

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**KATE CHOPIN AS FEMINIST:
SUBVERTING THE FRENCH
ANDROCENTRIC INFLUENCE.**

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
IN ENGLISH AT
MASSEY UNIVERSITY

JANE NICOLE LE MARQUAND

1998

Abstract

As nineteenth century woman taking the pen, Kate Chopin ran the risk of becoming overcome by a patriarchal literary tradition, of losing herself as female writer. And doubly so, in turning to male mentor Guy de Maupassant, himself so entrenched in the androcentric dictates of this tradition, for creative inspiration.

Ironically, however, it is in the very act of Maupassantian emulation that Chopin's feminist subversiveness lies. In the creation of her short stories, appropriation becomes reappropriation. Patriarchal literary traditions become tools in the very act of their own subversion, as androcentric means meet resoundingly feminist ends. And as the technical strength of Maupassantian influence grows, so too does the effectiveness of the subversive message carried therein. The Poesque form of Maupassant, his unobtrusive, amoral style, his despondent, pessimistic philosophy, all come together in the work of Chopin, but her result epitomises the victory of feminist subversive survival. And it is a victory not only read but also felt as Chopin's focus shifts, under the guidance of Maupassant, from lengthy expositions of the externalities of female experience to increasingly concentrated and deeply insightful psychological journeys of womanhood. Feelings and emotional responses come to take precedence over action; overt feminist treatise is replaced by the subtly effective "voice covert" - the hidden voice of feminism.

Thus, Chopin disrupts the discourse of patriarchy from within, simultaneously subscribing to and subverting Maupassant's male-centred perspective. She swims against the currents of tradition, maintaining her individuality and identity as woman writer even as she speaks of the despair and hopelessness this condition brings. The French androcentric influence is overturned.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could in no way be complete without expression of my most profound and prodigious gratitude to the following:

My supervisor, Karen Rhodes, who was always there, both as a source of inspiration and direction in the thesis-world (albeit immensely nebulous at times! - only now do I fully appreciate the value in this), and of comfort and consolation in life beyond.

My brothers, Sean and James, whose support and loyalty I could count on throughout, however unspoken.

My father, Paul, who taught me the art of arguing a point and provided me with the impetus to undertake my own subversive act.

My friends in academia, Simon, the three Angelas, Blair, Lennie, Steve, and Eddie, whose constant flow of polemic deliberation (as distracting and irritating as I made it seem!) stimulated my own thinking long after their departure.

Andrea, who supported me in infinite ways and to whom mere words of thanks are clearly inadequate.

My friends in the deep south who kept me afloat when I found myself sinking and gave me the strength to finally make this dream a reality.

Mel, a true soul-mate, who believed in me and gave me the most precious gift of all - the encouragement to believe in myself.

And finally, my mum, Sue, without whose unconditional love and understanding I could never have made it through the trials to find this point of tribulation.

I dedicate this to you.

My sincere thanks must also be noted for the scholarship assistance granted me for the writing of this thesis by Massey University, the Freemason's Association of New Zealand, and the New Zealand Federation of University Women. I can but hope my worthiness for such assistance shows itself in these pages.

Table of Contents

Abstract		ii.
Acknowledgements		iii.
Table of Contents		v.
Introduction		1.
Chapter One	Pre-Maupassantian Subversiveness: Chopin's 'flawed' Feminist Beginnings	18.
Chapter Two	Maupassantian Subtlety and Elusiveness: The Covert Feminist Voice of "The Story of an Hour"	40.
Chapter Three	Maupassantian Amorality and the 'unmentionable': The Repudiation of Patriarchal Passionless in "The Kiss"	60.
Chapter Four	Heights of Maupassantian Reappropriation in the Depths of Despair: The 'descending helical' of "Her Letters"	76.
Chapter Five	Drowning in the Wake of Maupassantian Pessimism?: The Climactic Dream of Ultimate Despair in "An Egyptian Cigarette"	97.
Conclusion	The Victory of Subversive Survival: Swimming on Against the Currents of Maupassantian Patriarchal Tradition	119.
Works Cited		128.

