

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 couvert" - 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	i.
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 Amoralism 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 “escape¹⁵ 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.

Chapter One

Pre-Maupassantian Subversiveness: Chopin's 'flawed' Feminist Beginnings

There was once an animal born into this world, and opening his eyes upon Life, he saw above and about him confining walls, and before him were bars of iron through which came air and light from without; this animal was born in a cage.¹¹

So began Kate Chopin's writing career as we know it. Its composition undated, "Emancipation: A Life Fable", the sketch which begins thus, is taken to have been written late in 1869 or early 1870¹². At only 18 years of age Chopin's concerns are apparent: the quest for liberty and freedom in a world of imprisonment. And they are concerns which remain with her throughout the course of her career, developing, shifting, but ever present. Perhaps most important, and most notable, is the shaping of these concerns with regard to gender. As Chopin retakes the pen after years of marriage and motherhood, emancipation as the fable of life seen in her stories becomes, more specifically, female emancipation. The male animal above becomes the woman, confined, imprisoned by the cage of patriarchal society into which she is born, struggling for freedom through the very selfhood this society denies her. This is the voice of feminism.

This feminist voice is central to, and perhaps sounds itself most obviously in, the first two short stories written by Chopin after turning to the genre on the failure of her early novel, *At Fault*. "Wiser Than a God" and "A Point at Issue," both written in 1889, stand as early, and extremely overt, illustrations of Chopin's feminism - her concern

¹¹ From Chopin's "Emancipation: A Life Fable," collected in *The Complete Works* and referred to by Seyersted, in the introduction to the same, as the "only significant piece of writing we have from the young girl's hand" (21).

¹² See *The Complete Works*, Appendix of composition and publication dates, 1003-1032.

with 'the woman question,' the conflict of desires imposed upon the female by the situation of the male-centred world which cages her in. In these stories, the limitations imposed upon women by the forces of this world and, in particular, by the institution of marriage it constructs to enforce its lore, are exposed and explored in a revolutionary, bold and unorthodox way. Chopin's feminism speaks out with strength; her treatment of female emancipation is direct and unavoidable.

The way in which Chopin's feminist concerns are shaped in these early stories is captured most succinctly in the Latin proverb which opens the first: "To love and be wise is scarcely granted even to a god" (39). In this epigram, a conflict is introduced, one which results from the mutually exclusive nature of alternatives. In this case, the alternatives are those which limit the woman's experience: she can either love or be wise, not both. It is through this conflict that 'the woman question' is explored here by Chopin. The focal point of the two stories is established within the one proverb: "the special problems that women face in reconciling their often conflicting needs for place and love on the one hand and individual sovereignty on the other" (Skaggs 112). This is the conflict between what the woman truly wants to be (an autonomous individual, an embodiment of 'true selfhood') and what society wants her to be, the definition which patriarchal convention imposes upon her (the ideal of 'true womanhood'), a conflict which, as these stories show, makes itself known at its utmost on the suggestion of marriage.

In "Wiser Than a God" the marriage relationship in question is that between the heroine Paula Von Stoltz and her beau George Brainard, and its terms are clear from the outset. We are introduced to George as Paula sees him, entering the room of his house in which she awaits direction for her musical services, and what unfolds is an image of the 'typical' patriarch, the man of the house, looking "critically and with an air of

proprietorship at the festive arrangements. . . . gaz[ing] with pardonable complacency at his own handsome, athletic figure in the mirror” (42). This is a man very much in control, of himself and of the situation in which we find him, a point which becomes more striking as he notices Paula. She is, it seems, immediately worthy of attention. George approaches her oozing with charm “with a glance full of *prognostic* complimentary utterances, which a further acquaintance might develop” (42 emphasis mine). Paula has become the object, subject to rather than subject of, his attentions. Her appearance is what matters, what he finds appealing. He has objectified Paula from the outset. She is something (rather than someone - she has no *being*) to be looked at, judged, and admired.

At this point the focus of the story shifts away from Paula and George to explore the social occasion unfolding around them, but the shift, in many ways, emphasises Chopin’s concern with female emancipation, highlighting, at least, the need for it. As the events of the evening unwind much is revealed about the social world which surrounds the pair: the conventions which rule this world and the expectations thus imposed upon its members. The rooms of the house, it is said, are filled with “the pretty hub-bub that a bevy of girls can make when inspired by a close masculine proximity” (42), girls whose immediate concern is with appearances and “throwing themselves into attitudes of picturesque exhaustion” (42). In their world, or rather the very patriarchal, male-centred world conceived *for* them, this is the ideal; the ideal of femininity, of selflessness, of constructing a self which rather than being true to one’s own inner being, needs and desires, is instead a product of social definition, a response to the needs of the man around whom this world is constructed. These women have internalised the patriarchal codes. Through them, Chopin exemplifies the ideology of true womanhood, an ideology

which comes to serve as a building block in both stories - a point of comparison against which the heroine may be seen and against which she stands.

