, 201. Vernon Knapp wrote about Chopin's famous literary salon, though he does not mention The Awakening. [Vernon Knapp?] "Is there an Interesting Woman in St. Louis?" St. Louis Republic, September 11, 1910, Feature Section, Part V, p. 1. Also see Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 182.

[131] Rankin's claim that the novel "sold well" (Rankin, p. 195) seems doubtful in light of the facts. Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 226.

indicate. Moreover, in "Confidences," she described herself as devoid of shame: ". . . I am sometimes 'afraid o' myse'f' but never ashamed."[132] Although some twenty years after the author's death, DeMenil wrote that The Awakening was "a novel with an unfortunate chapter that [the author] agreed with me later on, should have been omitted," this statement lacks verification. In all likelihood, contends Chopin's biographer Per Seyersted, this is a falsehood contrived by DeMenil to further embarrass an author who he felt had transgressed upon established moral grounds.[133]

In any case, Chopin never recovered from the harsh reception of The Awakening. Subsequently, her literary production practically ceased. On November 29, 1899, the ladies of the elite Wednesday Club had her on a special program where some of her "songs" were set to music by her friend William Schuyler and where she gave a reading of her new story "Ti Démon." That same month she wrote "A Reflection," a short work, according to Seyersted, which can be read as a criticism of those who had stifled her creative energy and interrupted her career.[134] But her misfortunes

[132] Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, Vol. II, p. 700.

[133] Alexander N. DeMenil, "A Century of Missouri Literature," Missouri Historical Review, 15 (October, 1920), 119; and Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 225-26.

[134] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 180-81.

continued. Sometime in 1900, the Atlantic rejected "Ti Démon," finding it too "sombre, . . . the sad note . . . [being] too much accented." Then in February of that year, Herbert S. Stone of the Herbert S. Stone Co., returned her collection "A Vocation and a Voice," which had become the property of the company after it bought out Way & Williams. Unaware that Stone had decided to reduce the number of titles to be published by his company or that he, unlike many others, was unafraid of censorship because of the controversy over Hamlin Garland's Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, Chopin took this rejection as another sign of literary ostracism.[135]

Still she tried to revitalize her career. In April, Chopin composed "Charlie" and offered it to Youth's Companion and the Century but without success. Her short story sketch "The White Eagle," written on May 9, was published in Vogue on July 12. During July and August, she dabbled in poetry, composing "Alone" and "To the Friend of my Youth: To Kitty," both of which remained in manuscript form. Soon after, she tried to get another collection of stories published, but

[135] According to Kramer, the rejection of "A Vocation and a Voice" was probably not due to the poor reception of The Awakening, as Rankin and others have assumed, or for censorship reasons. Rather, it was probably "necessitated by intentionally smaller lists of books which his [Stone's] company published after 1900, and to the assignment of all the Way & Williams' copyrights to Doubleday, McClure Company on January 26, 1900." Kramer, A History of Stone & Kimball and Herbert S. Stone & Co., p. 298.

the effort ended in failure.[136] Toward the close of 1901 and a little thereafter, her last creative effort resulted in four stories, all intended for Youth's Companion, but only "The Wood-Choppers" written October 17, 1901, and "Polly" written January 14, 1902, were published in the magazine, the former on May 29, 1902, the latter July 3, 1902. The other two stories were either lost or destroyed. It mattered little, though, for the heroines of her two extant stories indicate that she had abandoned the passionate women of her earlier works for more conventional figures.[137]

The harsh reception of The Awakening had succeeded in destroying the author's momentum and seemingly her creativity. It may have also been responsible for weakening her health. Barely past fifty, she suddenly became ill and in 1903 moved to 4232 McPherson Avenue. Despite her failing strength, in 1904 she decided to attend the St. Louis World's Fair. But on August 20, 1904, after a strenuous day at the Fair, she suffered a brain hemcrrhage and died two days later. She was buried in Calvary Cemetery, her headstone inscribed simply: "Kate Chopin/February 1851-August 1904."

[136] No evidence exists as to whom she approached. On August 22, 1904, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote: "The announcement was made some time ago that another volume of short stories was to be issued this year." See Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 226, p. 52.

[137] Ibid., p. 185.

Critical Post-Mortems

The death of Kate Chopin on August 20, 1904 brought to a close a brief but startling literary career. From an unheralded figure who had begun a belated writing career in 1888 upon the advice of her doctor, the thirty-seven year old widow had progressed from a popular St. Louis story-teller to a nationally known local color artist of unlimited promise in six years following the success of Bayou Folk. "Rare praise" in the form of critical notices and reviews from all over the country had extended her fame from the culturally conscious confines of St. Louis to the flourishing literary centers in the East, and even as far west as California. Success seemed a certainty--until the publication of The Awakening in 1899. Suddenly critical acclaim turned to critical outrage--and then silence. Five years after the reception of her last novel, the name Kate Chopin again lapsed into obscurity and upon her death only six reviewers paid their respects to the once prominent author.

In a front-page story for August 22, two days following her death, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch bade farewell to the "well-known" authoress of Louisiana stories. Entitled "Death Comes to Mrs. Kate Chopin," the story told of the circumstances surrounding her death after she attended the World's Fair and of her life in St. Louis. Conspicuously, discussion of her literary works was absent outside of a

brief comment that her fiction illustrated her insight into character.[138]

The next day the New Orleans Daily Picayune reprinted the obituary from the Post-Dispatch under the heading "Mrs. Kate Chopin." Cited as "Special to" the Picayune, the obituary likely had been provided by the wire service. As it was not a hometown paper like the Post-Dispatch, the Picayune did not allot it front page coverage but instead placed it among the usual obituary notices.[139]

Also on August 23, the St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat lamented the loss of the "well-known depictor of Creole life in Louisiana" without paying her any special acclaim as a native St. Louisan. A portrait of Chopin accompanied a biographical sketch that reviewed her "distinguished career" beginning with At Fault in 1890. Four years later she composed Bayou Folk, noted the Globe-Democrat, which drew notices from "all over the continent" and initiated "a universal desire to study more of Creole life" as vividly described by its author. In 1897, she wrote A Night in Acadie. Two years later came The Awakening, a "fascinating novel." Undoubtedly, this favorable comment upon the novel was written out of respect for the author's memory, as the Globe-Democrat

[138] "Death Comes to Mrs. Kate Chopin," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 22, 1904, p. 1.

[139] "Mrs. Kate Chopin," New Orleans Daily Picayune, August 23, 1904, p. 3.

had previously censured the work. The obituary closed with a bleak summary of the author's career following the reception of The Awakening: "Since then Mrs. Chopin had published nothing of importance, but it was recently announced that another volume of short stories from her pen was to be issued this year." The Globe-Democrat was mistaken, however, for the collection never found a publisher.[140]

The most poignant memorial came from William Reedy of the Mirror on August 25. Lamenting that St. Louis had lost "a woman of rare intellect and noble character," Reedy commented on both the author's literary attributes and motherly instincts: "She was a remarkably talented woman, who knew how to be a genius without sacrificing the comradeship of her children." Although her literary productions were few, she possessed a "true literary genius," as evidenced by her depictions of Creole life and character in the South. Apparently, setting aside his distaste for The Awakening out of compassion for the deceased, Reedy summed up her career: "'At Fault,' 'Bayou Folk,' 'A Night in Acadie,' and 'The Awakening' are literary treasures which she has left and which have afforded many a pleasant hour."[141]

[140] "Mrs. Kate Chopin, The St. Louis Authoress, Dead," St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat, August 23, 1904, p. 13.

[141] William Marion Reedy, "Reflections," St. Louis Mirror, 14 (August 25, 1904), 1.

On August 26, the Boston Evening-Transcript became the only non-regional paper to publish its reflections upon the author. Because it was not local, it probably felt freer to comment frankly upon her fluctuating career. Besides printing the usual biographical data and noting the regional sources of her material, the Evening-Transcript stated that of her stories, Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie "perhaps brought her greatest credit from the literary world." As for The Awakening, though it "met [with] approval," it seemingly "did not bring forth the true talent of the author "as had the other two works."[142]

Several months passed before Alexander N. DeMenil expressed his sentiments in the October-December issue of The Hesperian. A supporter of her earlier works, DeMenil had been affronted by The Awakening, but in memory of the author he discreetly gave only a passing reference to the novel and instead dwelled on her personal attributes and her success with Bayou Folk. Proclaiming that St. Louis had lost "her foremost female author," DeMenil renewed the contention that she surpassed Cable in her faithful depictions of Creole life in Bayou Folk. She was herself a Creole, spoke of them as "her own people," and exhibited a "touch of humanity" lacking in Cable. In these "studies of life" her touch was

142 "Recent Deaths," Boston Evening-Transcript, August 26, 1904, p. 5.

more "deft," her insight "more femininely subtle." Unlike others, "she had no fads, no serious purposes in her literary work, no lesson to teach, no moral to point." She was in all respects "a womanly woman."[143]

This handful of notices--notably restrained in tone--was a sad memorial to a woman who only a decade before had attained national fame with Bayou Folk. They recalled her finest achievement with respect and tactfully overlooked her demise as a writer. Yet even in remembrance, these notices had a detrimental effect, for they continued to treat the author as a regional writer, citing her two short-story collections as examples of her best work. This critical reputation which Chopin herself rejected early in her career seemed indelibly stamped upon the author for posterity. And when regional literature went out of vogue at the turn of the century in favor of realistic fiction, Chopin became a neglected figure. It would take almost fifty years before her unique contribution to the art of realism would be noticed and another sixteen years or so before the label of local-color artist would begin to fade--so ingrained was the critical view established by her early reviewers. One of DeMenil's statements in the obituary that served as a final comment

[143] [Alexander Nicolas DeMenil], "Current Literature," The Hesperian, 4 (October-December, 1904), 383-84. Much of the contents of the above article was incorporated into DeMenil's "Kate Chopin" in The Literature of the Louisiana Territory (St. Louis: St. Louis News, 1904), pp. 257-59.

upon the author's career now seems strangely ironic; "The critics have not as yet fully understood the excellence of Mrs. Chopin's work." The temperament of the times did not allow for this to be so and it would take another generation of readers--nourished by a different temperament--before the critical reputation of Kate Chopin would be adjusted and revitalized.