Kate Chopin as Feminist: Subverting the French Androcentric Influence

Introduction

...whatever you do let it be original. Give your own impressions, for goodness sake! However lame or poor, they ought to be of more value than any second-hand material you may chance to gather.¹

Kate Chopin is best known in the literary world of today as author of the novel *The Awakening*, highly controversial in its time, dealing as it does with the condition of the nineteenth-century woman in marriage, and more recently rediscovered as an overtly feminist text for these same reasons. However, this novel represents only the climax in a literary career spent almost exclusively in the composition of short fiction. It was in her writing of the short story that Chopin developed as a writer, in this form that she developed a style best suited to her particular revolutionary thematic concerns, and herein lies the focus of this study.² This development will be explored in light of a specific notion: literary influence. As Harold Bloom argues in his *A Map of Misreading*, no writer stands alone; all have their predecessors and all write, or more, rewrite with them in mind. The process, he claims, is inescapable (Kolodny 46-48). For Chopin, one

¹ These are the words of Kate Chopin, taken from a portion of an essay entitled "As You Like It" first published in the *St Louis Criterion*, Feb 13, 1897, but cited here from *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. 706. Chopin writes of giving this advice to a young friend seeking guidance in the preparation of an essay. The very crux of this exposition lies in the evidence it provides of Chopin following this same advice, as presented to her in the words of Maupassant, in her own act of literary creation.

² While I do consider Chopin's short stories here as providing evidence of her artistic growth, the dangers of seeing this development as climaxing in the form of *The Awakening* are fully acknowledged. Critics who treat her short work as an apprenticeship phase, a form which she turned to on the negative reception of her first novel *At Fault* for use as "a testing ground for the themes, images and techniques . . . later brought together so well in her final masterpiece" (Papke 51), unwittingly, or otherwise, buy into the notion of a hierarchical relationship between the two genres - the novel and the short story. Such views are based on the assumption that the novel possesses some inherent superiority over the shorter form, that the latter can only be seen in relation to the former. This is not the position adopted here. The stories are to be studied and appreciated for their own merits. For more on the short story-vs-novel debate see Mary Louise Pratt's "The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It" and Charles E. May's "The Unique Effect of the Short Story."

writer in particular was highly influential in this way, French short story writer Maupassant. This study examines his influence. But it also does more, for Chopin's writing is itself more. Her work represents not merely Maupassant rewritten; it moves far beyond the bounds to which he subscribes, and it asserts a voice strikingly individual in nature. In this voice Chopin speaks subversively, speaks against the French androcentric influence.

The influence which Maupassant had over Chopin as a writer is undeniable. It is a fact alluded to repeatedly in the criticism surrounding her work, and one which is in no way restricted to recent-day recognition. Chopin's contemporary reviewers and critics were equally forthright in asserting the importance of the French short story writer in shaping her work. In her biography of Chopin, Emily Toth cites the comments of two such individuals. One recognised *Bayou Folk*, Chopin's first collection of short fiction, as containing works which may "remind some readers of certain finished bits of Maupassant and other French 'short story' masters"; the second goes further, remarking on the quality which Chopin's Maupassantian inspiration produces: "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"³ (Toth *Kate Chopin* 227). Toth's own comments show a similar awareness, testifying to present-day acknowledgement of literary influence: "Her style, like his, was crisp and clean; her storytelling, like his, was a matter of letting stories unfold - not hammering home morals" (*Kate Chopin* 272). Maupassant has indeed been identified by one critic as Chopin's greatest literary "mentor" (Taylor 159).

³ The first comment is said to come from the *Review of Reviews*; the second from the *Pittsburgh Bulletin*.

The most direct assertion of Maupassant's influence comes from the writer herself in an unpublished essay of 1896 entitled "Confidences."⁴ Here Chopin expresses clear admiration for the Frenchman as she recalls her reaction to "stumbl[ing] upon" a volume of his tales eight years earlier. She was clearly impressed by what she found therein:

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. (700-701 *CW*)

Maupassant had spoken to her, and here she speaks of the effect that voice had upon her. And she does so directly, placing this case of literary influence beyond question. Further testimony can be seen in Chopin's practice of Maupassantian translation, rewriting into English, as she did, eight of his stories between the years of 1894 and 1898.⁵ Her appreciation of the Frenchman's work was deeper than simple indulgence in the pleasures of reading; she studied it intently, her admiration for Maupassant complemented by a thorough knowledge of his technique.

