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**KATE CHOPIN'S FICTION: ORDER AND DISORDER
IN A STRATIFIED SOCIETY**

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Much has been written on the negative reaction of readers to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* when it was first published in 1899, and on her reputation as a local color writer of short stories before she wrote the novel. Scholarship on the reception of the novel has focussed primarily on the heroine and on themes unacceptable to nineteenth-century readers: Edna Pontellier's awakened sexuality, her rebellion against the prescribed duties of a wife and mother, and her decision to live for herself, to achieve some individual autonomy. Parallels between the stories that brought recognition to Chopin and the novel that brought her condemnation have also been noted and commented on.

Especially, attention has been drawn to the ways the stories published before *The Awakening* anticipated the novel. Helen Taylor, for example, concludes that "A No-Account Creole" "prefigures the novel in its focus on the polymorphous, uncontrollable nature of sexual desire" and that "Athénaïse" "anticipates the novel even more directly, since it confronts the problems of the institution of marriage itself."¹ Joyce Duer comments that, in both the stories and *The Awakening*, characters, under the influence of nature, awake to the revelation that "freedom and sensuous experience is a basic component of the human personality."² Gina Burchard traces the conflict between self-assertion and duty in the novel and several of the stories.³ What has not been convincingly explained is why *Bayou Folk* and *A Night in Acadie*, the two collections of stories published before the novel, escaped adverse criticism if representative stories also explore similarly daring themes.

Though some of the individual stories did face difficulties with editors, the two collections were warmly received by an increasingly admiring audience of readers. By the time *The Awakening* appeared, Chopin was a well-known and generally admired story teller. Yet, when reviewers turned to the novel, it was to call it "sex fiction," "a morbid book," and "bald realism."⁴ If the treatment of a woman's sexual awakening and rebellion had escaped condemnation earlier in the collections of stories, and in some instances in a narrative context more provocative than that of the novel, why did such themes inspire a different reaction now?

Some answers have been suggested. Perhaps the fact that the stories were classified as local color enhanced their acceptability. Lewis Leary theorizes that in the stories Chopin uses "strange and exotic" backgrounds to disguise theme.⁵ Helen Taylor too comments on Chopin's use of "unfamiliar and exotic locations...to explore taboos around female sexuality and desire" (p. 165). Other explanations have focussed not on Chopin's use of the conventions of American local color but more on the narrative of rebellion itself. In general, readers have felt that, in these early stories, the rebellion against conventions is tentative or ambivalent or incomplete.⁶

However, another explanation suggests itself. The stories very likely evaded open criticism because in them Chopin not only submerges the narrative of rebellion beneath the myth of the Creole and the Acadian but also confines a rebellious heroine within the same class and caste. Typically, a heroine's defiance occurs within a clearly defined ethnic group or an otherwise clearly demarcated and insulated social class. Hence, a heroine's rebellion does not evoke *inter-class* tensions and conflicts within the text and in the reader as does the defiance of Edna Pontellier. In contrast to the heroines in the short stories, Edna, a Southern American woman in an alien culture, experiences a transformation which compels her to defy the conventions not only of her own social class and culture and of the dominant class and culture of her adopted region, upper-class Louisiana Creole, but also those conventions that link various subclasses and cultures, Acadians, Spanish Creoles, and blacks, into the intricately stratified social order of New Orleans and its surroundings. In so doing, Edna introduces a disturbing element into the context of a highly ordered world that, paradoxically, is itself suggestive of disorder. It is surely this undercurrent of disruption that explains the hostile reaction to the novel and not solely its themes of sexual freedom and social rebellion.

To begin with the parallels between heroines in the collected stories and Edna Pontellier, several stories depict unawakened women like Edna, sheltered, inhibited women who are also transformed by appeals to their sleeping passions. Among the stories in the *Bayou Folk* and *A Night in Acadie*, such women as Madame Delisle in "A Lady of Bayou St. John," Euphrasie in "A No-Account Creole," and Athénaïse in the story by the same name are inhibited far more completely by their Creole and Acadian cultures than Edna has been repressed by her own Southern Presbyterian culture. However, in her delineation of the heroines in the short stories, Chopin embeds their arrested development so completely in cultural norms that, ironically, readers hardly seem to notice the infantilization.