CHAPTER V

THE REVIEWERS' LEGACY AND THE CRITICAL AWAKENING

The exiguous obituaries prompted by the death of Kate Chopin in 1904 brought an abrupt close to a once promising literary career. Over sixty reviews of her works had been written in the fourteen-year span that began with the publication of At Fault in 1890. This number in itself is not impressive, but in light of the initial obscurity of the author, the limited promotion given to two of her works, and the preponderance of literary endeavors in the nineties, the critical attention Kate Chopin received from the reviewers grows in magnitude. By their comments, the reviewers not only influenced the author's career dramatically in her own lifetime, but left a legacy that would dominate critical thinking for sixty years.

The reviewers' legacy appears largely binding. After Chopin's death, a silence ensued that would last for some sixty years. In their final estimate of Chopin as a talented regional writer of short fiction, the reviewers by their very praise had damned her to literary oblivion. With only two short-story collections in the local-color vein upon which her entire literary reputation rested, the name of Kate Chopin had little else to sustain it. Most readers outside of St. Louis remained unacquainted with her first work

At Fault, and those who had read it found it structurally weak and overflowing with minor characters. The poems and essays she had composed scarcely attracted comment. A few ephemeral pieces and uncollected short stories, the already rejected "A Vocation and a Voice," an unsuccessful one-act play, a polka, and translations of Maupassant were all that remained. As for The Awakening, her contemporaries thought it best forgotten. With a legacy confined to her abilities as a local color artist and with the subsequent decline of local color in popularity, the memory of Kate Chopin soon faded.

One year after her death, W. P. Trent ignored Chopin in his anthology Southern Writers. In 1906, a reprint of The Awakening went unnoticed, and gradually all of the author's works went out of print. A year later, Leonidas R. Whipple included excerpts from The Awakening in the Library of Southern Literature and though he called the novel her "most ambitious work" and defended the morality of the book against those who "misunderstood its motive," he maintained Chopin's fame lay in her shorter fiction, especially "Désirée's Baby." In 1909, Percival Pollard attacked the "utterly forgotten" novel in his study Their Day in Court, arguing that Chopin had no excuse for writing such a work, when she had already gained fame for her "charming contes of Creole life." That same year Walter L. Fleming in The South in the Building of the Nation concluded that The Awakening was "not a success"

even though it had been Chopin's "most ambitious work." Only Orrick Johns, the son of Mrs. Chopin's friend George S. Johns of the Post-Dispatch, called for renewed interest in the author. Yet he too felt her forte resided in her short fiction. This mattered little--his plea in the July 20, 1911 issue of the Mirror went unheeded.[1]

In 1915, Fred Lewis Pattee barely mentioned The Awakening in A History of American Literature Since 1870. In "The Short Story" written for the authoritative Cambridge History of American Literature (1918) and in The Development of the American Short Story (1923), Pattee relegated Chopin's genius to her local color stories. "Madame Célestin's Divorce," however, earned a place in his Century Readings in the American Short Story.[2]

[1] Leonidas Rutledge Whipple, "Kate Chopin" in Library of Southern Literature, II, ed. by Edwin Anderson Alderman and Joel Chandler Harris (Atlanta: Martin and Hoyt, 1907), pp. 863-67; Percival Pollard, Their Day in Court (New York: Neale, 1909), pp. 40-45; Walter L. Fleming, ed. The South in the Building of the Nation, XI (Richmond, Virginia: The Southern Historical Publication Society, 1909), p. 196; and Orrick Johns, "The 'Cadians," Mirror, 20 (July 20, 1911), 5-6.

[2] Fred Lewis Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870 (New York: Century, 1915), pp. 364-65; Pattee, "The Short Story," in The Cambridge History of American Literature, II, ed. by William Peterfield Trent and others (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1918), p. 390; Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey (New York & London: Harper and Bros., 1923), pp. 325-27; and Pattee, Century Readings in the American Short Story (New York: Century, 1937), pp. 404-06.

On March 28, 1925, the first review on Chopin since her death appeared in the Saturday Review of Literature.[3] It cited Bayou Folk as one work among several representative selections related to descendants of Acadian refugees. Alexander N. DeMenil's "A Century of Missouri Literature," (1920), John Louis Haney's The Story of Our Literature (1923), Dorothy A. Dondore's "Points of Contact Between History and Literature in the Mississippi Valley," (1924), and her study The Prairie and the Making of Middle America: Four Centuries of Description (1926), and Floyd C. Shoemaker's A History of Missouri and Missourians (1927), all simply mentioned Kate Chopin in passing.[4] Two short-story studies, The Development of the Short Story in the South (1911) and The Advance of the American Short Story (1923), briefly commented upon her local color stories.[5] Virtually all ignored The

[3] "Readers Guide," Saturday Review of Literature (March 28, 1925), 637.

[4] Alexander N. DeMenil, "A Century of Missouri Literature," Missouri Historical Review, 15 (October 1920), 117; John Louis Haney, The Story of Our Literature (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1923), p. 346; Dorothy A. Dondore, "Points of Contact Between History and Literature in the Mississippi Valley," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 11 (September 1924), 230; Dondore, The Prairie and the Making of Middle America: Four Centuries of Description (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1926), p. 361; and Floyd C. Shoemaker, A History of Missouri and Missourians (Columbia: Missouri: Lucas Bros., 1927), p. 359.

[5] Robert Cecil Beale, The Development of the Short Story in the South (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Michie Co., 1911), p. 63 and Edward O'Brien, The Advance of the American Short Story (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1923), pp. 170-71.

Awakening. By the close of the 1920's Kate Chopin's fate seemed sealed: her critical legacy as a local colorist could sustain her memory no longer.

In the early thirties, a subtle shift took place in Chopin criticism. The few who commented upon the author began to focus less on the local color aspects of her work than on her expertise in the short story genre and its elements.[6] No one yet considered her as a novelist. Citing Kate Chopin in the 1930 edition of the Dictionary of American Biography, Dorothy A. Dondore lamented that the very qualities that made Chopin's short stories effective made The Awakening "almost erotic."[7] Two years later and some twenty-eight years after the author's death, the first full-length work devoted solely to Kate Chopin appeared, Father Daniel S. Rankin's Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories.[8] This pioneer biography elicited only six reviews, an embarrassingly small number and far too few to revitalize an interest in the author. All reviewers concurred she was worthy of study, but the commentary was mainly restricted

[6] Thomas Bonner, Jr., "Kate Chopin: An Annotated Bibliography," Bulletin of Bibliography, 32 (July-September, 1975), 101.

[7] Dorothy A. Dondore, "Kate O'Flaherty Chopin" in Dictionary of American Biography, IV, ed. by Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (New York: Scribners', 1930), pp. 90-91.

[8] Daniel Rankin, Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932).

to her two short-story collections, most of which echoed the platitudes found in the reviews of Chopin's contemporaries. The Boston Evening Transcript (1932), which had paid tribute to Chopin upon her death, spoke of the author in glowing terms: "Kate Chopin is the seventh, we believe, in a list that portrays America far more clearly than does 'The Bridge of San Luis Rey' and 'The Good Earth,' excellent as they are." This remark pertained strictly to her short stories, for the Evening Transcript joined Edward Tinker of the New York Herald Tribune (1932), Frederick Hard of Modern Language Notes (1934), and Jay B. Hubbell of American Literature (1933) in overlooking The Awakening. The Springfield Daily Republican (1933) stood alone in speaking out on the novel. It described the work as one that had

> . . . incurred considerable criticism in conservative circles because . . . [its author] dared to suggest in her chief character that a woman had capacity for passion beyond the limits of marriage. Such a theme would cause very little stir today, though it would probably be presented without the sincerity and delicate artistry that characterized Mrs. Chopin's handling of it.

The Times Literary Supplement committed a gross inaccuracy in its passing remark upon the novel. In its December 29, 1932, issue, the Times observed that Bayou Folk and The Awakening "are very well known outside the South." Perhaps an error in verb tense mars the validity of the statement, for certainly in 1932 neither work was very well-known anywhere. In fact, Jay B. Hubbell in his "Brief Mention"

reviews for American Literature (1933) observed that Rankin had thought it necessary to explain in his biography that "Kate Chopin" was not a pen name, so forgotten was the once popular author.[9]

In composing the biography, Rankin himself reflected the legacy of the early reviewers. He praised the local color stories of Bayou Folk and dismissed The Awakening as an "erotic morbidity," posing the question first queried by Frances Porcher of the Mirror--cui bono? At Fault, he concurred, suffered the defects of many an author's "first novel" and in words strikingly similar to those of The Nation (October 1, 1891), he took issue with the many characters who could possibly be "at fault":

> There is the wife who drinks to excess, the husband who gets a divorce from her, the widow who loves and is beloved by him, but who persuades him to remarry his divorced wife and bring her to the Louisiana plantation, where the widow may have a fostering care of the two. There is also the young lady of many engagements, the negro youth who commits arson, the young Creole gentleman who shoots him, the Texas colonel who shoots the young Creole, the St. Louis lady who goes to matinees and, forgetting she has a husband, runs off with a matinee-going salesman.10

[9] "Kate Chopin," Boston Evening Transcript, December 31, 1932, book section, p. 3; Edward Larocque Tinker, "Southern Story Teller," New York Herald Tribune, December 4, 1932, section X, p. 23; Frederick Hard, "Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories," Modern Language Notes, 49 (March, 1934), 192-93; Jay B. Hubbell, "Brief Mention," American Literature, 5 (March, 1933), 93; "Kate Chopin," Springfield Daily Republican, January 24, 1933, p. 8; and "New Books and Reprints," Times Literary Supplement, December 29, 1932, p. 991.