Merely to provide evidence of the Maupassantian impact on Chopin is, however, in no way the aim of this thesis. Rather, what is intended here is an exploration of the nature of this influence, and here a greater degree of uncertainty is found. In the above quotation from "Confidences," Chopin asserts quite explicitly that her attraction to

⁴ This unfinished essay has now been published with inclusion in *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. All further references made to the Seyersted edition in the text shall appear as *CW*.

⁵ The translated works, as listed in Richard Fusco's *Maupassant and the American Short Story: The Influence of Form at the Turn of the Century* (155) with dates of completion, are as follows: "A Divorce Case" (11 July 1894), "Mad?" (4 September 1894), "It?" (4 February 1895), "Solitude" (5 March 1895), "Night" (8 March 1895), "Suicide" (18 December 1895), "For Sale" (26 October 1896), "Father Amable" (21 April 1898). The translations are collected in Thomas Bonner's *The Kate Chopin Companion*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. 179-224. Their importance and relevance to this exploration will be discussed more fully later in the study. In particular, see chapters three, four and five.

Maupassant was founded on his evident “escape” from *tradition and authority*” (emphasis mine). Per Seyersted treats this assertion in his *Critical Biography*, supporting Chopin’s claim in stating that this escape was achieved by Maupassant “both technically and morally” (84). But how convincing is this argument, even as it does appear to be Chopin’s own? It can in fact be said, as it shall be here, that those very elements within Chopin’s work which point to a Maupassantian influence actually suggest the reverse of her assertion: that Maupassant did not “escape tradition and authority” but was indeed part of a literary tradition himself, that he too was heavily influenced by his predecessors. Technically speaking, tradition and authority were not escaped, but rather adhered to and gained from, firstly by Maupassant himself, then by Chopin. Thus, in working within the short story form as it presented itself to her through Maupassant, Chopin not only followed his example but participated more fully in a larger tradition, and one extremely, if not entirely, male.

The tradition which I refer to is that of the short story as defined by Edgar Allen Poe. His renowned theory on the nature of this genre is expressed most succinctly and memorably in his early review of *Twice Told Tales*, by his fellow American writer of short fiction, Nathaniel Hawthorne.⁶ Here Poe writes of the ultimate importance of “unity of effect or impression,” an element essential to all composition; without it “the deepest effects cannot be brought about” (60). The short story, he argues, is the form best suited to this for reasons of its very brevity, a merit which allows the writer to “capture” readers; they become engrossed, absorbed, emotionally involved: “During the hour of perusal the *soul* of the reader is in the writer’s control” (61). But Poe also recognises that such an effect is not achieved solely through the ability with which the short story graces the reader: to read the entire piece in one sitting. Length is irrelevant

⁶ Extracts of this review and others of Poe’s writings on short story form are to be found in *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994.

if something else is lacking: focus. Every word, dictates Poe, should be focused toward one single point:

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents - he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the bringing out of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to be the one preestablished design. (61)

A further review of *Night and Morning: A Novel* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton expands on this notion considering the issue of unity in terms of plot. Here Poe identifies plot as being essential to the short story, but this is plot as he defines it: not the complex intermingling of incidents but “that which no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole” (65). Everything must be essential; nothing can be omitted, and everything must centre on attaining that “totality of effect” (66).

These were the injunctions followed by Maupassant in producing the short story. He strove for unity of impression, for that single effect, for condensation rather than lengthy explication. As A.S.G. Butler suggests, Maupassant did have practical reasons for striving for economy of form. Nearly all of his stories were published in daily newspapers which were strictly limited for space: “Maximum impact and maximum verbal economy were essential” (5). But more importantly, Maupassant also realised a single moment of experience carried with it far greater intensity than would the ‘tracking’ of it. He saw that “the more confined the space within which both characters and action can be compressed, the greater the stress and drama to which these characters may be subjected” (Butler 6). Unity was of vital importance to Maupassant, the centring of incidents around a single event “to which all preceding details build; from which all following ones stem... Imagery, structure, characterisation, theme, are all so tightly interwoven that each element is a vital and necessary function of the total work

of art” (Dugan 148). Maupassant wrote with a single goal in mind - the ‘single effect’ of Poe’s theory at its absolute.