Especially in the three stories mentioned above, the heroines emerge as "doll-like and childlike" as Priscilla Leder observes of the Creole women in the novel.⁷ Of the upper-class Creole wife, Madame Delisle, the narrator says she was so young that "she roamed with the dogs, teased the parrots, and could not fall asleep at night unless old black Manna-Loulou sat beside her bed and told her stories....In short she was a child."⁸ Though Euphrasie is old enough to have accepted her childhood friend Placide's proposal of marriage, her father still calls her "my li'le chile."⁹ The parent's reflections on his absent daughter lead his visitor, Wallace Offdean, a stranger to the rural community, to conclude that the little girl must be an unusually precocious child indeed (p. 8). Similarly, of the Acadian wife, Athénaïse, the narrator says, "About her features and expression lurked a softness, a prettiness, a dewiness, that were perhaps too childlike, that savored of immaturity."¹⁰ And her husband, Cazeau, reminds his wife's brother that she is "nothing but a chile in character" (p. 116) and in constant need of the guidance of authority.

In contrast, Edna's development never appears to be as arrested as that of these heroines in the stories. Only once in the novel is the image of the child used in connection with her. When Adèle Ratignolle goes to visit Edna at her new house, the quintessential Creole woman reflects on her American friend's behavior: "In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life. That is the reason I want to say you mustn't mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living here alone."¹¹ However, Adèle's comment emphasizes the proper behavior of a Creole wife rather than psychological maturity. And, in any case, Adèle does not speak with the authority of a narrator's voice or that of a father or a husband as is the case in the stories.

In several of the stories in the two collections, at a climactic moment in the narrative, a heroine awakens not only sensually but also psychologically and begins to imagine a freer and fuller existence than the one she has known thus far. Madame Delisle's intimate walks and talks with her neighbor Sépincourt with the sensuous sounds and smells of the marais all around them, Euphrasie's rides with Offdean into the plantation woods, and Madame Baroda's encounter with Gouvernail under the cover of a dark summer night all foreshadow Edna's awakening in the company of Robert Lebrun that summer on the Gulf.

Not only are the circumstances and settings in some of the stories and in the novel similar, but so are the patterns of self-discovery and the

subsequent desire for change and individual autonomy. Though the passion Madame Delisle sees in Sépincourt's glance and recognizes in herself at first frightens her, the awakening of this sleeping beauty results in her putting an end to her extended childhood, symbolized by her forgoing Manna-Loulou's storytelling and blowing out the night candle by her bed. Becoming an adult woman, sexually alive for the first time in her life, Madame momentarily and spontaneously is "capable of love or sacrifice" (p. 307), reminiscent of Edna's self-assertive, "I give myself where I choose" (p. 107). Edna too puts aside the trappings of her unawakened self—forgoing the customary Tuesdays at home, turning the kitchen over to her cook and the house to the servants, and, finally, moving out altogether. However, in the development of a character like Madame Delisle, Chopin is far more critical of the culturally accepted role that imprisons a woman and against which some of her heroines begin to rebel than she is of Edna's married life in the novel. Edna has been enough the adult woman that she has at least played at being the proper Creole wife. Madame Delisle has just played, child-like, in her world of fantasies.

The directness with which Madame's story moves toward the climactic moment of defiance of social and moral conventions and the radical change between her infantile state before her awakening and her adulterous longings after should have evoked some unease in nineteenth-century readers. Unlike Robert who runs away to Mexico and then leaves Edna a second time, Sépincourt urges on Madame real choices: to live in Paris with him outside of marriage or return to her infantilized state in a Creole marriage. In imagery that parallels the use of music in the novel, the love language of Sépincourt's letter is to Madame like "a voice from the unknown, like music, awakening in her a delicious tumult that seized and held possession of her whole being" (p. 308).

The ironic, almost comic, narration of events leading to and away from the climax of the story—Madame's first agreeing to go to Paris with her lover, then, immediately after receiving the news of her husband's death, sublimating her sexual passion to a religious ecstasy—provides one of Chopin's most telling critiques of marriage. Like Mrs. Mallard in "A Story of an Hour," Madame is freed from marriage by death. But, unlike Mrs. Mallard, Madame lives on as a votary dedicated to the memory of her dead husband. With consummate irony the narrator at the conclusion implies that such a life allows Madame both to escape a second marriage and to enshrine the feminine virtues her culture idealizes in the mythic Creole woman. To the admiring community she is "a very pretty old lady, against whose long

years of widowhood, there has never been a breath of reproach" (pp. 312-313). And Sépincourt, says the narrator, has been taught a lesson in the "psychological enigma of a woman's heart" (p. 312).