Rankin departed from the critical legacy in one respect--he chose A Night in Acadie over Bayou Folk: "In the earlier volume the grace and delicacy of her art is paramount; in the later an intellectual and spiritual quality is added which keeps one brooding long after the spell of charm has passed."[11] Otherwise, Rankin remained strongly under the influence of the early reviewers.

After Rankin's biography, mostly incidental references to Kate Chopin followed. In 1933, Oscar Cargill briefly alluded to At Fault as "amateurish" in his study The Social Revolt.[12] That May, Lelia Chopin, daughter of the author, wrote of her mother in "Kate Chopin," Maryville Magazine (St. Louis).[13] In 1936, Arthur Hobson Quinn agreed with Rankin's estimate of The Awakening in American Fiction. Quinn grouped the novel with "studies of morbid psychology" and preferred instead her "brief, cameo-like stories."[14] Two studies for the thirties touched upon Kate Chopin's

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[10] Rankin, p. 117. To compare Rankin's comments with those in The Nation, see "Recent Fiction," The Nation, 53 (October 1, 1891), 264.

[11] Ibid., p. 170.

[12] Oscar Cargill, ed. The Social Revolt (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 598.

[13] Lelia Chopin [Hattersley], "Kate Chopin," Maryville Magazine, 8 (May, 1933), 25. Cited in "Notes," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall, 1975), 34.

[14] Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey (New York: Appleton-Century, 1936), pp. 354-57.

treatment of the Negro. M. Clifford Harrison, Social Types in Southern Prose Fiction (1932), and Sterling Brown, The Negro in American Fiction (1937), both found Chopin wanting in her depictions of the Negro, who too often appeared stereotyped in her stories as overly loyal and self-sacrificing.[15] Arlin Turner simply placed Kate Chopin with other early writers of Louisiana people in "Fiction of the Bayou Country" (1939) as did Shields McIlwaine in "Picturesque Backgrounds and Louisiana Cajuns: George W. Cable and Kate Chopin," The Southern Poor-White from Lubberland to Tobacco Road (1939). Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" was selected for Alexander Jessup's Representative Modern Short Stories (1932).[16] The author's name was also listed among the entries of Lizzie C. McVoy and Ruth B. Campbell's A Bibliography of Fiction by Louisianians and on Louisiana Subjects (1935), and B. M. Fullerton's Bibliography of American Literature 1755-1900 (1936) and in two biographies, The National Cyclopedia of American Biography

[15] M. Clifford Harrison, Social Types in Southern Prose Fiction (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards, 1932), pp. 72-73, 79-84; and Sterling Brown, The Negro in American Fiction (Washington, D. C.: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937), p. 61.

[16] Arlin Turner, "Fiction of the Bayou Country," Saturday Review of Literature, 18 (April 30, 1938), 3-4, 16; Shields McIlwaine, "Picturesque Backgrounds and Louisiana Cajuns: George W. Cable and Kate Chopin" in The Southern Poor-White from Lubberland to Tobacco Road (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), pp. 148-52; and Kate Chopin, "Désirée's Baby," in Representative Modern Short Stories, ed. by Alexander Jessup (New York: Macmillan Co., 1932), pp. 540-46.

(1936) and American Authors, 1600-1900: Biographical Dictionary of American Literature (1938).[17]

One exception to the superficial commentary on Chopin in the thirties was Joseph J. Reilly's "Stories by Kate Chopin" (1937), later reprinted with minor changes as "Something About Kate Chopin" in Of Books and Men (1942). In this first article of note on Chopin, other than those composed by her friends and associates, Reilly limits his discussion to her short fiction, proclaiming the author "uncomparably the greatest American short story writer of her sex." More significantly, he regarded Chopin as more than a local colorist by comparing her to such "short story masters" as Poe, Hawthorne, and Hardy.[18] Despite this shift in perspective by Reilly and a few others, the critics of the thirties still saw Chopin's value in her two short-story collections.

[17] Lizzie C. McVoy and Ruth B. Campbell, A Bibliography of Fiction by Louisianians and on Louisiana Subjects (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1935), p. 20; B. M. Fullerton, Selective Bibliography of American Literature 1755-1900 (New York: Dial Press, 1936), pp. 52-53; "Chopin, Kate (O'Flaherty)," in The National Cyclopedia of American Biography, XXV (New York: James T. White, 1936), pp. 70-71; and "Chopin, Kate (O'Flaherty)," American Authors, 1600-1900: Biographical Dictionary of American Literature, ed. by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1938), pp. 150-51.

[18] Joseph J. Reilly, "Stories by Kate Chopin," Commonwealth, 25 (March 26, 1937), 606-07; and Reilly, "Something About Kate Chopin," in Of Books and Men (New York: Julian Messner, 1942), pp. 130-36.

In the forties, the reviewers' legacy was threatened but not destroyed by Cyrille Arnavon's essay "Les Débuts du Roman Réaliste Américain et l'Influence Française" in Romanciers Américains Contemporains. Published in 1946, Arnavon's essay treated Chopin as an important novelist and realist much in the manner of Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser. Clearly here was a departure from Chopin's critical legacy which gave The Awakening added significance.[19] But Arnavon remained alone in his conviction as other critics of the decade continued to adhere to the pronouncements of the early reviewers. George Harrison Orians, A Short History of American Literature Analyzed by Decades (1940), James Hart, The Oxford Companion to American Literature (1941), the anonymous author of "Missouri Miniatures: Kate Chopin" (1944), and Harry Bernard, Le Roman régionaliste aux États-Unis (1949), once again praised her local color artistry and her short stories while merely alluding to the adverse effects The Awakening had upon her career.[20] Minnie M.

[19] Cyrille Arnavon, "Les Débuts du Roman Réaliste Américain et l'Influence Française," in Romanciers Américains Contemporains, ed. by Henri Kerst (Cahiers des Langues Modernes, I, Paris, 1946), pp. 9-35.

[20] George Harrison Orians, A Short History of American Literature Analyzed by Decades (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1940), pp. 254-55; James Hart, The Oxford Companion to American Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 133-34; Anonymous, "Missouri Miniatures: Kate Chopin," Missouri Historical Review, 38 (January 1944), 207-08; and Harry Bernard, Le Roman régionaliste aux États-Unis (Montreal: Fides, 1949), p. 131.

Brashear briefly touched upon Chopin in a historical context in her study "The Missouri Short Story as it Has Grown Out of the Tall Tale of the Frontier" (1949). The still recognized "Désirée's Baby" was anthologized in two collections, Lizzie McVoy's Louisiana in the Short Story (1940) and Harry R. Warfel and George Harrison Orians' American Local Color Stories (1941). In the highly respected Literary History of the United States (1948) Carlos Baker devoted only one page to Chopin in his chapter "Delineation of Life and Character" and grouped her with such local colorists as George Washington Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Mary Wilkes Freeman. Baker completely ignored The Awakening.[21]

The fifties, however, brought a significant change in attitude toward Kate Chopin and her novel The Awakening. Although Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (1951), still spoke of Chopin as a local colorist,[22] other critics

[21] Minnie M. Brashear, "The Missouri Short Story as it Has Grown Out of the Tall Tale of the Frontier," Missouri Historical Review, 43 (April 1949), 211-12; Lizzie C. McVoy, ed. "Désirée's Baby" in Louisiana in the Short Story (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1940), pp. 81-89; Harry R. Warfel and George Harrison Orians, eds. "Désirée's Baby" in American Local-Color Stories (New York: American Book Company, 1941), pp. 646-51; Carlos Baker, "Delineation of Life and Character," Literary History of the United States, ed. by Robert E. Spiller and others (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948), pp. 843-61.

[22] Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York: American Book Co., 1931), p. 536.

began consideration of her as a novelist. In his essay "Exploitation of the Provinces" (1951) Clarence Ghodes designated The Awakening worthy of a place in "the history of sterner realism in nineteenth-century America" and renewed the comparison with Flaubert's Madame Bovary, as Willa Cather and Cyrille Arnavon had done before him.[23] The next year Van Wyck Brooks in The Confident Years: 1885-1915 described The Awakening as a "small perfect book that mattered more than the whole life-work of many a prolific writer."[24] This generous praise was followed in 1953 by Cyrille Arnavon's French translation of The Awakening entitled Edna, which included an "Introduction" based upon his previous essay.[25] On July 5, 1953, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reviewed Edna in its "Books and Authors" section. Commenting that the French translation "should revive old time memories" about a book that once shocked St. Louis, the Post-Dispatch astutely noted how attitudes had changed since the original publication: "In view of what goes on in modern shockers, the offending incident in 'The Awakening' is amusing." According to the Post-Dispatch, the offending incident

[23] Clarence Ghodes, "Exploitation of the Provinces," in The Literature of the American People: An Historical and Critical Survey, ed. by Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), p. 654.

[24] Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years: 1885-1915 (New York: Dutton, 1952), p. 341.