In "Wiser Than a God," the essence of this ideology is captured in one character in particular: the "pretty little black-eyed fairy" (43) who is moved by George's banjo playing to charm the company with a "few passes of a Virginia breakdown, as she had studied it from life on a Southern plantation" (43). This character's appearance is but brief and she remains nameless throughout but this in itself emphasises her role. It does not matter who she is. What is important is what she stands for. She is a 'type', a socially constructed woman, a woman to whom the heroine stands in opposition. The selection from the modern classic which Paula plays is met with flippant praise from the women of the audience, and Paula's response to this praise, "each inane compliment falling like a dash of cold water on [her] ardor" (44), highlights her position. Paula is different from the women surrounding her, and so too is her art. It is not like the dance of the "little black-eyed fairy," not simply a feminine accomplishment designed with no aim in mind but the selfless pleasure of a man. Paula's art is more, more than amusement, it is a career: "How little did her auditors appreciate in the performance the results of a life study, of a drilling that had made her amongst the knowing an acknowledged mistress of technique" (43). For Paula, nothing will stand in the way of that career.

Paula feels attracted to George in a way that she has never experienced. She feels a "new awakened admiration" for him (44), an awakening of desire. But before Paula's passions can be explored they are extinguished by the death of her mother, and when the story returns to the scene after some passing of time their final end is decided. On her mother's death, Paula has thrown herself into her work "with the view of attaining that position in the musical world which her father and mother had dreamed might be

hers”(45). She is following the path of career, a truly unconventional path for the nineteenth-century woman, a path which leads her away from the ideal of femininity, which breaks the codes of true womanhood, and as such, a path which George must attempt to block. And this he does. He calls on her, seeing his interruption of her musical transposition as “the wholesomest thing” for her (45), but Paula is assertive. Her music, she claims, is her “calling” in life (45). She is absolutely dedicated to her talent and nothing shall surpass its importance to her. George persists. He would see her devotions directed elsewhere. He wants her love, and expresses this desire in an outburst of devotion, but buried within this impassioned ebullition lies “not a homage, but a deprivation” (Toth “Independent Woman” 657). George’s words confine Paula to the sphere of love . She becomes the caged animal. George fails to see her desire for something larger, her desire for life beyond love. Love as he desires it is love absolute, love to the exclusion of all else - to the exclusion of her music, to the exclusion of self. To love George on his terms, on the terms of patriarchy, would be, for Paula, to lose herself. Union with a man represents death of the ‘true self.’

The language of romantic passion flows freely from George. His life, he claims, is dependent on Paula’s love: “ ‘...to-day a feeling of dread has been forcing itself upon me - dread that with one word you might throw me back into the gulf that would now be one of everlasting misery’ ” (46). Paula is in possession of power, the power to determine his happiness, a power embodied in her voice. At least that is what George’s words suggest. His actions, or rather his reaction to her response, however, reveal the truth of his view of the world. Paula is initially silent, and George immediately ascribes his own meaning to this silence. In his mind there is no question: “ ‘You *will* be my wife’ ” (46 emphasis mine). He speaks for Paula. In true patriarchal fashion her feelings are defined by the male. And further, when Paula does attempt to speak for herself, she

is silenced. Her words are not the words of romantic love. They speak out against the definition which George has imposed upon her, they question his knowledge: “ ‘What do you know of my life?’ ” (46). Paula calls upon codes ‘other’ to those by which George plays, codes which thus, as Martha J. Cutter suggests, he cannot understand (20-21). He cannot perceive of art being, to her, life. He cannot perceive that her passion for music may indeed represent her ‘true self’. He can see only one truth for woman - the ideal of ‘true womanhood.’ Paula’s words speak against this ideal and are thus, as the dictates of patriarchal lore require, labelled insane, meaningless: “ ‘Paula listen to me; don’t speak like a mad woman’ ” (46).¹³

Herein lies the conflict between them. The conception of love which each holds is irreconcilable with that of the other. George sees love as something which Paula must ‘prove’ to him, and the only way for her to do so, in his eyes, is through absolute selflessness, through giving up all else to be with him. Paula, however, recognises that love to her is more. She does indeed love George, but not exclusively. Her music represents an even greater passion: “ ‘it’s something dearer than life, than riches, even than love’ ” (46), and this she will not sacrifice. Paula knows that to marry George would be to give up this ‘other’ passion. She cannot have both. She cannot love *and* be wise, and wisdom in the form of musical ambition is a goal she will not suppress for love of a man. She makes the self-assertive choice, the feminist choice, the choice that stands against the codes of the patriarchal world, and against George’s view of the world, a choice expressed in bold and unquestionable terms. Paula perceives herself as a “self-fulfilled and self-fulfilling individual”, responding to the call of the artist, of the ‘true self’ rather than that of ‘true womanhood’ (Papke 39), and the result is one of success.

¹³ Note also that Paula’s final rejection of George comes to him in a foreign tongue of the old lady of the upper storey: “ ‘Ach Gott! Fraulein Von Stoltz ist schon im Leispic gegangen!’ ” (47). His inability to conceive of the female voice of self-assertion is further emphasised.

Not only does Paula follow her passion, that which comes from within rather than that imposed by the patriarchal world without, she also realises her dream. As Per Seyersted propounds, Paula “make[s] a conscious choice, give[s] her own laws, realise[s] her essence and make[s] herself her own destiny” (*Critical Biography* 104). The ideology of passivity is replaced by the active state of ‘selfhood.’ Paula stands as an embodiment of Simone de Beauvoir’s “emancipated woman,” the woman who “wants to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her” (727).