The Frenchman himself asserted a direct affinity to Poe, and his own theories on the short story form, as seen in a piece entitled “The Writer’s Goal”⁷ seem almost a reworking of the American’s argument that every single word included in the short story must be done so to add to effect; if it does not, it is not important: The author “should know how to eliminate, among the minute and innumerable daily occurrences, all those which are useless to him... selectivity is required” (1457). In fact, Maupassant almost repeats Poe’s argument to the very word in saying “This is why the writer, having selected a theme, will take from this chaotic life, encumbered with hazards and trivialities, only the details useful to his subject and omit all the others” (1457). Nothing that appears in Maupassant’s work need not be there. All is crucial. Appropriation of Poe’s theory of the form is evident. As Richard Fusco recognises, Maupassant’s talent was not strictly innovative but was borrowed from the past and the forms found therein (96). Maupassant is clearly identifiable as part of a tradition of short story writing, a tradition predominantly practised by men, and therefore centred around the male.

And thus, so too is Chopin. As this study will show, it is precisely those qualities which Maupassant ‘borrowed’ from Poe that can be seen ‘rewritten’ in the work of Chopin. She gains not from Maupassant’s escape from tradition and authority, but rather from his participation therein, and in the process becomes herself part of the male tradition. This fact would appear, to an extent, to deny Chopin’s individuality as an artist, to suggest that she was mere mimic, but as the title of this thesis asserts, the viewpoint adopted here is a very different one. Rather than being restricted by this male tradition Chopin is seen here as using it to her advantage, to move beyond the bounds it

⁷ This piece appears in Ann Charter’s *The Story and its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*. Fourth ed. Boston: St Martins, 1995. 1456-1458. Translated by Mallay Charters.

would have her confined to. In her work, adoption becomes adaptation; appropriation, reappropriation. Mimicry is not simply imitative; it is subversive.

The genre of the short story was forced into the limelight just as Chopin began writing when, in 1885, Brander Matthews wrote "The Philosophy of the Short Story," taking up Poe's notions of the genre and working them into a set of truly formalistic rules. Matthews' terms are drawn directly from his predecessor as he distinguishes the short story from the novel in its adherence to the classic unities: dealing, as it should, with "a single character, a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation . . . the single effect, complete and self contained" (73). He demands of the short story writer concision, compression, and a sense of form, or "plan" (the term he prefers to 'plot'). In his introduction to *Short Story Theories*, Charles E. May sees Matthews' 'rules' as being the stem from which an abundance of criticism against the short story form spread. According to May, Matthews "made the short story form merely a question of taxidermy" (5). Through his 'rules' the short story lost its 'life'; the end product became stuffed and dead rather than a living and breathing art form. Chopin, however, seems to stand as a counter-example; refuting this claim, she takes these 'rules' and makes something of them. Rather than simply 'stuffing' her stories into the framework which Matthews provides, she brings them to life; they are in no way static and unmoving. While others rushed to imitate O. Henry in the belief that all one had to do to write a good story was follow the rules, Chopin reappropriated those rules, made an old traditional form new again. She moved within yet beyond that tight construction, not restricted by it but able to use it to her advantage in the symbolic and sensual creation of atmosphere she portrays.

The achievement of the artistry which Chopin gains from her participation in this male tradition is best appreciated in terms of gender. As a woman writer Chopin