[25] Cyrille Arnavon, "Introduction" to Edna [The Awakening] (Paris: Le Club bibliophile de France, 1953), pp. 1-22.

occurred when Edna was kissed lightly upon the neck while dancing. This indiscretion, however, was not one of those cited by the early reviewers, and upon what basis the comment was made, one can only conjecture. But the Post-Dispatch was correct in foreseeing a new day for The Awakening.[26]

This "new day" was hastened by two significant contributions to Chopin scholarship in 1956. That summer, Kenneth Eble published his now famous article "A Forgotten Novel: Kate Chopin's The Awakening" in Western Humanities Review. Eble reflected upon the circumstances that led to neglect of the novel "almost from its publication." Noting its structural coherency brought about by the symbolic images drawn from the sea, sky, and land and its serious treatment of sex, he concluded that, despite minor flaws, The Awakening was "a first-rate novel" which demonstrated that its author possessed the skills to "go beyond the limitations of regional material." Eble then called for reappraisal of Chopin as a novelist. Soon after, Robert Cantwell wrote an in-depth review of The Awakening for the winter issue of the Georgia Review. He was even more enthusiastic than Eble in his praise of the book, ranking it "among the world's masterpieces of short fiction" and claiming it to be "the finest novel of its sort" to come from the pen of an American author. In a startling departure from his critical

[26] "Books and Authors: St. Louis to Paris Twice," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 5, 1953, p. 4C.

predecessors, Cantwell merely glossed over the author's two short story collections. The spell of the early reviewers had finally been broken.[27]

Besides Jacob Blanck's inclusion of Kate Chopin in his Bibliography of American Literature (1951) and some passing references to her in other works,[28] the fifties offered no further comments on Chopin. But critical attention had shifted dramatically from Chopin the story teller and local colorist to Chopin the novelist and realist. As a result, The Awakening grew in importance in the sixties, and the new interest proved the final undoing of the reviewers' critical legacy. Some critics and literary historians, of course, still practiced the old silences and omissions. The Literary History of the United States for 1962 again cited her two short story collections but ignored The Awakening, and Leon Howard in Literature and the American Tradition (1960) bypassed the novel as simply another regional book.[29] However, these

[27] Kenneth Eble, "A Forgotten Novel: Kate Chopin's The Awakening," Western Humanities Review, 10 (Summer 1956), 261-69; and Robert Cantwell, "The Awakening by Kate Chopin," Georgia Review, 10 (Winter 1956), 489-94.

[28] Jacob Blanck, "Kate O'Flaherty Chopin," Bibliography of American Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 160-61; Bartholow V. Crawford and others, eds. "Kate (O'Flaherty) Chopin," American Literature (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1958), p. 180; and Robert Falton Richards, "Chopin, Kate (O'Flaherty)," Concise Dictionary of American Literature (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), pp. 28-29.

[29] "Delineation of Life and Character," Literary History of the United States. Third edition: revised, ed. by Robert E. Spiller and others (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.,

oversights were more than compensated for by the number of new admirers of The Awakening.

In 1962, Edmund Wilson found Chopin's treatment of infidelity in her "beautifully written" novel comparable to D. H. Lawrence's.[30] A year later, Per Seyersted anticipated the Chopin revival in "Kate Chopin: An Important St. Louis Writer Reconsidered" (1963).[31] Kenneth Eble edited the Putnam edition of The Awakening for 1964 with an "Introduction" based upon his previous article.[32] In 1965, Warner Berthoff recognized this "remarkable novel" in his study The Ferment of Realism, and Choice in "Books for College Libraries" termed the novel "a minor masterpiece" worthy of "a place on all library shelves."[33] The next year Larzer Ziff applauded The Awakening as "the most important piece of fiction about the sexual life of a woman written to date in America" in his study The American 1890's.[34] On December 3,

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1963), pp. 843-61; and Leon Howard, Literature and the American Tradition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1960), p. 205.

[30] Edmund Wilson, Patriotic Gore (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 590-91.

[31] Per Seyersted, "Kate Chopin: An Important St. Louis Writer Reconsidered," Missouri Historical Society Bulletin, 19 (January 1963), 89-114.

[32] Kenneth Eble, "Introduction" to The Awakening (New York: Capricorn Books, 1964), pp. v-xiv.

[33] Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 88-89; and "Books for College Libraries," Choice, 2 (April 1965), 92.

[34] Larzer Ziff, The American 1890's (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 300.

1966, Stanley Kauffman reviewed Larzer Ziff's book for The New Republic, agreed that the novel was worthy of "a place in the line of major American fiction," and praised Ziff for including it in his study.[35] In a 1967 essay entitled "Kate Chopin's The Awakening in the Perspective of Her Literary Career," George Arms predicted the novel would very likely gain "a permanent place among the American novels of distinction which appeared at the turn of the century."[36] Both Marie Fletcher, "The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin" (1966), and Joan Zlotnick, "A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood, and Motherhood" (1969), examined Edna Pontellier of The Awakening in light of the author's other heroines; Fletcher thought Edna enhanced the concept of womanhood while Zlotnick saw her questioning the traditional role that should make all women happy.[37] Though reaching opposite conclusions, both had joined the increasing number of critics linking Kate Chopin to the women's studies movement.

[35] Stanley Kauffman, "The Really Lost Generation," The New Republic, 155 (December 3, 1966), 22, 37-38.

[36] George Arms, "Kate Chopin's The Awakening in the Perspective of Her Literary Career" in Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbell, ed. by Clarence Ghodes (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967), p. 215.

[37] Marie Fletcher, "The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," Louisiana History, 7 (Spring 1966), 117-32; and Joan Zlotnick, "A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood, and Motherhood," Markham Review (October 1968), 1-5.

The major breakthrough came in 1969 with publication of Per Seyersted's Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography and The Complete Works of Kate Chopin. The former, likely to serve as the definitive biography for some time, treated Chopin as both story teller and novelist in tracing her development from a Louisiana local colorist to a writer of powerful realism in The Awakening, a work bordering upon existentialism, according to Seyersted.[38] The Complete Works, despite some omissions, gathered all the important writings of Kate Chopin, including a number of previously unpublished or uncollected stories, and was hailed by Choice (September 1970) as a work superseding previous reprints of her work.[39]

The two endeavors were greeted enthusiastically by a number of critics, in sharp contrast to the woeful reception Rankin's work had received. From February 1970 to September 1971, fourteen reviews of Seyersted's two works appeared, in comparison to the six that succeeded Rankin's study. A few reviewers voiced complaints,[40] but most commended Seyersted

[38] Per Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); and Seyersted, The Complete Works of Kate Chopin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 2 vols.

[39] Choice, 7 (September 1970), 839.

[40] Espey criticizes the collection for its lack of completeness as its ordering of the short stories by their date of composition makes it impossible to reconstruct the sequence of stories in Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie. Nor can those stories designated for the unpublished "A Vocation and A Voice" be readily determined. Choice adds that the biography "is unimaginatively organized, excessively

for reviving a long neglected author worthy of a place in American literature. Many used the review as an opportunity to reassess the author's merits. The British review "Love in Louisiana," Times Literary Supplement (1970), echoed the sentiments of most when it described Chopin as a local colorist who had made the transition to realism and whose novel The Awakening would serve "as her passport into our time and posterity." Several reviewers foreshadowed points of conflict in interpreting The Awakening. John R. Willingham, Library Journal (1970), agreed with Seyersted that the work expounded existentialism, but George Arms, in American Literature (1971) thought it more fitting to place it in the impressionistic tradition. S. K. Oberbeck, Newsweek (1970), and Mary Lewis Chapman, The American Book Collector (1971) concluded the novel contained timely subject matter on women's rights; in contrast, Jean Stafford, New York Review of Books (1971), and Lewis Leary, Southern Literary Journal (1970), maintained that the work was not concerned with women's rights and social reform as such but with an objective portrayal of a sensuous woman conceived by an artist consciously seeking a freedom of spirit. In the most comprehensive review on Seyersted's biography which was

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detailed in matters of small consequence, and written in a prose style that is clear but uninspired." John Espey, "Reviews," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 25 (September 1970), 242-247; and Choice, 7 (September 1970), 845.

actually an outgrowth of a doctoral disputation at the University of Oslo, June, 1969, Daniel Aaron and Sigmund Skard, "Per Seyersted: Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography," Edda (1971), give their respective views on the strengths and weaknesses of Seyersted's study and Chopin's accomplishments, though both conclude as did the other reviewers that with the publication of Seyersted's two works Kate Chopin would now receive the recognition she deserved.[41]

The reviewers were prophetic--by the early seventies a "Chopin revival" primarily instigated by Seyersted's two works was underway. Free of a critical legacy that had lingered for over sixty years, the critics now focused most of their attention upon The Awakening. Though the short fiction still came under some scrutiny, The Awakening, largely unexplored apart from moral implications since its original

[41] Daniel Aaron, "The New York Times Book Review," New York Times, February 8, 1970, section 7, pp. 5, 30; Daniel Aaron and Sigmund Skard, "Per Seyersted: Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography," Edda (1971), 344-66; George Arms, "Book Reviews," American Literature, 43 (March 1971), 136-37; "Briefly Noted," New Yorker, 46 (March 14, 1970), 155; Mary Lewis Chapman, "Kate Chopin," American Book Collector, 22 (September 1971), 33; Choice, 7 (September 1970), 845; Espey, 242-47; Richard Jones, "The Mood of the Times," The Times, March 28, 1970, p. 14; "Kate Chopin," New York Times Book Review, June 7, 1970, p. 40; Lewis Leary, "Kate Chopin, Liberationist?" Southern Literary Journal (Fall 1970), 138-44; "Love in Louisiana: Kate Chopin: A Forgotten Southern Novelist," Times Literary Supplement (October 1970), 1163; S. K. Oberbeck, "St. Louis Woman," Newsweek, 75 (February 23, 1970), 103-04; Jean Stafford, "Sensuous Women," New York Review of Books, 17 (September 23, 1971), 33-35; and John R. Willingham, "Kate Chopin," Library Journal, 95 (May 1, 1970), 1744.

publication, offered ample opportunity for commentary. The critics of the seventies eagerly examined the once forgotten novel--each seeking the answer in his own way to the question posed long ago by Frances Porcher of the Mirror--cui bono? Only now the query was investigated in a positive context.