Refusal of a desirable marriage has placed Paula in a position of power. It creates for her what Cynthia Guidici defines as an “occasion,” a sociological concept which expresses a temporary suspension of the normal codes of behaviour (26).¹⁴ Guidici adopts this concept to explore the social world of Chopin’s women, arguing that in Chopin’s work, “occasions” take the form of her female characters escaping from the patriarchal world, breaking with patriarchal convention and obtaining the empowerment denied women within its codes - the empowerment, in other words, of ‘true selfhood.’ In “Wiser Than a God” Paula benefits from this sense of selfhood, becoming in the end an internationally renowned pianist, but the temporary nature of the “occasion” is still emphasised. This is not a permanent change for the social world. The limitations of patriarchy for women are still stressed. Paula may be able to obtain the power of ‘selfhood’ but she can do so only at a cost. She is forced to make a choice - that between marriage and a career. The two options are mutually exclusive. An “occasion” of female empowerment does indeed result, as she chooses the option which defies convention, but to choose this option is to sacrifice love. Something must be lost. Paula remains imprisoned by the patriarchal cage.

¹⁴ Guidici distinguishes the notion of an “occasion” from that of a “domain” which can involve more permanent, spatial divisions of power in society (i.e. between men and women), to which the discussion will return in the following chapter with reference to “A Story of an Hour”.

The heroine of "A Point At Issue" appears, at first, to have escaped this cage, and to have done so through the very institution created by patriarchy to strengthen its bars: through marriage. Again, the central issue of the story is that of the conflicts inherent to any marital union attempted under the strictures of patriarchy, and again the feminist point is a strong one, but Chopin's exploration of the 'woman question' takes quite a different turn. Rather than having the conflict between 'true selfhood' and 'ideal womanhood' embodied in a solitary heroine forced to make a choice between the two alternatives of marriage and career, in "A Point At Issue" Chopin explores the notion of a woman who is granted the opportunity to have both, who enters into a marriage that actually fosters her intellectual growth and fulfilment. What is desired by the self, and what is desired for the self by society are not, in this case, it seems, mutually exclusive. The traditional choice which must be made, between love and freedom, as identified by Emily Toth in her "The Independent Woman and 'Free' Love," is opposed by the heroine (648). She chooses love *and* freedom. She is allowed independence *within* marriage: 'free' love.

Eleanor's opposition to matrimonial convention is apparent from the outset; she finds all the expectations which tradition imposes upon the newly married couple equally tedious. Regardless of being charged with social impropriety, Eleanor would rather be doing other things than paying tribute to formalities: "feeling the discomfort and attending opprobrium to be far outbalanced by the satisfying consciousness of roaming the heights of free thought, and tasting the sweets of spiritual emancipation" (48). Like Paula, Eleanor has a passion for something which stands beyond domestic duty and the social definition which marriage brings in a patriarchal world, and, also like Paula, this is a passion she will not sacrifice. But unlike Paula, she is not forced to do so. Eleanor, it appears, can both love *and* be wise.

What allows her this opportunity is a marriage very different from that proposed by George Brainard. Charles of “A Point At Issue” claims to have found in Eleanor “his ideal woman” (49), but she has, it seems, altered his conception of what such an ‘ideal’ should be:

she rather surpassed that ideal, which had of *necessity* been but an adorned picture of woman as he had known her. A mild emphasizing of her merits, a soft toning down of her defects had served to offer his fancy a prototype of that bequoted creature. (49 emphasis mine)

In the past he has subscribed to the notion of ‘ideal womanhood,’ as constructed by patriarchal society; society has made it *necessary* for him to view women in this way. But knowing Eleanor has altered that. He no longer values simply appearances and mannerisms; his notion of the ‘ideal’ has grown to encompass recognition of the “free masonry of intellect” (49), a recognition which sees them united on common ground, with like interests, in the pursuit of intellectual growth and development, and which allows Eleanor the life of the “modern woman,” as defined by de Beauvoir: a woman who can attempt to be man’s equal without need to disparage him, who “prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men” (727).

Conservatism is swept aside. Theirs is to be a marriage with a difference, one that will stand outside the expectations of the social world:

In entering upon their new life they decided to be governed by no precedential methods. Marriage was to be a form, that while fixing legally their relation to each other, was in no wise to touch the individuality of either; that was to be preserved intact. Each was to remain a free integral of humanity, responsible to no dominating exactions of so-called marriage laws. And the element that was to make possible such a union was trust in each other’s love, honor, courtesy, tempered by the reserving clause of readiness to meet the consequences of reciprocal liberty. (50)

Chopin has prophesied de Beauvoir’s view of the ‘ideal’ marriage, capturing the notion that the wedded couple should become not a closed unit but rather remain individuals, each “integrated into the society at large, where each (whether male or female) could

flourish without aid” with full acknowledgement that “both are free” (497). This is a marriage to be governed by the laws of those who are partaking therein, not by the laws of patriarchy. These laws are based on the protection of the individual, of freedom and independence, culminating in a union of reciprocity and equality. Rather than marking “the closing period of a woman’s intellectual existence” (50), as marriage would have done for Paula in “Wiser Than a God,” Eleanor’s union with Charles shall instead embellish her learning with greater opportunities for development.

The liberty and independence of Eleanor and Charles’ marriage is embodied in the geographical distance forced between them by Eleanor’s sojourn in Paris. But while this separation serves to highlight the ‘freedom’ of their union, it simultaneously exposes its limitations. A difference in views becomes apparent. Eleanor cherishes the opportunity for intellectual advancement, surrounding herself with books and throwing herself into a new world of possibilities. Charles, on the other hand, regresses. He returns to his old world, proving himself to be a conservative man at heart (Papke 40). The society which he rejoins is that built on custom and tradition, a society astonished at the Faradays’ behaviour:

That two young people should presume to introduce such innovations into matrimony!
It was uncalled for!
It was improper!
It was indecent! (51)

This is the voice of patriarchal society, outraged at its codes having been broken. Eleanor and Charles have upset every social expectation.