Of course, key differences exist between Madame Delisle and Edna. One retreats into what might be called delusional madness, displacing her passion onto the picture of her dead husband, her altar and icon, living a life-in-death; the other chooses death over continuing the oppressive marriage she is in. Unlike Edna, Madame cuts herself off from self-awareness while Edna is never so alive as when she makes the decision to take her life, never so fully aware of the limitations conventional society will continue to impose on her. Edna, at the point of death, is an existentialist actively choosing her fate. Madame, in her response to her husband's death, becomes the sentimental heroine in a Gothic romance. Her life becomes the kind of sadly poignant story Manna-Loulou might tell to lull her child-mistress to sleep. With gentle but pointed irony Chopin delineates this child-woman's brief period of self-awareness and assertion, a moment of psychological growth between fantasy and withdrawal into madness.

Yet, as Seyersted observes, a story such as "A Lady of Bayou St. John" did not face difficulties getting published (p. 55). And, apparently, neither Madame Delisle's extended childhood nor her sudden sexual awakening, neither her decision to leave her husband and live in an illicit union with Sépincourt nor her subsequent escape into madness gave offense to nineteenth-century readers. One has to conclude that the irony in the submerged narrative, the story of an upper-class Creole child-wife going from infantilization to madness, with a moment of self-awareness allowed her, went undetected. Instead readers responded to the surface narrative—the Gothic romance—the romanticizing of love and death and of the mystery of a beautiful Creole woman's transcendent devotion to her dead husband.

Indeed, even twentieth-century readers read over the ambiguities and ironies in the narrative texts of such stories. They see tentative or incomplete expressions of rebellion against social and moral norms but not the extent of Chopin's critique of cultural attitudes toward women. Some recent scholarship has been devoted, however, to Chopin's use of narrative strategies to suggest the imprisonment of Edna in the Creole culture and her subsequent inability to tell her story. Patricia Yaeger argues that Edna's "temptations to think are repressed by the moody discourse of romance" and that "her inability to deal fluently in the language her husband and lovers speak remains a sign of her disempowerment"¹², that they, in fact, narrate her story. Joseph Urgo makes a similar point in relation to Edna's difficulty telling her

story.¹³ In such stories as "A Lady of St. John," Chopin in fact uses narrative strategies to suggest disempowerment and imprisonment. Manna Loulou's storytelling prolongs Madame's imprisonment in childhood, and the Gothic romance her story becomes further imprisons her in the text of her story.

In addition, in a story like "The Lady of Bayou St. John," Chopin uses the mythic Creole woman both to mask her subversive narrative and, at the same time, expose the realities behind such romanticized exotic cultures. Because the stereotyped Creole woman embodied feminine virtues very similar to those of the idealized nineteenth-century woman, Chopin could use Madame Delisle to comment on both the cult of true womanhood and Creole attitudes toward women. The feminine qualities Wilbur Fish Tillet celebrated in his essay on Southern womanhood were also admired in the Creole woman, especially her decorousness—her beauty, refinement, social graces and gentility—and her devotion to family and home.¹⁴ Indeed, a white, upper-class Creole woman of leisure like Madame Delisle embodied exactly those social and moral values important to the stratified world of a very conservative male hegemony.

However, Chopin also suggests the alien and deviant in the Creole myth, the disorder to which the general population responded with ambivalence. Both social historians and scholars of American literary regionalism make much of the sensuality, eroticism, and openness of the Louisiana French. Edward Tinker describes the city of New Orleans as one of the most open ports in the country, where cock-fighting, bull-baiting, gambling, dueling, and quadroon balls compete with opera and theatre for the attention of the wealthy Creoles.¹⁵ Nancy Walker, in her article on the social context of the novel, illustrates from several sources the differences between the Anglo-American culture and the Creole culture as perceived in the popular imagination.¹⁶ In Creole Louisiana in general, the codification by class and race into the various levels of racial gradations itself suggested both a highly intricate, legalized social hierarchy and at the same time the potential for disorder, immorality and impurity. Thus, the Creole culture represented both order and disorder for Americans, a highly formalized world of social behavior and conservative values coupled with a liberal enjoyment of sensual pleasures.