Several critics have noted the book's intricate imagery. In "Kate Chopin and Walt Whitman" (1970), Lewis Leary points to the Whitmanesque quality of the sensuous sea imagery which enhances the book's Whitmanesque theme: the joy of physical awakening. In addition, bird imagery reveals Edna's confined state; sleep-awake imagery emphasizes her escape from such confinement. Bernard J. Koloski, "Swinburne Lines in The Awakening" (1974), cites the importance of the Swinburne lines spoken by the novel's "sophisticated observer" Gouvernail, which serve as an image of Edna's impending death. Donald Ringe sees the book's imagery as an indicator of its literary mode. In "Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin's The Awakening" (1972), he argues the sleep-waking metaphor, coupled with Edna's transcendental discovery of self indicated by the romantic sea imagery, places the novel within the romantic tradition rather than in that of late nineteenth-century realism.[42]

[42] Lewis Leary, "Kate Chopin and Walt Whitman," Walt Whitman Review, 16, iv (December 1970), 120-21; B. J. Koloski, "Swinburne Lines in The Awakening," American Literature, 45 (January 1974), 608-10; and Donald Ringe, "Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin's The Awakening," American Literature, 43 (January 1972), 580-88.

The literary techniques germane to the novel occupy three studies. Kenneth M. Rosen, "Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Ambiguity as Art" (1971), sees in Chopin's descriptive simplicity filled with "ambiguous dualities" a technique foreshadowing that used by Ernest Hemingway some fifty years later in The Old Man and The Sea. This technique is explicit in Edna's ambiguous view of herself and in the ambiguous death imagery surrounding her which makes for a complex closing, void of answers. James E. Rocks, unable to place the novel within a definite literary school or movement, suggests Chopin can best be understood as an ironist in "Kate Chopin's Ironic Vision" (1972). In her demands for authorial objectivity and impersonal behavioral judgments, Kate Chopin wrote much in the manner of Henry James and Guy de Maupassant. Her ambiguous view of Edna is created through her complex narrative stance, argue Ruth Sullivan and Stewart Smith, "Narrative Stance in Kate Chopin's The Awakening" (1973). By alternating between objective and sympathetic points of view, the heroine possesses a duality which seemingly offers two distinct and incompatible ideals about self-conduct.[43]

Edna's suicide has been the focal point of several studies. George M. Spangler, "Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Partial

[43] Kenneth M. Rosen, "Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Ambiguity as Art," Journal of American Studies, 5 (August 1971), 197-99; James E. Rocks, "Kate Chopin's Ironic Vision," Revue de Louisiane, 1 (Winter 1972), 110-20; and Ruth Sullivan and Stewart Smith, "Narrative Stance In Kate Chopin's The Awakening," Studies in American Fiction, 1 (Spring 1973), 62-75.

Dissent" (1970), takes issue with those who find Edna's suicide properly motivated and convincing. He contends that Edna's final act is inconsistent with her character: a previously defiant and strong-willed woman, she is suddenly overwhelmed by the loss of her lover and a rekindling of her motherly instinct. As a result, the novel's psychological complexity is converted into sentimentalism. According to Joyce Ruddel Ladenson, "Paths to Suicide: Rebellion Against Victorian Womanhood in Kate Chopin's The Awakening" (1975), Edna's suicide consummates a final assertion of self necessitated by a traditional culture that has stripped her of social options. In "Edna's Suicide: The Problem of the One and the Many" (1976), Suzanne Wolkenfeld perceives Edna's last gesture as a subconscious regressive act instigated not by self-awareness or self-liberation, but by a psychological longing to return to the womb. Steven G. Hardmeyer is convinced Chopin brought her work to an honest and logical end in lieu of the other alternatives open to her in "A Student's Response to The Awakening" (1976).[44]

[44] George M. Spangler, "Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Partial Dissent," Novel: A Forum of Fiction, (Spring 1970), 249-55; Joyce Ruddel Ladenson, "Paths to Suicide: Rebellion Against Victorian Womanhood in Kate Chopin's The Awakening," Intellect, 104 (July-August 1975), 52-55; Suzanne Wolkenfeld, "Edna's Suicide: The Problem of the One and the Many," in The Awakening, ed. by Margaret Culley (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 218-24; and Steven G. Hardmeyer, "A Student's Response to The Awakening," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 2 (Spring 1976), 6.

Edna Pontellier's relation to the "woman question"--that is, how to maintain a sense of self and still keep a meaningful connection to others--has prompted the greatest recent commentary. In "Feminism and Literature," Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives (1972), Florence Howe regards The Awakening as "the political story of many women" except that Edna is a troubled woman without a feminist movement or social theory to support her actions and the consciousness of her deeds finally kills her. In contrast, Jacqueline Berke, "Kate Chopin's Call to a Larger 'Awakening'" (1975-1976), maintains that Edna's consciousness did not perpetuate her downfall; instead, it was a lack of consciousness on the part of a repressive society that prevents Edna from developing as a total human being. Similarly Emily Toth, "The Independent Woman and 'Free Love'" (1975), blames society for thwarting Edna's attempt to merge psychological, social, and sexual independence. Jules Chametzky notes the complexity of the woman question in "Edna and the 'Woman Question'" (1976), wherein Edna's sense of self must contend with her motherly instinct and having no precedent to follow, she succumbs. Edna Pontellier typifies the dilemma of the independent, self-reliant New Woman, contends Carolyn Forrey, "The New Woman Revisited" (1974).[45]

[45] Florence Howe, "Feminism and Literature" in Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, ed. by Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), pp. 253-77; Jacqueline

Other studies qualify Kate Chopin's position in respect to the "woman question." Clement Eaton, "Breaking a Path for the Liberation of Women in the South" (1974), asserts that Chopin's involvement in the woman question is neither political nor social but intellectual, and that she protested against the patriarchal society of the South and sentimental prudishness by making sex central to Edna's life. In a psychological study of The Awakening, "Thanatos and Eros: Kate Chopin's The Awakening"(1973), Cynthia Griffin Wolff observes that the importance of the novel rests not in "the woman question" expounded by the "new feminist criticism," but rather in its realistic presentation of Edna's personal disintegration because of her divided self.[46]

Other recent critical studies of Edna Pontellier have examined her psychological development. Margaret Culley sees Edna as a woman torn between the dread and the delight of her own solitude in "Edna Pontellier: 'A Solitary Soul'" (1976).

Berke, "Kate Chopin's Call to a Larger 'Awakening,'" The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Winter 1975-1976), 1-5; Emily Toth, "The Independent Woman and 'Free Love,'" The Massachusetts Review, 16 (Autumn 1975), 647-64; Jules Chametzky, "Our Decentralized Literature," Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien (1972) reprinted as "Edna and the 'Woman Question,'" in The Awakening, ed. by Margaret Culley (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 200-01; and Carolyn Forrey, "The New Woman Revisited," Women's Studies, 2 (1974), 37-56.

[46] Clement Eaton, "Breaking a Path for the Liberation of Women in the South," Georgia Review, 28 (Summer 1974), 189-99; and Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "Thanatos and Eros: Kate Chopin's The Awakening," American Quarterly, 25 (October 1973), 449-71.

The awakening of Edna to her own potential occupies Kimberly H. M. S. Snow, "Kate Chopin's Masterpiece: The Awakening" (1972). Otis B. Wheeler finds the heroine rejecting both the Victorian myth of love and the Romantic dream of self as she progresses through five "awakenings" in "The Five Awakenings of Edna Pontellier" (1975). Paula S. Berggren believes Edna's search for self is prompted by her aimless existence as a woman without work in "A Lost Soul: Work Without Hope in The Awakening" (1977). The psychological effect of Edna's motherly instinct is one concern of Irene Dash, "The Literature of Birth and Abortion" (1977). Peggy Skaggs, "Three Tragic Figures in Kate Chopin's The Awakening" (1974), examines Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz as foils to Edna Pontellier.[47]

Comparative studies of The Awakening have placed Edna in the tradition of other tragic and rebellious heroines of earlier fiction. The need for self-assertion followed by social and biological entrapment links Edna Pontellier of The Awakening

[47] Margaret Culley, ed. "Edna Pontellier: A Solitary Soul," in The Awakening (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 224-28; Kimberly H. M. S. Snow, "Kate Chopin's Masterpiece: The Awakening," Aphra 3 (Spring 1972), 4-15; Otis B. Wheeler, "The Five Awakenings of Edna Pontellier," Southern Review, 11 (January 1975), 118-28; Paula S. Berggren, "A Lost Soul: Work Without Hope in The Awakening," Regionalism and the Female Imagination, 3 (Spring 1977), 1-7; Irene Dash, "The Literature of Birth and Abortion," Regionalism and the Female Imagination, 3 (Spring 1977), 8-13; and Peggy Skaggs, "Three Tragic Figures in Kate Chopin's The Awakening," Louisiana Studies, 13 (Winter 1974), 345-64.