faced uniquely female problems on entering the literary world, problems such as that recognised by Martha J. Cutter, the problem of “How to speak in a voice which disrupts patriarchal discourse, without being censored by patriarchal structures” (33-34); how to adopt male form and style without becoming immersed in patriarchal views of the world; how to create a voice which subverts, rather than being overcome by, the male tradition. The process of mimicry, Cutter suggests, is wrought with problems; in particular, the risk taken by the female writer in adoption of the male coda that she may in fact end up endorsing patriarchal norms of silence and submission (34). This was the double bind which nineteenth-century women writers as a whole found themselves locked into. As Elizabeth Ammons claims, to be heard the woman writer had to enter the male tradition, enter the male world and its patriarchal discourse; their very key to freedom of expression, to a voice, simultaneously imprisoned them: “On the one hand, they found themselves free from many of the limiting definitions that had constricted women aspiring to be artists in earlier periods . . . on the other hand, [they] found themselves . . . emotionally stranded between worlds. They floated between a past they wished to leave and a future that they had not yet gained” (10). The tension that resulted, however - that between “the tradition they aspired to enter and the lives and fictions they sought to create as women” (10) - is one which Chopin appears to overcome. Indeed, Chopin appears to escape what Lynn Sulenick, in her “On Women and Fiction” sees as the “inescapable,” that “condition of identity which distances [the woman writer] from the mainstream and forces her to stress her separation from the masculine literary tradition or to pursue her resemblance to it” (28). Chopin refuses to partake in this binary opposition; she refuses to accept the two options as mutually exclusive, claiming both as her own, simultaneously subscribing to and subverting the male tradition of Maupassant and his predecessors. Rather than showing, as Kathleen

Wheeler claims of Chopin's work, "that to remain within traditional conventions and accepted forms is tantamount to drowning one's individuality, originality and creativity in a sea of banalities" (53), her short stories stand as testimony to the fact that emulation need not mean abandonment of individuality.

It can be claimed then that Maupassant did not cry out to Chopin to simply replicate that which he laid before her. In fact, she asserts this in no uncertain terms in the same piece cited above, "Confidences." Here Chopin testifies that Maupassant's influence upon her was felt in a way that inspired her beyond the bounds of mere imitation, that he spoke to her more deeply than one asking to simply be copied:

He did *not* say, as another might have done, 'do you see these charming stories of mine? Take them into your closet - study them closely - mark their combination - observe the method, the manner of their putting together - and if ever you are moved to write stories you can do no better than to imitate' (701 *CW* emphasis mine).

Chopin did not find in Maupassant merely a source for modelling her own work directly upon. He was a model to her, his work an exemplar of form and style, a source of thematic inspiration, but he was also more than this. In his stories Chopin found more - something in his voice spoke to her and urged her to move beyond imitation, to speak as an individual, with her own unique voice.⁸

The result? A woman writer who, though creating from within a very male, even patriarchal, discourse, maintains her female individuality. As Per Seyersted propounds, "with her independent spirit and her personal views [Chopin] stood entirely on her own" (*Critical Biography* 129). She does not simply adopt the short story form as learnt from Maupassant, rather she takes that form and reappropriates it. She pulls down the boundaries of the traditions and conventions of form and style which Maupassant's

⁸ Mary J. Papke forfeits this entire argument for Chopin's independence as a writer in misreading Chopin's words. She writes of Chopin imagining Maupassant saying to her "if ever you are moved to write stories you can do no better than to imitate" (25). This is, in fact, precisely what Chopin claims Maupassant did *not* say to her.

work represents, those of the male tradition of short story writing, and in doing so undertakes a process which Mary Papke identifies in the work of many woman writers, a process of “question[ing] traditional ways and means of representation, interpretation, being” (2). Thus, Chopin asserts her individuality and originality as an artist in a specifically female way. As Peggy Skaggs suggests, “Chopin’s voice remains her own,” and it is truly a female voice which speaks out from the pages of her stories, “transcend[ing] her sources and influences to create a body of work that speaks in its own voice” (11). Chopin maintains the very selfhood which she asserts for her heroines; she maintains what Per Seyersted sees as “a daring and a vision all her own” (*Critical Biography* 199). Maupassant provided a framework from within which she could explore the female self, but as Fusco suggests his influence was “more inspirational than substantive . . . suggestive rather than prescriptive” (146). Chopin used Maupassantian form for her own ends, “exploited his example to discover more possibilities for her own voice” (Fusco 140).