In a story like "The Lady of Bayou St. John," the tension between order and disorder suggested by this exotic culture is contained within the world of the upper-class Creole. The disorder of the war has disrupted the ordered existence on the Creole plantation as well as the

ritualized life of the Delisles in their separate spheres. And the code of behavior which condoned an unattached man's lavishing attention on a married Creole woman is broken when Sépincourt, apparently the lone man in the community not committed to defending the sacredness of Southern and Creole plantation values, makes his passionate appeal to Madame to enter into a serious, though adulterous, relationship. And Madame herself symbolizes the contrasting images suggested by the mythologized culture. She is refined and gracious yet sensuous and unfathomable, the mistress of a plantation yet developmentally a child. In the end, she becomes the lovely Southern grand lady who is also mad.

Similarly, in "A Respectable Woman," collected in *A Night in Acadie*, the ambivalence the general culture felt about the Creole is dramatized in the encounter between Mrs. Baroda and Gouvernail, her husband's college friend. Though not infantilized like Madame Delisle, Mrs. Baroda is another inhibited, unformed woman, the decorous wife in the highly ritualized Creole plantation society. Hers is the world of the social seasons, of fashions, and of "mild dissipations." With a comic detachment suggestive of the English novel of manner, the narrator of the story describes the superficial social world Mrs. Baroda inhabits as her only sphere of influence. Mrs. Baroda's dilemma, what to make of a man, a guest, who is definitely not "a society man or 'a man about town,'"¹⁷ reflects not only the purely social role she plays in her marriage and her culture but also her unawakened state. She had expected that Gouvernail would make social demands on her and that he in turn would provide her with "intellectual," that is, entertaining dinner conversation and with the attention a married Creole woman can expect from an unattached Creole man. But he does not fit into her world of social stereotypes. He is neither a man about town, nor the dinner conversationist, nor the Creole gigolo. Rather, Gouvernail is reserved, introspective and philosophical, a man whose hidden passionate nature unfolds in her presence and to which she responds, at first in confusion but finally with self-awareness. Though Mrs. Baroda at first does not understand what is being appealed to in her own hidden self, she, too, like the other heroines, does acknowledge and act on those first stirrings of feelings as she listens to Gouvernail talk about his disappointments in the past and his present compromises. She at first chooses to run away, but the conclusion suggests that, unlike Madame and Edna, Mrs. Baroda will have the best of both worlds, the respectable, though purely social life, of a Creole wife and the more personally satisfying and sensually pleasing relationship with her husband's friend when he returns for another visit. Such a reconciliation between the married life

of duty and the illicit relationship of passion and intimacy is suggested in other stories, in "The Storm" and "The Kiss," for example, but not with the possibility that it may well be on-going, recurring with each summer visit of the beloved.

Again, the parallels between Mrs. Baroda and Edna are striking, and the story's conclusion would seem to be at least as threatening to social and moral order as Edna's leaving Léonce's house. As in other stories in the two collections and in the novel, the disorder symbolized by the Creole culture itself is suggested—the "mild dissipations," the sensuous setting, and the unattached male companion for the Creole wife who is free, within the accepted social ritual, to enjoy his company. More explicitly, of course, disorder is revealed in the adulterous longings of a respectable married woman who wishes to break out of the conventions of her culture. But in this story, as in "A Lady of Bayou St. John," the threat that sexual freedom and individual autonomy for the woman pose to the dominant order is again confined within the same class and ethno-social group; and the heroine's rebellion is submerged beneath and masked by cultural stereotypes and by the comic tone of the narrative strategy Chopin has adopted to delineate the social world of plantation Creoles. In the novel, on the other hand, Edna enters the culture not only as herself the outsider but also as the representative of a "pure" culture ready to be corrupted by a socially diversified world; and neither the myth of the Creole in characters like Adèle nor the narrative strategy of regional realism provides an adequate cover to mask her radical departure from the tradition of feminine heroines nor the author's departure from the genteel tradition of feminine writing.