to Esther Greenwood of The Bell Jar (1963), concludes Gladys W. Milliner, "The Tragic Imperative: The Awakening and The Bell Jar" (1973). In "Three Ednas" (1975-1976), Carol B. Gartner compares Chopin's Edna to the Wild Edna of Edward L. Wheeler's Old Avalanche, The Great Annihilator: Or Wild Edna, The Girl Brigand (1878) and Edna Kenderdine of Miss Murlock's (Dinah Maria Murlock Craik) The Woman's Kingdom: A Love Story (1869). Cathy N. Davidson, "Chopin and Atwood: Woman Drowning, Woman Surfacing" (1975-1976), discusses the parallels and variants in imagery and plot structure between Margaret Atwood's unnamed narrator in Surfacing (1973) and Chopin's Edna in The Awakening. Two publications, Pamela Gaudé's "A Comparative Study of Kate Chopin's The Awakening and Guy de Maupassant's Une Vie"(1975) and William P. Warnken's "Kate Chopin and Henrik Ibsen: A Study of The Awakening and A Doll's House" (1975), draw parallels between Chopin's novel and works by Guy de Maupassant and Henrik Ibsen. The significant role of the sea and society in the psychological development of the heroines of The Awakening and Une Vie and other similarities in character description and setting make it highly probable that Chopin read Maupassant's novel, contends Gaudé. To Warnken, Edna of The Awakening is an Ibsen woman who searches for self-identity while married to a man insensitive to the seriousness of her quest much in the manner of Nora of A Doll's House.[48]

[48] Gladys W. Milliner, "The Tragic Imperative: The Awakening and The Bell Jar," Mary Wollstonecraft Newsletter,

The relationship of The Awakening to the local color tradition and regionalism still concerns scholars. John May finds the Creole environment of the novel instrumental to the unfolding of its theme in "Local Color in The Awakening" (1970). Kate Chopin's displeasure with the local color tradition and her attempt to transcend its limitations is an important aspect of Sharon O'Brien's study, "Sentiment, Local Color, and the New Woman Writer: Kate Chopin and Willa Cather" (1976-1977). Emily Toth discusses the nature of regionalism and to what extent it applies to Kate Chopin and The Awakening in "Some Introductory Notes on Women Regionalists" (1976).[49]

Another measure of the later recognition of The Awakening appears in records of student responses to the book. Elaine Borish of Morley College in London tells of her English students' responses to The Awakening in "The Awakening Awakens England" (1976). Of a class of eighteen intelligent students

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2 (December 1973), 21-27; Carol B. Gartner, "Three Ednas," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Winter 1975-1976), 6-10; Pamela Gaudé, "A Comparative Study of Kate Chopin's The Awakening and Guy de Maupassant's Une Vie," Louisiana Review, (Winter 1975), 19-27; and William P. Warnken, "Kate Chopin and Henrik Ibsen: A Study of The Awakening and A Doll's House," Massachusetts Studies in English (Spring 1975), 43-49.

[49] John R. May, "Local Color in The Awakening," Southern Review, 6 (Autumn 1970), 1031-40; Sharon O'Brien, "Sentiment, Local Color, and the New Woman Writer: Kate Chopin and Willa Cather," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 2 (Winter 1976-1977), 16-24; and Emily Toth, "Some Introductory Notes on Women Regionalists," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 2 (Fall 1976), 1-4.

not one had heard of Kate Chopin; yet they eagerly responded to the effective sea and animal imagery of her novel and concurred that the thematic emphasis upon the importance of self made the work a powerful and fitting selection for any modern novel course. In "Kate Chopin Meets The Harvard Lampoon" (1975-1976), Emily Toth and Dennis Fitzgibbons report on The Harvard Lampoon's satiric effort to teach freshmen students basic composition skills in its model student paper "The Conceptions of Freedom in Kate Chopin's The Awakening and the Ones in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn: Where They Differ and How Come." Jan Gilbert, who did her Master's thesis at the University of New Orleans on New Orleans graffiti, cites Kate Chopin graffiti which she found scrawled in the women's restroom at Lu and Charlie's in New Orleans proudly announcing that the setting for Chopin's novel took place only 70 miles south of here in "Kate Chopin Up Against the Wall" (1976).[50]

These notices of The Awakening represent a substantial increase of interest in the novel; yet no full-length study of the work has appeared in the seventies. A few scholars have modified their previous articles and incorporated them into longer works to form a chapter or two on the author and

[50] Elaine Borish, "The Awakening Awakens England," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 2 (Spring 1976), 1-5; Emily Toth and Dennis Fitzgibbons, "Kate Chopin Meets the Harvard Lampoon," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Winter 1975-1976), 28; and Jan Gilbert, "Kate Chopin Up Against the Wall," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 2 (Fall 1976), 46.

her works. For example, Lewis Leary's Southern Excursions: Essays on Mark Twain and Others (1971) includes "The Awakening of Kate Chopin," an adaptation of his "Introduction" to The Awakening and Other Stories (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), and "Kate Chopin's Other Novel," an article first printed in the Southern Literary Journal (1968). Warner Berthoff, editor of the 1970 Garrett Press editions of The Awakening and Bayou Folk, offers an "Introduction," with commentary on the novel, as does Barbara H. Solomon for the New American Library edition of The Awakening and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin (1976) and Malcolm Bradbury for The Penguin Companion to American Literature (1971). The current interest in The Awakening, however, promises that a full-length study of the novel cannot be too far away.[51]

Kate Chopin's "other novel" At Fault--so designated by Lewis Leary in an early article--remains largely unexplored. Besides Leary's article "Kate Chopin's Other Novel" (1968), which argues that the novel contains glimpses of elements found in The Awakening, and the commentaries of Rankin and Seyersted, little attention was given to the novel before the

[51] Lewis Leary, "The Awakening of Kate Chopin" and "Kate Chopin's Other Novel," in Southern Excursions (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), pp. 159-91; Warner Berthoff, ed. "Introduction" to Bayou Folk and The Awakening (New York: Garrett Press, Inc., 1970), pp. v-xvii; and Barbara H. Solomon, ed. "Introduction" to The Awakening and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin (New York: New American Library, 1976), pp. vii-xxxiii; and Malcolm Bradbury, "Kate Chopin," in The Penguin Companion to American Literature (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971), pp. 57-58.

seventies. Now a handful of critics are reassessing the merits of At Fault.

In "Landscape Symbolism in Kate Chopin's 'At Fault'" (1970), Robert D. Arner challenges the notion established by Chopin's contemporaries and perpetuated by Seyersted and Leary that the importance of the book resides in the extent to which it does or does not reflect the themes of The Awakening. Instead, Arner sees the significance of the novel in its landscape symbolism, which establishes a tension between past and present racial violence, quite similar in vision to William Faulkner's myth of the South. If read in this light, the love stories of Thérèse-Hosmer and Melicent-Grégoire are structurally sound: the former relationship represents a union of past and present, agrarianism and industrialism, tradition and innovation; while the latter represents a splintering of those unable to adjust to changing conditions and times. Donald A. Ringe, "Cane River World: Kate Chopin's At Fault and Related Stories" (1975) likewise views the marriage of David Hosmer and Thérèse Lafirme as a symbolic union of opposites necessary for survival in a changing world, but he refutes Arner's contention that the work is akin to Faulkner's myth of the South, arguing instead that the theme is related to the Cane River area of post-Reconstruction Louisiana, where Chopin thought such change was necessary. To Bernard J. Koloski, "The Structure of Kate Chopin's At Fault" (1975), the novel's structure is based

upon a succession of contrasts involving the heroine Thérèse Lafirme, who struggles to maintain social order and personal dignity amidst the turmoil of change. The images depicting the main characters also attract the attention of William Warnken, "Fire, Light, and Darkness in Kate Chopin's At Fault" (1975).[52]

Although critical interest has shifted to Chopin's longer fiction, several of her short stories have gathered attention, particularly "The Storm," a story so overtly sensuous and daring that Chopin herself kept it out of print during her own lifetime. Years later, Rankin still chose not to discuss the story in Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories, and the story remained in manuscript form until Seyersted published it in The Complete Works of Kate Chopin. Shortly thereafter it was included in two other collections: The Storm and Other Stories (Feminist Press, 1974) and The Awakening and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin (New American Library, 1976).[53] The Feminist Press edition contains an "Introduction"

[52] Lewis Leary, "Kate Chopin's Other Novel," in Southern Excursions (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), pp. 176-91; Robert D. Arner, "Landscape Symbolism in Kate Chopin's 'At Fault,'" Louisiana Studies, 9 (1970), 142-53; Donald A. Ringe, "Cane River World: Kate Chopin's At Fault and Related Stories," Studies in American Fiction, 3 (Autumn 1975), 157-66; Bernard J. Koloski, "The Structure of Kate Chopin's At Fault," Studies in American Fiction, 3 (Spring 1975), 89-95; and William Warnken, "Fire, Light, and Darkness in Kate Chopin's At Fault," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall 1975), 17-26.

[53] The MS of "The Storm" is at the Missouri Historical Society. Kate Chopin, "The Storm" in The Complete Works of

by Seyersted based largely upon comments in his biography where he described "The Storm" as a "first-rate" story of joyous love outstripping even Maupassant's sexual explicitness in the daring love scene between Alcée Laballière and the Spanish vixen, Calixta. In "Kate Chopin's 'The Storm': A Study of Maupassant's Influence" (1975), Pamela Gaudé traces this unprecedented objective account of the lovers' sexual union by Chopin to the Maupassantian stories "Marroca" and "Moonlight." Robert D. Arner, "Kate Chopin's Realism: 'At the 'Cadian Ball' and 'The Storm'" (1970), examines the story in terms of its subtitle "A Sequence to The ''Cadian Ball,'" whereby he notes Chopin's transition from a conventional local colorist to a pioneer realist in comparing the first story to the latter. Two reviews were prompted by the 1974 Feminist Press edition of The Storm and Other Stories. In "Fine Print" for the March 1975 issue of The New Republic, Doris Grumbach finds the Feminist edition worthy of acquisition yet fails to comment on the story itself. Vivian Gornick in "Too True, Too Soon" (1975) also applauds the effort of the Feminist Press to bring the works of Kate Chopin before the public now that her stories of the emotional reality of the feminine mind can be understood.[54]

Kate Chopin, II, ed. by Per Seyersted (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), pp. 592-96; Seyersted, ed. with an "Introduction" to The Storm and Other Stories (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1974); and Solomon, ed. The Awakening and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin, pp. 244-49.