In the world of this society Charles can find no-one to match Eleanor in his regard, but while this in itself may be complimentary, the way in which he expresses the fact reveals much about how he has come to view his wife: “She stood pre-eminent. *She was himself*” (52 emphasis mine). As Mary Papke suggests, while Eleanor continues to

see them as two selves with a sole and complementary purpose, here Charles makes them one, denying the existence of his new wife's individuality (41).¹⁵ Eleanor, in this view, is no longer an autonomous being; she is Mrs Faraday, her husband's 'other' half. Their marriage, as unconventional as it may seem, has resulted in that very patriarchal convention of death of the female self. And, as the story progresses, Charles becomes more and more deeply entrenched in this social world. He buys wholesale into the patriarchal norm, finding himself touched by the "girlish charms" of the 'ideal' of 'true womanhood,' Kitty Beaton: "Her laughter and song, the restless motion of her bubbling happiness, he watched with the casual pleasure that one follows the playful gambols of a graceful kitten" (53). His attraction to her is founded entirely upon appearances: "He liked the soft shining light of her eyes. When she was near him the velvet smoothness of her pink cheeks stirred him" (53). But then, he is a man, and therefore, what else can be expected? This is what men do - naturally: "It is idle to suppose that even the most exemplary men go through life with their eyes closed to woman's beauty and their senses steeled against her charm" (53). Patriarchal society defends his patriarchal behaviour: his social flirtation and ego-gratification. And so, it becomes to him unquestionably acceptable. Thus, he reports it to Eleanor without qualms, placing her "large comprehensiveness far above the littleness of ordinary women" (54), but again, his intended compliment at once restricts her. In placing her above the pettiness of feminine emotions as he sees them embodied in Kitty, Charles denies Eleanor any expression of these same emotions. She is forced to fit the dichotomy - the either/or of masculine and thinking, or feminine and feeling. To be one is not to be the other. A woman is the 'ideal' or not a woman at all.

¹⁵ The 'one' that he makes them is, notably, his 'one' - the male self, the dominant self in patriarchal society.

Charles has formed his own set of expectations which Eleanor is deigned to fit, and they stand for male-centred patriarchal definition of the female just as much as those of society do. When the two reunite in Paris, the impact of society is highlighted further. Eleanor is found engaged in an inner battle with these very forces: pure intellect in conflict with pure emotion (Papke 40). She feels “a misery of the heart, against which her reason was in armed rebellion” (54), but with little hope of success. Reason cannot overcome what is innate to her gender: “against it were the too great odds of a woman’s heart, backed by the soft prejudices of a far-reaching heredity” (55). She is a woman so necessarily ruled by the heart, not the head. Both husband and wife have become marked by their sex. They can no longer communicate. They seem to be moving further and further apart, each to their respective pole of socially constructed gender. Eleanor becomes increasingly ‘feminine,’ “losing something of her frankness” (56); Charles, increasingly ‘masculine’ - suspicious and possessive. Neither can escape the clutches of old-fashioned jealousy, and as Per Seyersted suggests, the result is a step in retreat of their initial advanced stand (*Critical Biography* 106-107). Charles’ true possessive nature comes to the fore; Eleanor surrenders her intellect to her emotions (Papke 41). Both have failed to escape the codes of patriarchy that their own laws of marital union stood against.

The story’s moment of revelation uncovers more than a portrait. Through the unveiled painting, Eleanor becomes an ‘objet d’art,’ the ideal woman, an image of beauty: silent and ever obedient, an object crafted by a man to please male eyes: “disposed on the wall in the best possible light to display the gorgeous radiance of her wonderful beauty and the skill of the man who had portrayed it” (57). Charles is delighted and rapt, elated at the prospect of carrying home the “exquisite piece of inanimation” (57), and it seems that it is precisely this quality which pleases him so

much - the state of utter inanimation in which the portrait captures Eleanor; she is forever trapped in its image of the ideal, imprisoned in the patriarchal cage. And so it is in life. Eleanor has become that image. She has buckled under the pressures of society, explaining away her own jealous feelings in terms of her gender: "I have found that there are certain things which a woman can't philosophize about" (58). This is the moment of self-effacement, "the inner self lost through capitulation" (Papke 42). Eleanor has found that she cannot redraw the boundaries of woman's existence, as imposed by patriarchal convention. She is brought once more into the centre of the societal web, becoming, in the process, "the shadow of her true self" (Papke 42).

The opening proverb of "Wiser Than a God" is recalled. Like Paula, Eleanor is forced to make a choice. She cannot be both of reasoning mind *and* an object of male desire as society dictates that such desire be formed. The two are mutually exclusive. Once again, one must be sacrificed in order to obtain the other. Eleanor must either remain Eleanor Gail *or* become Mrs Charles Faraday. On marrying, as Peggy Skaggs suggests, Eleanor cannot retain her individuality (56). She must sacrifice the self to her husband. She must choose the 'proper' alternative - love over intellectual pursuit, submission over ambition. This is the role of the nineteenth-century woman in marriage - to be 'other' to the superior male. And Charles completes the picture. He too has fallen victim to patriarchal lore, falling back into the age-old concept of male superiority, his patriarchal over-evaluation of himself stressed in his claim that inconsistency is a female trait: "my Nellie is only a woman after all" (58). As a female, Eleanor is not expected to know much - she is of the lesser gender. Charles, on the other hand, has nothing to learn - a superior being (Seyersted *A Critical Biography* 108). Patriarchal tradition has proven inescapable. The marriage which Eleanor and Charles sought to live out is not possible

within the bounds of their male-centred society, and those bounds are not readily transcended.