The question of precisely where Chopin’s individuality asserts itself is best answered in claiming not only that Maupassant influenced her technically, but also that she looked to him as a model for thematic concerns, for it is in her exploration of identifiably Maupassantian themes that the subversive element to her writing can be found. With regard to theme Maupassant did indeed stand beyond the bounds of tradition and authority and it is perhaps this which, as Seyersted suggests, spoke to her so deeply (“Introduction” *CW* 24). He did something which, to American eyes at least, was bold and unorthodox; he acknowledged the sensual. Henry James raises this very issue in writing of Maupassant in his *Partial Portraits*.⁹ Here a charge is made against

⁹ An extract of the portion of this work entitled “Guy de Maupassant” can be found in Richard A. Hocks’ *Henry James: A Study of the Short Fiction*. Boston: Twayne, 1990. 129-136. [from *Partial Portraits*. London: MacMillan, 1888. 243-287.]

English and American writers in terms of their overriding concern for convention, their tendency to be misled “as to the sort of feeler [which] *ought* to be put forth, forgetting that the best one will be the one that nature happens to have given us” (129). The French, on the other hand, and Maupassant in particular, he argues, are more in tune with the latter, their writing moving beyond conventional bounds:

If the sexual impulse be not a moral antecedent, it is none the less the wire that moves almost all M. de Maupassant’s puppets, and as he has not hidden it, I cannot see that he has eliminated analysis or made a sacrifice to discretion. His pages are studded with that particular analysis; he is constantly peeping behind the curtain, telling us what he discovers there. (131)

The inner workings of the sexual being are explored - those which society hides behind the curtain of patriarchal convention. Sensual feelings, sexual emotions are given life in Maupassant’s work. His is what the American public saw as the “poison of Europe” (Wheeler, K. 52). As Edward D. Sullivan claims, many readers were highly disconcerted about the sensual aspects of Maupassant and his overriding emphasis on the sexual impulse, were shocked by his total unconcern for moral actions (8). Chopin, it would seem, was not one such reader, being attracted to, rather than repelled by, these elements in his writing and, further, incorporating them into her own.

Chopin’s fiction can be seen, as it is by Helen Taylor, as a response to European writings in general, writings which concentrated on gender: “her texts work in opposition to, dialogue with, European writers who shared her concern with questions of sexuality, bourgeois marriage, and woman’s role” (157). And Taylor’s choice of words carries significance in itself for it is indeed the ‘response to’ as opposed to the ‘rewriting of’ these themes evident in Chopin’s work which is central to this exposition. The themes themselves may not be unique but what she does with them are. Chopin takes Maupassantian themes and lends to them a uniquely female perspective. The subject matter, themes, tone, and patterns of imagery of her stories may all be drawn

directly from Maupassant, but, as Taylor continues, she “built on and departed from his narrative structure, characterisation and emphasis to develop an individual voice” (159), a voice which is resoundingly subversive.

With this voice Chopin “blaze[d] her own path” (Fusco 146) - the path of feminism. She writes against, and thus subverts, the androcentric view of the world which Maupassant subscribed to, and in doing so asserts her difference from and opposition to this view he offers.¹⁰ In the world of Maupassant’s stories men are central. All is viewed through male eyes - eyes which do not, it seems, grant the female anything even approaching ‘true selfhood.’ Women in these stories are constructed according to traditional patriarchal definition. They are seen only in relation to the man, and in either/or like fashion. The woman is either an object of attraction or one of horror, one of temptation or one of fear, the angel or the monster. As Henry James points out, “for the most part M. de Maupassant’s heroines are a mixture of extreme sensuality and extreme mendacity” (134). Mary Donaldson-Evans furthers this argument in her *A Woman’s Revenge: The Chronology of Dispossession in Maupassant’s Fiction*. Maupassant’s treatment of women characters in his stories, she propounds, is undeniably misogynistic. They are portrayed not as individuals but as objects. The right to a ‘true self’ is denied them. They are constructed according to the dictates of patriarchal lore: “women are objects of erotic delight, intended for the pleasure and adornment of the male, and their physical beauty is paramount” (14). Add to this the fact that “the pleasure that the possession of a beautiful woman affords is

¹⁰ In asserting Chopin’s difference from Maupassant in such gendered terms the risk is run of reproducing the very structure which it is argued here she tries to escape in and through her writing - that structure which assumes an essential difference between the sexes. As Elizabeth Ammons recognises “the idea of essential difference is what centuries of patriarchal criticism have used to exclude women”(12). Repetition of this oppositional pattern must, therefore, be avoided. The argument proposed here seems instead to reify it, but what is suggested is not that Chopin writes as she does, and of what she does, simply *because* she is a woman, but rather that she writes against this very notion of essential difference; she critiques the society which creates it, and does so from within the male form, thus emphasising her belief in sexual equality.

entirely physical and is coupled by an absolute disdain for her 'being'" (15), and the total contrast which Chopin provides can be fully appreciated.