Several other studies focus upon individual stories: Robert D. Arner, "Pride and Prejudice: Kate Chopin's 'Désirée's Baby'" (1971-1972); Arner, "Characterization and the Colloquial Style in Kate Chopin's 'Vagabonds'" (1971); Anne Rowe, "A Note on 'Beyond the Bayou'" (1975); and Emily Toth, "The Cult of Domesticity and 'A Sentimental Soul'" (1975). Ever since William Reedy's pronouncement in the September 30, 1894 issue of his Sunday Mirror that "Désirée's Baby" alone should have been enough to earn Chopin fame, this short story has retained the honor of being the most frequently anthologized and most often praised of Chopin's stories. Not until the late fifties and early sixties did critics begin accusing Chopin of using an artificial and contrived closing to the story for dramatic impact.[55] In his article on "Désirée's

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[54] Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, pp. 164-69; Pamela Gaudé, "Kate Chopin's 'The Storm,': A Study of Maupassant's Influence," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall 1975), 1-3; Robert D. Arner, "Kate Chopin's Realism: 'At the 'Cadian Ball' and 'The Storm,'" Markham Review, 2 (February 1970), 1-4; Doris Grumbach, "Fine Print," The New Republic, 172 (March 15, 1975), 33; and Vivian Gornick, "Too True, Too Soon," MS (November 1975), 52-54.

[55] For representative comments on "Désirée's Baby," see Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography, p. 122; Espey, "Reviews," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 242-47; Ziff, The American 1890's, p. 297; Arms, "Kate Chopin's The Awakening in the Perspective of Her Literary Career," in Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbell, p. 133; Pattee, "The Short Story," in Cambridge History of American Literature, p. 391; Seyersted, "An Important St. Louis Writer Reconsidered," Missouri Historical Society Bulletin, 102; and Robert Penn Warren and others, eds. American Literature: The Makers and The Making, II (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 1705.

Baby," Arner refutes those who fault the story's ending by insisting that the ironic reversal of the closing adequately reflects the realities of the Southern social system and has been properly foreshadowed by color imagery throughout the story. Arner also praises Chopin's "Vagabonds," a deceptively simple story made subtle by its two narrative voices and skillful use of idiomatic language. To Anne Rowe, "Beyond the Bayou" is significant because it anticipates the physical and psychological realism of The Awakening. In "A Sentimental Soul," Emily Toth discovers an early questioning of the cult of domesticity which fixed the social role and behavior of American women for so many years.[56]

Special aspects of Kate Chopin's short stories have also come under consideration. Bert Bender, "Kate Chopin's Lyrical Short Stories" (1974), asserts that in her lyrical short stories celebrating the self, Chopin went well beyond social and moral expectations of the local color tradition. "A Vocation and A Voice," "Athénaïse," "The Story of an Hour," and "The Storm" are four examples of unconventional lyrical stories by Chopin, according to Bender. In Chopin's short stories, women acquire a sense of identity through their often

[56] Robert D. Arner, "Pride and Prejudice: Kate Chopin's 'Désirée's Baby,'" Mississippi Quarterly, 25 (Winter 1971-Fall 1972), 131-40; Arner, "Characterization and the Colloquial Style in Kate Chopin's 'Vagabonds,'" Markham Review, 2 (May 1971), 110-12; Anne Rowe, "A Note on 'Beyond the Bayou,'" The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall 1975), 4-8; and Emily Toth, "The Cult of Domesticity and 'A Sentimental Soul,'" The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall 1975), 9-16.

painful relationships with their possessive husbands, claims Peggy Skaggs, "The Man-Instinct of Possession: A Persistent Theme in Kate Chopin's Stories" (1975). Merrill M. Skaggs in The Folk of Southern Fiction (1972) discusses Chopin's stories in the social and literary context of the plain folk of the South, in which a restatement of Chopin's superiority over Cable is offered. In a recent study, The American Short Story (1973), Arthur Voss groups Kate Chopin with other regional writers and gives her only passing notice in his chapter "The Regional Story in New England, the South, and the Middle West: Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, George Washington Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, Hamlin Garland, and Others." Howard Mumford Jones and Richard M. Ludwig similarly group Chopin under the heading "The Regional and the Local" in their Guide to American Literature and Its Backgrounds Since 1890 (1972). Richard H. Potter, "Negroes in the Fiction of Kate Chopin" (1971), claims that Chopin's Negro characters are varied, realistic, and human--not at all the stereotyped figures found by earlier critics except for those relegated to minor roles. Thomas Bonner, Jr., "Kate Chopin's European Consciousness" (1975), examines the French and German influences reflected in several of the settings of the author's short stories, while Emily Toth, "St. Louis and the Fiction of Kate Chopin" (1975), reveals the limited but significant role of Chopin's native city in her short stories and novels. Joyce Ruddel Ladenson

points out that prototypes of Edna Pontellier can be found in many of the author's short stories in "The Return of St. Louis' Prodigal Daughter: Kate Chopin after Seventy Years," Midamerica II: The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature (1975).[57]

Miscellaneous items on Kate Chopin's life and times have supplemented Seyersted's biography. Emily Toth's "The Misdated Death of Oscar Chopin" (1975) and Elizabeth Shown Mills' "The Practical Side of Oscar Chopin's Death" (1975-1976) try to establish the correct date of Oscar Chopin's death. Remembrances of Kate Chopin by friends and relatives form the core of Emily Toth's "Kate Chopin Remembered" (1975-1976), while Kate Chopin's family heritage occupies Elizabeth Shown Mills' "Colorful Characters from Kate's Past" 1976).

[57] Bert Bender, "Kate Chopin's Lyrical Short Stories," Studies in Short Fiction, 11 (Summer 1974), 257-66; Peggy Skaggs, "The Man-Instinct of Possession: A Persistent Theme in Kate Chopin's Stories," Louisiana Studies, 14 (Fall 1975), 277-85; Merrill M. Skaggs, The Folk of Southern Fiction (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1972), pp. 177-88; Arthur Voss, The American Short Story: A Critical Survey (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), p. 99; Howard Mumford Jones and Richard M. Ludwig, Guide to American Literature and Its Backgrounds Since 1890, 4th edition: Revised and enlarged (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 140; Richard H. Potter, "Negroes in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," Louisiana History, 12 (Winter 1971), 41-58; Thomas Bonner, Jr., "Kate Chopin's European Consciousness," American Literary Realism 1870-1910, 8 (Summer 1975), 281-83; Emily Toth, "St. Louis and the Fiction of Kate Chopin," Missouri Historical Society Bulletin, 32 (October 1975), 33-50; and Joyce Ruddel Ladenson, "The Return of St. Louis' Prodigal Daughter: Kate Chopin after Seventy Years," Midamerica II: The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature (1975), pp. 24-34.

Mary Helen Wilson, "Kate Chopin's Family: Fallacies and Facts, Including Kate Chopin's True Birthdate" (1976-1977), corrects some misconceptions on Chopin's family background and adjusts her birthdate. Textual errors in publication and critical errors in Chopin scholarship are the concerns of Margo Culley's "Kate Chopin and Recent Obscenities" (1975) and Emily Toth's "Some Problems in Kate Chopin Scholarship" (1975).[58]

Three publications noting the sudden rescue of Kate Chopin from obscurity are Phillip Butcher's "Two Early Southern Realists in Revival" (1970); Mary Colwell's "Kate Chopin, Writer Unknown" (1970), and Linda Wolfe's "There's Someone You Should Know" (1972). Other publications citing Kate Chopin are Emily Toth's "Women and Their Friends: Some Thoughts about Literature" (1972), Emily Hahn's Once Upon a Pedestal (1975), Ernest Earnest's The American Eve in Fact and Fiction (1974), and "Awakening in New Orleans: Kate Chopin" (1975). Stephen Nissenbaum lists Kate Chopin in

[58] Emily Toth, "The Misdated Death of Oscar Chopin," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall 1975), 34; Elizabeth Shown Mills, "The Practical Side of Oscar Chopin's Death," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Winter 1975-1976), 29; Emily Toth, "Kate Chopin Remembered," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Winter 1975-1976), 21-27; Elizabeth Shown Mills, "Colorful Characters from Kate's Past," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 2 (Spring 1976), 7-12; Mary Helen Wilson, "Kate Chopin's Family: Fallacies and Facts, Including Kate's True Birthdate," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 2 (Winter 1976-1977), 25-30; Margo Culley, "Kate Chopin and Recent Obscenities," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall 1975), 28-29; and Emily Toth, "Some Problems in Kate Chopin Scholarship," The Kate Chopin Newsletter, 1 (Fall 1975), 30-33.

Notable American Women (1971). Emily Toth's "Kate Chopin as Foremother" is forthcoming in the Distaff.[59]

Bibliographic studies on Kate Chopin have verified the seriousness with which Kate Chopin is now studied as a standard author. Prior to 1970, the "selected bibliographies" of Rankin and Seyersted's biographies were the main sources of information, though Seyersted updated his list in "Kate Chopin (1851-1904)," American Literary Realism: 1870-1910 (1970). Seyersted also provided the "selected bibliography" on Kate Chopin found in Louis D. Rubin's A Bibliographical Guide to the Study of Southern Literature (1969). Rubin himself lists works on the author and remarks on the state of Chopin studies in "The Literature of the New South," Fifteen American Authors before 1900 (1971). Richard H. Potter's "Kate Chopin and Her Critics: An Annotated Checklist" (1970) was the first extensive annotated bibliography on Chopin.