Chopin's early women are caught in a double bind. To be woman is to be selfless; to be true to the self is not to be woman. In choosing the pursuit of self-improvement, Paula forfeits her right to happiness in love; in choosing the happiness of love in marriage, Eleanor, despite the very best of intentions, in the end, forfeits her right to improve, or even *be*, her self. "To love and be wise is scarcely granted even to a god," and never, it would seem, to the nineteenth-century woman caged behind patriarchal bars. From these very beginnings, Chopin's voice exposes the limitations imposed upon women under androcentric rule. It is a voice which is undeniably feminist. The concern it expresses is with women, with exploring the 'woman question,' with what 'true womanhood' means for the nineteenth-century woman, and of this concern the feminist voice speaks out strongly, even shouts. But is Chopin's message here projected perhaps too loudly, too clearly? Does overt feminist treatise always mean effective feminist treatise? A consideration of the way in which this early voice is formed would seem to suggest not. "Wiser Than a God" may well be, as Seyersted claims, Chopin's "most outspoken demonstration of the self-sufficient woman" (*A Critical Biography* 117), but thematics aside, the story lacks in other areas, areas of form and structure. And the same can be said of "A Point At Issue." Here, the early feminist appeal loses in effectiveness. For while Chopin had, at this early stage in her career, begun to write against the androcentric tradition, she had not yet come to use this tradition against itself.

Subversion through reappropriation was yet to come; Maupassant's lesson was still to be learnt.¹⁶ Chopin may have established her themes early on but her techniques are, as Barbara C. Ewell purports in her Chopin biography, "flawed," marking a writer still learning the craft of short story writing (49). It seems that the direction inspired in Chopin by Maupassant, to write by the discovery of "life, not fiction," was yet to be followed and worked into her own writing. In fact, those very elements which, Ewell claims, Chopin borrowed from Maupassant are those which these early stories suffer from a lack of - the characteristics of "impeccable, concise prose, carefully chosen, expressive details, and solidly realistic characters" (19). The presence of such elements would suggest that Chopin was indeed following Maupassant in following Poe, that she was indeed writing by his 'rules' of unity and compression and the "single effect." Their lack rather suggests the reverse: that Chopin still had much to learn from the male-centred tradition of her predecessors. The early stories do have, as Thomas Bonner identifies, a strikingly "European consciousness... their setting and atmosphere... decidedly European" (282) which in itself can be said to speak of the continental influence on Chopin's writing, but, as Richard Fusco suggests, "Maupassant's work did not yet dominate¹⁷ her artistic conceptions" (147). In her *The Awakening: A Study of Maupassant's Influence on Kate Chopin*, Pamela Parker Gaude identifies two elements as being the characteristics of the Frenchman's work most admired by Chopin (21).

¹⁶ Composition dates of Chopin's work, as cited in the appendix to the Seyersted edition, support this claim suggesting that at the time of writing "Wiser Than a God" and "A Point at Issue" Chopin's acquaintance with the short stories of Maupassant was but newly founded. Her early stories were written in June and August, respectively, of 1889, while the essay "Confidences," written in September 1896, suggests that Chopin 'discovered' Maupassant only a short time earlier in 1888: "About eight years ago there fell accidentally into my hands a volume of Maupassant's tales. These were new to me" (700). It appears that Chopin was indeed 'familiar' with Maupassant at the time of writing these stories but it is unlikely that she was 'studied' in his work. That intimate involvement came later in the act of translation.

¹⁷ This thesis, in fact, argues that Maupassant's influence never did *dominate* Chopin's artistry, rather that his influence was what enabled her to overthrow any such male domination of literary pursuit within the short story genre.

Being most admired, it should then follow that these same elements would be those Chopin would chose to appropriate and work into her own stories. But such is not the case. Neither can be seen as characteristic of her early writing, and thus serve as a good point from which to view the lacks therein.

The first element identified by Gaude is “Maupassant’s lack of concern for formal plot” (21). In his biography, Seyersted makes a claim about “Wiser Than a God” which stands in support of this characteristic being not only admired, but also adopted by Chopin. There is, he propounds, “nothing inorganic” about the story; the opening leads straight to the point, the central problem, which is then logically developed (118). His claim must be questioned. The latter may be true¹⁸, but to claim that “everything” serves explicitly to illustrate this point, this central problem of the conflict between career and marriage, seems to be carrying the argument too far. In fact, the criticisms which Seyersted goes on to make of Chopin’s first novel *At Fault* actually seem more applicable here, and with regard to “A Point At Issue.” Seyersted sees the novel as full of inorganic matter, lacking in focus, with many subplots and secondary characters (*Critical Biography* 119-120). Such can be said of the two stories which immediately followed. Both are full of extraneous material and contextual backgrounding, ignorant, or ignoring, of Poe’s “unity of impression.” And both are heavily plotted.¹⁹ The early stories do not uphold Gaude’s suggestion.