At Grand Isle Edna befriends Adèle, the personification of the polarity in the Creole culture. Sensuously indulgent, openly seductive, Adèle revels in the minutiae of her pregnancies, charmingly flirts with adoring young men like Robert Lebrun, and indulges her pleasure in risqué stories making the round. Yet no-one in the novel understands the rules of the Creole society better than she does or observes them more assiduously. She knows that Edna does not understand the various codes of behavior, such as those that apply to summer flirtations between married women and unattached young men. She warns Robert not to play the gigolo with Mrs. Pontellier who is likely to take him seriously. When Edna and Robert do not return from Chênrière Caminada, Adèle cares for the boys to lessen Edna's transgression as wife and mother. Later, in New Orleans, Adèle stays away from Edna's farewell party, as does Mrs. Lebrun. At other events deemed inappropriate for a Creole woman, such as excursions to the race track,

Edna is surrounded by Creole men and American women. What is seductive about Adèle is her sensuous feminine beauty and ritualized encroachment on sexual and social taboos confined within this very ordered, though deviant, culture.

But Edna, the innocent American in this milieu, is an embodiment of the nineteenth-century Anglo-American reader's own values. The standards she is measured by are very different from those applied to the Creoles in the novel. Indeed, contemporary reviewers reveal their preoccupation with the fact that both the author and her heroine are outsiders to the Creole society. In reviews of the novel, readers are reminded that Chopin is a St. Louisan and her heroine a Kentuckian, that the former wrote "delightful sketches" of local color before she wrote this unacceptable novel, and that the latter is isolated in a "Creole watering place."¹⁸ Thus, what Nancy Walker has called "the clash of two cultures," dramatized in Edna's "denying what she was raised to believe...by succumbing to the sensuality of the Creoles,"¹⁹ seemingly was on the minds of Chopin's critics when they reacted to the novel, though they apparently could not articulate their anxiety clearly. Indeed, even more threatening, Edna is rebelling against both cultures.

In nineteenth-century Louisiana, the stratification by race and class was further complicated by various subcultures and by the ethnic diversity, the Spanish Creole, the Acadian French, the Creoles of color, and the descendants of slaves. As many misconceptions existed about these various subgroups as existed about Creoles. In particular, Acadians, or Cajuns as they are still popularly called, like Creoles, have inspired contrary stereotypes. Marcia Gaudet comments that "the images of Cajuns range from the quiet, pastoral view found in Longfellow's *Evangeline*, to the lazy, stupid, naive, happy Cajun of later writers."²⁰ In fact, Cajuns in nineteenth-century literature were frequently presented as either simple and gentle or rough and crude, given to drinking, fighting, and avenging wrongs. Glenn Conrad comments that the Cajun has been depicted as either a savage, "an ignorant, therefore superstitious swamp dweller living in squalor in a moss-draped, reptile-infested wilderness or as a creature of simple but solid virtue...inhabiting a timeless, changeless land of great natural beauty."²¹ There is then in the stereotypes of this subculture the suggestion both of an harmonious, bucolic life and of disorder, defiance of the law or, at the very least, non-conformity.

In *The Awakening* what was even more threatening to both the Louisiana Creole and Anglo-American cultures was that Edna's rebellion is acted out in inappropriate behavior outside the dominant

social order of the upper-class French, in the Spanish and French Acadian subcultures perceived to be socially inferior to the dominant culture of the region. When she and Robert disappear to the island of Chênrière Caminada, Edna responds to the Spanish Creole girl Mariequita's bold overtures to Robert with a sharp jealousy she has never felt before. And after Robert leaves her a second time and she begins to assess the unfulfilling life in store for her, she returns to Grand Isle and re-encounters Mariequita, this time openly flirting with Victor Lebrun. Edna then realizes even more fully than before that in the Creole culture she will quickly lose the support offered her by class and caste if she continues her socially unacceptable struggle for sexual freedom and autonomy. At her party celebrating her move out of Léonce's's house, Victor, always competing with his more respected older brother, has already begun to see Edna as a sexual object to steal from Robert.