[59] Philip Butcher, "Two Early Southern Realists in Revival," College Language Association Journal, 14 (September 1970), 91-95; Mary Colwell, "Kate Chopin, Writer Unknown," Women: A Journal of Liberation, 2 (Fall 1970), 10-11; Linda Wolfe, "There's Someone You Should Know," New York Times (September 22, 1972), 43; Emily Toth, "Women and Their Friends: Some Thoughts About Literature," Cold Day in August, 1 (November 1972), 1-3; Emily Hahn, Once Upon a Pedestal (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975), pp. 256-57; Ernest Earnest, The American Eve in Fact and Fiction, 1775-1914 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 263; "Awakening in New Orleans: Kate Chopin," Distaff, 3 (March 15-April 15, 1975), 14; Stephen Nissenbaum, "Kate O'Flaherty Chopin," Notable American Women, I (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), pp. 333-35; and Emily Toth, "Kate Chopin as Foremother." Forthcoming in the Distaff.

Potter's checklist provides nearly complete coverage of criticism up to 1969 on the author, including many of the early reviews of her works. Some early reviews omitted in Potter are listed in Clayton L. Eichelberger's A Guide to Critical Reviews of United States Fiction 1870-1910 (1971). Thomas Bonner, Jr.'s "Kate Chopin: An Annotated Bibliography" in the July-September 1975 issue of Bulletin of Bibliography supplements Potter's effort by adding criticism since 1970, though some pre-1970 criticism is included because of omissions in Potter. Marlene Springer's "Writings about Kate Chopin 1890-1973," Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin: A Reference Guide (1976) encompasses the material found in Potter and Bonner, Jr., and updates to 1973 and a few items up to 1975. At the present, it is the most comprehensive compilation of Chopin criticism and was recommended by Choice (1976). Regionalism and the Female Imagination (formerly The Kate Chopin Newsletter) edited by Emily Toth serves as a continuing bibliography and is valuable for current criticism. Every spring since 1969, the Mississippi Quarterly prints an "Annual Checklist on Southern Literature" which includes citations on Chopin.[60]

[60] Per Seyersted, "Kate Chopin (1851-1904)," American Literary Realism, 1870-1910, 3 (Spring 1970), 153-59; Seyersted, "Kate Chopin," in A Bibliographical Guide to the Study of Southern Literature, ed. Louis D. Rubin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), pp. 174-75; Louis D. Rubin, "The Literature of the New South," in Fifteen American Authors before 1900, ed. Robert A. Rees and Earl N. Harbert (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), pp. 402-03; Richard H. Potter, "Kate Chopin and Her Critics: An Annotated Checklist," Missouri Historical Society Bulletin, 26 (July 1970),

Despite the growth of Chopin criticism, most of the extensive studies on the author remain in the form of theses and dissertations, though prior to the seventies it was a rarity to find such studies devoted solely to Chopin. The greater number, as might be expected, examined her in terms of the local color tradition and the short story, often only in passing. Prior to 1970 twenty theses (one undated) and eight dissertations citing Kate Chopin in some manner were written. Of these, Chopin was given major consideration in seven theses and in one dissertation, Daniel S. Rankin's "Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories" (1932), published in book form later that year. One fourth of these studies originated from Louisiana State University, an indication that the academic interest in Kate Chopin remained largely within the region she wrote about in her fiction.

The growing number of dissertations devoted to the author in the seventies following Seyersted's two landmark works in 1969, which incidentally were also published by Louisiana State University, indicates the extent of renewed interest

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306-317; Clayton L. Eichelberger, A Guide to Critical Reviews of United States Fiction, 1870-1910 (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1971), p. 68; Thomas Bonner, Jr., "Kate Chopin: An Annotated Bibliography," Bulletin of Bibliography, 32 (July-September 1975), 101-05; Marlene Springer, "Writings About Kate Chopin, 1890-1973," in Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin: A Reference Guide (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1976), pp. 177-215; Emily Toth, ed. The Kate Chopin Newsletter (Grand Forks: University of North Dakota), retitled Regionalism and the Female Imagination (Spring 1977); and "Annual Checklist on Southern Literature" in Spring issues of Mississippi Quarterly (Mississippi State University).

in Kate Chopin. Ten dissertations, only one of which does not treat the author exclusively, have been written on Chopin from 1970 to 1975 compared to eight written in the previous sixty-five years following her death. That no two are from the same institution points to the author's widening appeal.

The latest dissertations emphasize thematic concerns about society and the individual: the importance of social roles and the sense of community in Chopin's fictive world; the tension between social order and selfhood or civilization and nature; and the interplay of the social, moral and psychological forces upon her characters. One study examines her departure from literary conventions; another points out her awareness of form.

Many of these dissertations have been published in part as articles in noted journals. One study, Robert D. Arner's "Music from a Farther Room: A Study of the Fiction of Kate Chopin" (1970), reappeared in "a much revised version," according to its author, as a monograph entitled "The Art of Kate Chopin: Apprenticeship and Achievement" in the 1975 special Spring issue on Chopin in Louisiana Studies.[61]

Though a similar compilation of theses for the seventies is unavailable, the dissertations themselves indicate recognition of the author in the academic world. More importantly,

[61] Robert D. Arner, "The Art of Kate Chopin: Apprenticeship and Achievement," Louisiana Studies, 14 (Spring 1975), 10-139.

they have continued to extend the range of interest in Kate Chopin beyond that of the local colorist.

For over half a century, reviewers of Kate Chopin had cursed the author with a critical reputation that had limited her genius and blighted her masterpiece The Awakening. Their culture and temperament forbade them otherwise. Alexis de Tocqueville was truly prophetic in Democracy in America when he foresaw that the tastes of readers would change and the reputation of writers would fluctuate more rapidly in nineteenth-century America than in the stabler societies of England and Europe.[62] The literary career of Kate Chopin bears him out. Before the author could gain acceptance as an important novelist and realist as well as an accomplished local colorist and short fiction writer, American readers had to make the transition from an age of romantic optimism and moral prudery to an age of psychological realism and social and moral perplexities. Only then would their literary tastes similarly adjust and accept an author who had been sensitive toward such changes in her work. As a story of a passionate woman unwilling to sacrifice her sense of self to a socially acceptable marriage blessed with children, The Awakening proved shocking to a domestically-oriented audience nurtured on the values of home and hearth where questions of morality, not art,

[62] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. by George Lawrence and ed. by J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 432-35; 438-43.

had priority. Intellectually and socially unprepared for the subtle forces behind Edna Pontellier's behavior, the largely unsophisticated readers of the nineteenth century gave a sigh of relief when Edna took her final dip into the sea and then sought assurances that another Edna would never again surface by rebuking her creator. Their rebuke endured far into the next century until gradually in the late sixties and early seventies another audience arose whose social, moral, and critical values differed from those of Chopin's comtemporaries.

Today the ethical and social problems raised by The Awakening and in some of Chopin's short fiction, though couched in the language of her day, readily fit into the intellectual concerns of the twentieth century. Attitudes toward sex, morality, and womanhood have changed dramatically since the rejection of Edna Pontellier in the nineties so that neither the sexual themes of the author's works nor the social and moral values she envisioned any longer seem offensive to readers and critics of fiction. Instead, these same themes and values are of interest to a society receptive to explorations of feminine sexuality and the feminine role, where sexual relations inside and outside of marriage are frankly discussed and where the conventional role of woman as homemaker and propagator is often questioned and reassessed. The feelings of Edna Pontellier about sex, marriage, and the self are no longer taboo; they are the feelings now shared by many women seeking out the answers to their own existence.

As a consequence, The Awakening now reflects the thoughts and concerns of today's women in its sensitive and skillfully constructed story of a woman trying to come to terms with her own essential nature amidst the social, psychological, and biological forces motivating her behavior. It confronts directly the problem of what it means to be a woman. Yet as timely and significant as the "woman question" might be, the work is meaningful to either sex, for it is in essence a story expressing the need to know one's self--a need both universal and permanent and not bounded by sex. Beyond this, The Awakening is a remarkable transitional work, indicative of the crucial shift from romance to realism in the nineties that helped shape much of modern fiction. Its artistic merits are many. It possesses a narrative technique and style coupled with an elaborate network of images and symbols found in few American novels until the turn of the century. It abounds in subtleties and ambiguities, yet is firm in structure. In short, it is a work worthy of the attention it has recently received.

Now set before a more sophisticated and widely educated audience, The Awakening and other stories by Chopin have gained favor with the reading public. The Awakening has been included on reading lists for those interested in feminist literature [63] and has been championed by the women's movement, though

[63] Pat Schuman and Gay Detlefsen, "Sisterhood is Serious: An Annotated Bibliography," Library Journal, 96 (September 1, 1971), 2587-94.

mostly for non-literary reasons. New editions of Chopin's works by the Feminist Press and the New American Library promise to make her even better known among the general public. Besides this popular notoriety, the works of Kate Chopin have gained acceptance in educated circles for wide and serious study. The recent selection of The Awakening for the highly respected Norton Critical Edition series and the ample publications and academic studies on the author in this decade attest to her importance among students and scholars of literature. Early in her career, Kate Chopin complained of the difficulties of having her works taken seriously. Today after years of neglect, that complaint is being rectified.

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