¹⁸ The opening does lead straight to the point because the opening *is* the point. The proverb “To love and be wise is scarcely granted even to a god” which pre-emptly the story proper establishes Chopin’s concern before the fact. All else can then build on this. The same applies to the marriage announcement of “Point At Issue.” The point is that as such the two stories are not, in fact, faithful to the tradition of Poe, and then Maupassant. It was Poe’s plan that the story build up to the “single effect” rather than build upon it, work towards it rather than stem from it. It appears almost as though Chopin, in these early stories, was unable to incorporate this underlying concern into the text itself but had to locate it outside, directing the reader’s focus from the outset.

¹⁹ But not in terms of ‘plot’ as Poe would have it defined. See introduction.

In “Wiser Than a God,” the feeling of contrivance is notable from the outset, in the dialogue between mother and daughter with which the story opens. Through this dialogue a sense of past is conveyed. The characters are given a background, upon which their present situation is built. Everything is contextualised; nothing is left to the imagination. The father’s absence, his hopes for Paula, her mother’s state of health, Paula’s musical career, who the Brainards are - all is revealed in the course of the conversation, and in a highly fabricated way, at times touching on the sentimental:

“Well, it’s not the career your poor father had in view for you. How often he has told me when I complained that you were kept too closely at work, ‘I want that Paula shall be at the head,’ ” with appealing look through the window and up into the gray, November sky into that far ‘somewhere,’ which might be the abode of her departed husband. (39)

A similar concern with contextual detail is evident in “A Point At Issue.” Superfluous detail abounds, especially with respect to the more minor characters of the story, a fact highlighted at one point in particular: the introduction of Kitty Beaton. An entire page of the story is devoted to a detailed description of not only this young woman but also of her entire family, and their successive character traits. Their natures seem to be explored in more depth even than those of Eleanor and Charles, yet unnecessarily so, it appears, for Kitty is the only family member of significant importance to the story and its central concern: the marriage relationship of the main characters. And what is really of interest is not Kitty herself, but rather Charles’ reaction to her. She is important as a ‘type,’ not as an individual. She may as well have been any young woman of like nature. Building up a detailed image of her family detracts from, rather than adding to the “single effect.”

In both stories then, nothing is left uncertain. There seems a need for all to be explained, placed in context. As a result, their impact is not compact. What the stories represent is life charted over time, not life captured at a point in time. Chopin fails to attain what Thomas A. Gullason identifies as traits essential to the genre. The short story

writer, he claims, “usually gains in control, in power and in meaningfulness by his [*sic*] arts of distillation, telescoping, and understatement” (30), arts which Chopin, at this point in her career, had yet to accomplish. Rather than looking through a telescope and focusing on a specific moment in time and space, a specific point, Chopin, in these stories, takes a more diffuse, a wider view. Her camera pans rather than focusing, and the excess detail which results detracts attention away from her main concern. As Gullason would claim, “everything is lost” (30). The stories come to be seen not as pieces of short fiction, but as “condensed novels,” precisely what Johannes Hedberg purports that a short story should never be (114). They follow a chronological sequence similar to that traditionally associated with the longer form. John Gerlach recognises the condensed novel as a common nineteenth-century trait within the short story genre, with short fiction of the time frequently “covering a long span of events without developing any dramatised scenes” (52). Such is the case with the two Chopin stories considered here. No one scene dominates the action. This is not to say that one scene is not dominant. In each there is a turning point - the death of Paula’s mother; the revelation of the portrait - but the stories do not centre around these points with any measure of Poe’s “unity of impression.” Rather they are told around them. These moments become part of, and lost in, the sequential chain. The “selectivity” required by Maupassant is not adhered to; his injunction that the short story writer take “only the details useful to his subject and omit all others” is not followed. The stories span a length of time; they do not capture a moment in time.

“Wiser Than A God” and “A Point At Issue” are built on contextual background. They focus on the externals as opposed to the internals of experience, surfaces rather than depth are developed. As Ewell suggests, Chopin “did not yet adequately reveal the psychological realities that were to become her principle subject” (“The Dream of

Female Selfhood” 160), a point which leads to the second, and perhaps more important, of the two elements noted by Gaude: “character development” (21). In these early stories, characters are indeed ‘developed,’ but only historically and contextually. They are given backgrounds and surface detail, but none of the psychological depth to which Gaude refers here, that depth which is evident in Maupassant. In discussing this point the critical commentary surrounding Chopin’s *At Fault* becomes even more important. Weaknesses in characterisation are perhaps the main charge laid against the novel as representative of Chopin’s early writing. Ewell’s comments illustrate this. She sees the novel as full of “extraneous and underdeveloped characters” (*Kate Chopin* 33), their psychological processes unapparent (*Kate Chopin* 43). The same applies to the early stories.