Chopin brings women to the centre; she rewrites their experience. No longer are they secondary and lesser to the man. Chopin creates a fictional world in which "woman's experience and desire are no longer marginalised or effaced but have become critically central" (Papke 88). As Barbara C. Ewell proposes in her "Kate Chopin and the Dream of Female Selfhood", she writes against patriarchal custom which denies women a self, which explicitly defines them as selfless, against the binary opposition which such a patriarchal view of the world creates, against the either/or construction of female self which dictates that an individual can be only one or the other, not both (157). Chopin allows her heroines the possibility of attaining the very thing which Maupassant denies his female constructions: the realisation of the self, and of being for that self, not merely for the man who controls it under patriarchal codes of rule. In writing for women the opportunity of the 'true self,' she achieves what Gilbert and Gubar claim as essential to the woman writer who attempts the feminist subversive act: she "examine[s], assimilate[s] and transcend[s] the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have created for [women]" (17). Chopin overwrites these patriarchally constructed images and in doing so challenges and overthrows the cult of 'true womanhood' which male authors continually reinscribe through their work, that of the ideal woman, in possession of "modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, politeness" (Gilbert and Gubar 23). Chopin writes an alternative reality for women.

That cult against which Chopin asserts this alternative - that of the ideal of 'true womanhood' - forms the basis of Barbara Welter's discussion in her *Dimity Convictions*. She sees this nineteenth century ideology as one which imposes definite,

and oppositional, hierarchical roles for man and woman: “man is a doer, an actor, woman reacts, she reflects rather than creates, is the moon to his sun” (77). The ‘true woman’ is denied the right to a self, she is a dependent, “an object of property rather than a human being” (Papke 14). The cult of “true womanhood’ made the woman “hostage in the home” (Welter 21). The attributes by which the “true woman” was conditioned to judge herself, and by which she was judged by others, were the cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submission and domesticity; “put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife - woman” (Welter 21). To be a godless woman within the societal bounds of this cult was to be no woman at all, and loss of purity was equally regarded as loss of womanhood. The “true woman” was expected to know her place as a dependent. Barbara Welter quotes from *The Young Lady’s Book* (1830) in espousing the necessity for passivity in the woman of Chopin’s generation: “It is certain . . . that in whatever situation of life a woman is placed from her cradle to her grave, a spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of mind, are required from her” (28). Submission was the woman’s lot - submission to the man, the patriarch. The only sphere of life which she could lay claim to, could call her own, was that of domesticity. Her role within this sphere, to make home a happy place, was not for herself but for brother, husband, and son - the male line (Welter 29). It is against this very definition that Chopin has her heroines assert a self. She grants them the “true selfhood” which patriarchy denies; she envisions for her woman “another way of being”(Papke 17) and one which truly is being, through which Other becomes Self.

This alternative then stands in direct opposition not only to Maupassant’s view but against patriarchal construction of the world as a whole. As Simone de Beauvoir suggests in her revolutionary *The Second Sex*, in the patriarchal world “humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as

an autonomous being”; she is only what man decrees, is defined and differentiated with reference to the male; “he is the subject, he is the absolute - she is the Other” (16). The woman of this world is acted upon, not actor: “Let her but think, dream, sleep, desire, breathe without permission and she betrays the masculine ideal” (496). And so Chopin does. She betrays the male vision of the world which patriarchy espouses; she allows her heroines to think, to dream, sleep, to breathe, and most of all to desire, of their own accord, with their own selves rather than that accorded to them under patriarchal rule. They are offered a way out, an escape from the world of the relative being, the existence only for others, a way out beyond that which patriarchy allows - that which is no more than acceptance of imprisonment and entrapment - losing the self, body and soul, in him who is represented as the essential (de Beauvoir 653). And in the offering of this alternative of ‘true selfhood’ to woman, Chopin feministises rather than simply feminises the male model of form and style.