As with her depiction of the Creoles in her stories and in the novel, Chopin suggests the conflicting images of Cajuns and uses that subculture to frame her heroine's rebellion. When Edna is overwhelmed at the church service, Robert takes Edna to an Acadian home to rest. In the simple, unpretentious cottage of the Antoinés, Edna begins her day-long slumber, isolated and withdrawn from her husband and children, separated from the Creole community of Grand Isle, unable even to communicate with her hostess. An outsider to the social codes of Creoles and their definition of social proprieties, Madame Antoine leaves Edna asleep in the care of Robert as she goes to make her rounds of family and friends. When she returns to her guests, it is to entertain them with stories celebrating disorder, the immoral and asocial in the adventures of Lafitte the pirate. As openly flirtatious and seductive as she is, Adèle certainly would not have allowed herself to be in such a situation. Later, at a more decisive stage of her rebellion, after her farewell party, Edna moves out of her husband's house with the Acadian, old Celestine, as her only companion.

In several of the stories in the two collections, the unawakened heroine is an Acadian, but, like the rebellion of Creole heroines, her rebellion is confined within a stereotypically defined ethno-social group. For example, in the story "Athénaïse," collected in *A Night in Acadie*, Chopin uses prevailing assumptions about Acadians against which to present a heroine undergoing an awakening paralleling the experience of Edna. In this story, Chopin uses the heroine's husband and her own family to suggest the bipolar images of order and disorder represented by the subculture. Athénaïse's husband, Cazeau, is, on the surface, a highly disciplined man who lives a very ordered, purposeful life, yet

there is the sense of barely suppressed rage whenever he is thwarted—particularly in his vengeful attitude toward his wife's brother, whom he clearly hates. Athénaïse's family, on the other hand, reflects the opposing image of the Cajun. They live an easy, carefree existence characterized by the *joie de vivre* frequently associated with Cajuns and suggestive of the hedonistic and immoral.

In this story too the heroine's rebellion, her efforts to leave her marriage, is associated with especially provocative themes, in fact more daring ones than Chopin was willing to chance in the novel. As Edna did in her younger years, the unawakened Athénaïse indulges in unfocussed romantic fantasies; however, in Athénaïse's case, her romantic fantasies are displaced onto her brother who finds that "eloping with his sister was only a little less engaging than eloping with some one else's sister" (p. 118). Like Edna and other heroines, Athénaïse too experiences a sexual awakening; but, significantly, it is not inspired by the urban Creole Gouvernail whom the young wife thinks of as merely a friend of her brother and someone who can be helpful. It happens rather as a result of her growing awareness of her own body at the onset of pregnancy. The emotional and physical awakening of this immature woman is suggested provocatively through the association of the bodily changes of pregnancy with sexual arousal, certainly a potentially bolder treatment of female sexuality than Edna's arousal. Marriage is criticized far more openly too. At one point, a husband's relationship to his wife is compared to a master's relationship to a slave, and Athénaïse's plight is compared to that of a runaway slave. The parallel Chopin draws between a traditional marriage and slavery certainly provides a harsher critique of marriage than the novel suggests in its description of the Pontellier marriage. Athénaïse's rebellion against marriage has been characterized as "problematical,"²² but, given the male-dominated culture that has encouraged her immaturity and the several men who are only too willing to tell her what to think and do, Athénaïse's actions are remarkably courageous. She is certainly "self-willed, impulsive, innocent, ignorant, unsatisfied, dissatisfied" (p. 123), as Gouvernail's observes. However, the social context of her story certainly supports some of her observations about the fate of women in her culture. At one point she reflects that marriage is "a trap set for the feet of unwary and unsuspecting girls" (p. 111); and, though she is too independent-minded to simply accept her fate, she does instinctively realize very early "the futility of rebellion against a social and sacred institution" (p. 109) like marriage. The Acadian culture, community, and family freely enjoy the pleasures of life but do not sanction a woman's rebellion

against certain duties and obligations any more than Creole society condoned Edna's rebellion.

But what is characteristic of Chopin's stories about Creoles is equally true of her stories about Acadians. The rebellion and the sexually explicit are confined within the same subculture, and the disorder is delineated in the language of cultural stereotypes. Chopin uses the sensuous, the socially uncultured and, at times, obstreperous nature of the Cajun to frame the rebellion of the spirited Athénaïse. She acts out her rebellion in a community and family that embrace an easy, fun-loving, non-conforming lifestyle; but, ultimately, they too, like Athénaïse's husband, Cazeau, support fidelity to the institution of marriage and the social and moral order it represents. Especially for the Acadian woman, such loyalty and submission are expected.