Seyersted speaks directly of “Wiser Than A God” in saying that Chopin’s characters are shown mainly through their actions rather than through exploration of their psychological depths (*A Critical Biography* 118), and so they are. Throughout, the story is concerned with what Paula does, not what she feels. A sequence of events is followed, and very much from the position of outsider. Paula’s inner being remains at a distance, unrevealed. The final section of the story does become more focused. Paula becomes more central and, to a degree, the emotional side of her nature is disclosed. The narrator speaks of her “father’s emotional nature aroused in her,” the “colour mounted [in] her cheeks,” her eyes “almost black with intensity of feeling,” and further to this, Paula’s own expression of her feelings is reported:

“What do you know of my life,” she exclaimed passionately. “What can you guess of it? Is music anything more to you than the pleasing distraction of an idle moment? Can’t you feel that with me, it courses with the blood of my veins? That it is something dearer than life, than riches, even than love?” with a quiver of pain. (46)

But the distance remains. Paula's psyche may be touched on here, but it is not entered into; her feelings are expressed but not explored, they are merely stated from the outside. Paula stands as an embodiment of the "emancipated woman" not in terms of how she feels, but in terms of what she does, that is, in terms of the act of refusing George and choosing career over marriage. The psychology behind this act is not entered into. As Seyersted goes on to claim, Chopin fails to make Paula a three-dimensional character; she does not become a living individual but remains merely an abstraction of theme (*A Critical Biography* 119). In *At Fault*, Peggy Skaggs suggests, Chopin had not yet learned "to draw fully developed, complex characters" (73). Nor had she done so, it seems, on initially turning to the short story form.

Eleanor of "A Point At Issue" is an equally one-dimensional character. She too appears on a highly superficial level. As the story opens, the intellectual side to her nature is all important; this is, after all, what makes her a "modern woman." Thus, the rest of her nature is left undeveloped. She is seen only through the eyes of Charles and it is here that his interest lies - in her possession of "a clear intellect; sharp in its reasoning, strong and unprejudiced in its outlook," in her identity as a "*rara avis*, a logical woman" (49). This is the view of Eleanor projected. The view of one outside her experience, and therefore, a view which can but touch the surface. Eleanor is represented as she appears to someone else. There is a serious lack of insight into how she feels herself to be. The woman's inner being is again left unexplored, and once more the outcome is a distancing. The focus is on the surface: Eleanor's *appearance* from the outside. Mary E. Papke argues that Chopin's earliest stories *do* show a marked concern with psychological realism, but the very terms in which she describes this realism - as "psychological portraiture" (23) - reveal the superficial nature of its presentation. It is not only at the close of "A Point At Issue" that Eleanor becomes embodied and

entrapped within the flat one-sided work of art; she is the one-dimensional portrait throughout. Both heroines stand as evidence of the lack of life Larzer Ziff identifies in the characters of *At Fault*. Ziff argues that in the novel Chopin “proceeds by contrivance rather than psychoanalysis,” and the importance of this discrepancy is highlighted as he continues, pointing out the urgent need for such analysis in terms of Chopin’s theme of self-fulfilment (299). Without consideration of the inner psyche how can the self even be explored let alone attain fulfilment?

Chopin has produced the very kind of stories with which Poe himself expressed a certain displeasure in his “The Philosophy of Composition,” stories in which “the writer sets out to work in the combination of events to form merely the basis of narrative” (67). She sets out literally to ‘tell a story,’ not to capture a moment or create a “single effect.” She does, in these stories, precisely what Valerie Shaw purports the short story must *not* do if it is to fulfil the aim of quick concentrated impression; that is, to “linger to unfold for the reader little incidents and wayward episodes, the dull patches and uneventful intervals through which he actually experiences time” (46). Maupassant’s formal stylistic influence is not yet evident, and Chopin’s feminist voice suffers from this lack. The heroines are viewed from a distance, and while the feminist treatise which lies behind their actions is boldly overt, it remains just this - a treatise. The result is an appeal to the mind; not to the senses. The stories speak *at* rather than *to*. Their tone is didactic; their design to teach rather than to touch and emotionally move.²⁰ Would a more subtly implied feminist statement carry greater effect?

²⁰ The heroine’s emancipation occurs at a spiritual as opposed to a sensual level - a point which will be elaborated on in the conclusion.

Chopin's later stories seem to suggest precisely this. In them she overcomes these initial artistic weaknesses. The influence of the male-dominated short story tradition becomes more manifest as her work becomes increasingly Maupassantian in style and form. But simultaneously, and seemingly paradoxically, these same stories speak with a feminist voice that is, through its very appropriation of the male discourse, increasingly subversive. Through adoption, and subsequent adaptation, of male codes of the short story form Chopin's feminist voice gains in strength. All is compressed, condensed, unified; all leads to the "single effect." Chopin has learnt the 'rules' of Poe, and with them has learnt the art of subtlety, entering the female psyche and exploring the inner workings of the woman; she is no longer limited to surface actions; her art reaches ever deeper into the workings of the female mind. Through the art not of imitation but of reappropriation, Chopin can speak more powerfully against that very male-centred tradition from within which she writes.

Chapter Two

Maupassantian Subtlety and Elusiveness: The Covert Feminist Voice of "The Story of an Hour"

I never hear the word "escape"
Without a quicker blood,
A sudden expectation' A flying attitude!²¹

"Wiser Than a God" and "A Point At Issue" have been largely ignored in terms of critical commentary, and are, in fact, unknown to many readers of Chopin's work. Despite the artistic deficiencies of these early works, this neglect seems surprising as it is in these stories that the grounds for Chopin's feminism are laid. On consideration of the path which Chopin's short story career took after their completion, however, it becomes more apparent why they may be dismissed. From the time of writing these very early stories, Chopin's literary career blossomed, but her growth carried her in a somewhat different direction from that initially taken. She moved away from exploration of what Thomas Bonner labels her "European Consciousness" (281), and turned to enter more fully into *the* mode of popular fiction of the time: the local colour movement. As the titles of her first two collections, *Bayou Folk* and *A Night in Acadie*,²² suggest, Chopin's stories became more specific to the Louisiana environment with which she had become intimately acquainted.²³ Her writing took on a distinctly regional flavour. Emphasis turned to the traditions, the manners, the customs of this locality. And the 'local colour' label has stuck. Chopin's recognition as a short story writer has been founded predominantly in precisely this characteristic: the regional interest which

²¹ Emily Dickinson, *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*. 22

²² *Bayou Folk* was published 1894; *A Night in Acadie*, 1897.