Chopin takes hold of what Mary Eagleton would name her “subversive potential,” transforming, as she does, male-dominated forms and, in the process, exposing their gender bias (58). And she does so in a way which moves beyond the mere ‘making woman subject’ line of feminism. What Chopin’s woman does as subject is more central than simply her centrality itself; the way in which she asserts the power of selfhood rather than merely the fact that that power is allowed her rather than a hero. Herein lies the element of Chopin’s fiction which enables its classification as feminist rather than simply feminine. She does not simply reverse the androcentric view of the world which pervades Maupassant’s canon, merely making woman rather than man the subject of her stories, she also addresses those social codes which prevent women in the real world from being subjects. Her concern is not simply with the individual heroine, but with the social impositions placed upon that heroine, and, by extension, on women

in general. As Judie Newman states, Chopin's concern "is not simply with what women do to themselves, but also with what society does to them" (161). Chopin's heroines stand in opposition, be it directly or indirectly, to society's conventions. They disrupt what is 'normal', or at least, an event occurs which allows them to see beyond what is 'normal', and therefore, to expose its limitations. To Maupassant, Edward D. Sullivan claims, the story was something "that peel[ed] off a layer of appearance to expose a different reality beneath" (22). Chopin's interests seem to lie in the same place, in the peeling back of appearances - in her case, those which take the form of social construction and patriarchal definition - to reveal what lies for the self underneath: an alternative view of the world that looks beyond the 'norm.'

Mary Papke formulates a similar argument. She claims that Chopin's work addresses those questions which mark a feminist, as opposed to a feminine, writer: How to unfix things? How to strip down or make moving the traditional or finished literary forms so that everything is new (1)? Taking a confrontational stance, Chopin attacks male authority and gives female experience centrality rather than the marginality it is generally afforded. In the process of doing so, Papke suggests, her work becomes not only social representation, but also ideological criticism (2). Chopin "reveals what is rarely seen in hegemonic discourse - woman as self informing subject" rather than other serving object (2). Her work stands as a critique of social theories and practices: "female moral art . . . that focus[es] relentlessly on the dialectics of social relations and the position of women therein" (2). Moreover, Chopin reacted against the established dicta of 'feminine' or sentimental fiction in her writing, moving beyond its limitations to speak with an equally female, but revolutionarily feminist voice. What results, however lacking in didacticism it may be, is a "literature of protest" which offers women alternatives to self-abnegation and social compromise (Papke 4).

Chopin then writes of women, and more specifically, the ‘woman question’ as it presents itself in the patriarchal world, and she does so from within a very patriarchal tradition. She simultaneously, and seemingly paradoxically, subscribes to and subverts, writes in and writes against, the male tradition of form and style. And the process of doing so, of asserting a feminist voice, is a constant one in her work, evident from the outset. But in no way does this constancy necessitate consistency. As Chopin develops artistically, so too do her feminist voice and the heroines she portrays. Her women become, as Seyersted suggests, “more passionate and emancipated” (“Introduction” *CW* 25). In this development lies the basis of this study. The concern here is with Chopin’s feminism with regard to Maupassant’s influence not as a fixed determinate, but as a gradually emerging characteristic of her writing. This examination of her work traces his influence as it emerges with increasing clarity over the course of her career, from her earliest attempts at the genre as epitomised in the pieces “Wiser Than a God” and “A Point at Issue” to those later stories brought together in her final collection, *A Vocation and a Voice*, represented here by “The Story of an Hour,” “The Kiss,” “Her Letters,” and finally “An Egyptian Cigarette,” Chopin’s final short story before turning that artistic talent gained through the act of reappropriation to the novel. Analysis of these stories illustrates that as Chopin’s writing becomes more and more ‘Poesque’ in terms of form and style a subsequent shift can be seen in her feminism. Her fictional pieces become more condensed, more conscious of the demands of “unity of impression” and the “single effect,” and as a result her feminist voice becomes stronger. Following the example of Maupassant, learning his art, and therefore adopting the formalities of the tradition of which he is a part, ironically, allows Chopin the opportunity to write herself out of and against this tradition, to move increasingly beyond its bounds and subvert from the inside.