Another story concerned with an Acadian community, "At the 'Cadian Ball," collected in *Bayou Folks*, comes closer to suggesting the inter-class and caste tensions reflected in the novel. In that story Calixta is of mixed Acadian and Spanish Creole heritage and, like Athénaïse, spirited and fiery, even more rebellious by nature. The man she wants is the upper-class Creole, Alcée Laballière, who clearly responds to her passionate nature but at the end rejects Calixta for his very respectable, socially appropriate Creole cousin. Her passion thwarted, Calixta accepts a Cajun suitor, Bobinôt, as her husband. Thus, the conclusion avoids any disalignment within the class hierarchy, and Calixta's mixed blood, in any case, further excuses her reckless behavior and inappropriate attempts to cross cultural and class lines. In a sequel story, "The Storm," never accepted for publication in Chopin's lifetime, Calixta and her Creole lover, Alcée, both married to other people, act on their illicit passion and consummate their love. Thus, the sequel acts out the rebellion forestalled in the earlier story.

In the stories and in the novel Chopin also recreates the racial strata of Southern Louisiana and uses the racial and interracial to reinforce the repression of the dominant white culture and to underscore the threat of rebellion against it. In the Pontellier household, acceptance of one's place in the social order is a given; and, on the surface, the servants seem to be stereotypically obedient and loyal, knowing their place in the patriarchal hierarchy. Edna's personal maid retrieves her mistress's wedding ring when Edna, in a rage, throws it to the floor and stamps on it. A servant boy faithfully produces the cards visitors have left behind while Edna has deliberately chosen to absent herself from her ritualized role as hostess. The children's quadroon nurse allows herself to be tyrannized by the Pontellier boys, and the cook is the recipient of Léonce's anger when Edna doesn't please him. Yet, as with the

Acadians and Spanish Creoles Edna has come in contact with, the black servants become involved in their mistress's rebellion. As she liberates herself, she empowers her inferiors, whom she should oversee. The servant boy has taken over receiving guests and accepting their cards and good wishes. The cook is placed in charge of the kitchen, and her cooking improves noticeably when she is given some freedom. Presumably, when Edna leaves, the servants are left in charge of the house. Edna's identification with the servant class, non-whites at that, in the course of her liberation certainly disturbed accepted conventions in such a stratified society.

In at least one story collected in *Bayou Folks*, a black heroine rebels against the racial codification of the Creole culture, but that defiance is also contained within the same racial group, though the codification itself is threatened. "La Belle Zoraïde," a companion piece to "A Lady on Bayou St. John," is a story presumably told to the child-woman Madame Delisle by her personal maid and nanny, Manna-Loulou. In its treatment of the black heroine's awakening, rebellion, and subsequent withdrawal into madness, it provides an ironic commentary on Madame's own awakening, rebellion, and withdrawal into madness. La Belle Zoraïde, the light-skinned favorite of her Creole mistress, caught between the codes of caste and race on the one hand and her own desires on the other, rebels against the codification of her race by the dominant white Creole culture. Her mistress wants for her belle Zoraïde a caste-appropriate husband, a neighbor's light-skinned house slave, and social acceptance within the caste system. But Zoraïde defies her mistress and gives her love to the slave Mézor, whose African origin is symbolized by his music and dance. When the child of this illicit union is taken away from her, mad Zoraïde displaces her love for her child onto a doll fetish. The story thus is doubly ironic in that Madame Delisle presumably heard this black woman's tragic story of rebellion and madness before withdrawing into her own mad world of the idealized Creole woman. The story follows a pattern similar to the others already analyzed. An unformed woman's being is awakened; she rebels and threatens the dominant order, but in this case the threat is confined to the same race, though not the same class or caste within the complicated racial stratification.

Clearly then it was not Chopin's use of explicit sexual material that most deeply shocked the readers of *The Awakening*, though that affront to their sexual mores is what they were able to respond to superficially. Nor was it Edna's transformation from an unawakened woman to a sexually aroused one. It was not even Edna's defying social conventions, even taking her own life to circumvent those conventions.

Far more disturbing to contemporary readers of the novel was the heroine's defiance of the very conventions that connected various subcultures and subclasses and held them in place in the social hierarchy. It was her defying not only the Creole codes of behavior symbolized by Adèle Ratignolle but also the stratification that stipulated the degree of acceptance a person of a certain class, caste, and race could expect to receive from the dominant culture. And that she was a Southern American woman defying this highly stratified society heightened the typical nineteenth-century reader's anxiety about social and moral order. The stories are frequently more daring in the treatment of theme and more critical of cultural attitudes about women, but the cultural insularity of the characters and the uses Chopin makes of stereotypes and of narrative strategies forestalled for the two story collections the outraged reaction the novel endured.

NOTES

¹Helen Taylor, *Gender, Race, and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin* (Baton Rouge, 1989), pp. 179-180.

²Joyce Dyer, "Epiphanies Through Nature in the Stories of Kate Chopin," *UDR*, 16:3 (1983-84), 80.

³Gina Burchard, "Kate Chopin's Problematical Womanliness: The Frontier of American Feminism," *JASAT*, 15 (1984), 39.

⁴These negative comments appear in "Notes from Bookland," *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat* 13 May 1899; "Books of the Day," *Chicago Times-Herald* 1 June 1899; and "Books of the Week," *Providence Sunday Journal* 4 June 1899, collected in the Norton Critical Edition of *The Awakening*, ed. Margaret Culley (New York, 1976), pp. 146-149.

⁵Lewis Leary, Introduction, *The Awakening and Other Stories* (New York, 1970), p. ix.

⁶For example, Helen Taylor comments that "A No-Account Creole" and "Athénaïse" are "significantly more timid and ambivalent precursors of *The Awakening*" (p. 179). Winfried Fluck sees in the heroines of several stories tentative formulations of "culturally disruptive impulses," in "Tentative Transgressions: Kate Chopin's Fiction as a Mode of Symbolic Action," *SAF* 10 (1982), 155. Per Seyersted observes that a heroine like Madame Delisle in "A Lady of Bayou St. John" does not complete her rebellion against conventions, in *Kate Chopin* (Baton Rouge, 1969), p. 55.

⁷Priscilla Leder, "An American Dilemma: Cultural Conflict in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," *SoSt*, 22:1 (1983), 102.

⁸"A Lady of Bayou St. John," *Bayou Folks in Americans in Fiction Series* (Ridgewood, N. J., 1967), p. 304. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses following the passage.

⁹"A No-Account Creole," *Bayou Folks*, p. 109.

¹⁰"Athénaïse," *Portraits*, ed. Helen Taylor (London 1979), p. 109. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses following the passage.

¹¹*The Awakening*, ed. Margaret Culley (New York, 1976), p. 95. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses following the passage.

¹²Patricia Yaeger, "'A Language Which Nobody Understand': Emancipatory Strategies in *The Awakening*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 20:3 (1987), 202, 210.

¹³"A Prologue to Rebellion: *The Awakening* and the Habit of Self-Expression," *SLJ*, 20:1 (1987), 22-32.

¹⁴"Southern Womanhood," in the Norton Critical Edition of *The Awakening*, ed. Margaret Culley (New York, 1976), p. 122.

¹⁵*Creole City: Its Past and Its People* (New York, 1953), pp. 208-209.

¹⁶"Feminist or Naturalist: The Social Context of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," *SoQ*, 17 (1979), 97-99.

¹⁷"A Respectable Woman," *Portraits*, ed. Helen Taylor (London, 1979) p. 78. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses following the passage.

¹⁸See references to Chopin's origin of birth in Frances Porcher's "Kate Chopin's Novel," *The Mirror* IX 4 May 1899 and in "Notes from Bookland," *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat* 13 May 1899. See also references to Edna Pontellier's place of birth in "Book Reviews," *Public Opinion* 22 June 1899; in "Fresh Literature," *Los Angeles Sunday Times* 25 June 1899; and in "Books and Magazines," *The Pittsburg Leader* 8 July 1899, collected in the Norton Critical Edition of *The Awakening*, ed. Margaret Culley (New York, 1976), pp. 145-146 and 151-153.

¹⁹p. 99.

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²⁰"The Image of the Cajun in Literature," *JPC*, 23:1 (1989), 77.

²¹"The Acadians: Myth and Reality," *The Cajuns: Essays on Their History and Culture* (Lafayette, La., 1978), p. 1.

²²Burchard, p 41.