²³ On marrying Oscar Chopin (son of a French father and Creole mother) in 1870, Kate went to live in his native Louisiana. From there, in 1879, they moved to Cloutierville in Natchitoches Parish to manage the family plantation and it was here that she formed her acquaintance with the 'local colour' of Cane River Creoles, Cajuns, and Negroes which were later to become a part of the world of her literature (Seyerstedt "Introduction" *CW* 21-22).

her *Bayou* and *Acadie* stories convey. Despite the recent 'feminist' revival of nineteenth-century women writers, this categorisation has remained with Chopin. Even in contemporary criticism surrounding her work, her treatment of women's issues and her exploration of the 'woman question' is all too often given only secondary attention. But as Chopin's two early attempts at short fiction testify, albeit in an artistically immature fashion, her writing contains more than a concern with specifically regional aspects of life. Just how much more can best be seen in her third and final collection, "A Vocation and a Voice."²⁴ Here Chopin escapes the local colour environment, once more bringing her concern with women's being to the forefront. And here, too, the influence of Maupassant reaches new heights.

Found in this collection are what may be called Chopin's 'best' stories: stories which, according to Peggy Skaggs, show "a strength and a maturity, a firmness of line and a level of artistic growth" (39) which is difficult to disregard, stories which are "fully born organic entities, firmly controlled, and entirely satisfying works of art which show that she knew exactly what she was doing" (Seyersted *A Critical Biography* 130). A shift had occurred in Chopin's writing away from the tradition of local colour with its emphasis on setting towards a more 'experimental' outlook. As Emily Toth suggests, Chopin had 'turned away from sunny Louisiana scenes with neatly crafted endings . . . toward more intimate, untidy explorations of human passions" (*Kate Chopin* 274). Chopin had begun to experiment both technically and thematically. Her writing had

²⁴ *A Vocation and a Voice* was never published in Chopin's lifetime, although not through lack of trying. Her proposed contents for the collection shifted between attempts, but the list of stories to be included as it stood in 1902-1903, according to Barbara C. Ewell in her Chopin biography, are as follows: "A Vocation and a Voice," "Elizabeth Stock's One Story," "Two Portraits," "An Idle Fellow," "A Mental Suggestion," "An Egyptian Cigarette," "The White Eagle," "Story of an Hour," "Two Summers and two Souls," "Sketches," "The Unexpected," "Her Letters," "The Kiss," "Suzette," "Fedora," "The Recovery," "The Blind Man," "A Morning's Walk," "Lilacs," "Ti Demon," "The Godmother." Only three of the tales are set in Louisiana showing setting to no longer be the predominant organising feature (Ewell 125-126).

become more formally controlled, her treatment of 'the woman question' deeper and more sensual (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 126). The initial artistic weaknesses of "Wiser Than a God" and "A Point At Issue" appear to have been overcome, and this has been done, it will be argued here, through the appropriation of the male-dominated short story tradition which presented itself to Chopin in the form of Maupassant.

This shift which is evident in the stories collected in *A Vocation and a Voice* is embodied most succinctly in one story in particular: "The Story of an Hour." The two and a half pages which make up this piece are not only an embodiment of all Chopin takes from Maupassant and the andocentric short story tradition, but also an embodiment of all she does with that which she takes. Although, as in "Wiser Than a God" and "A Point at Issue," Chopin's interest again lies with marriage and the condition for the woman within this institution as it is patriarchally constructed, here the similarity between "The Story of an Hour" and the early stories ends. The way in which Chopin tackles this concern with 'the woman question' lies worlds apart from her early feminist treatises. New techniques are explored and the result is a growth in artistry which is marked by not only an increase in technical skill, but a subsequent increase in effectiveness in Chopin's 'new,' appropriated but resoundingly appropriate, treatment of 'the woman question.'

The title of the story captures the essence of Chopin's artistic growth in itself. This is truly "The Story of an Hour." Chopin has left behind her the need to report chronologically the lives of her characters. The capturing of the moment has become the artistic endeavour, and the result a story more in line with that proposed by Hedberg as the 'norm:' "Usually the short story writer concentrates on *one* character in a *single* episode. He does not trace his development but reveals him to us at a particular moment in his life" (113). In "The Story of an Hour," the 'he' becomes a 'she,' but the formula

is adhered to. Here is a moment, a single episode in time, a slice of life at its most slivered. Here is Chopin at her most Maupassantian. She encapsulates the Poesque, centring, as Seyersted suggests, “on a small event, tak[ing] us right into the story, and develop[ing] it logically toward an inevitable conclusion” (“Introduction” *CW* 31). Concentration is increased, compression is achieved. “The Story of an Hour” captures the very essence of Poe’s “unity of impression,” and thus, its artistry can be likened to Maupassant’s. In “A Vocation and a Voice” Chopin attains stories which sustain reader interest and are, as Edward D. Sullivan says of Maupassant’s work, developed with economy and concision to the exclusion of all “verbal flourishes or elaborate enumeration” (10), to the exclusion of all found to be ‘at fault’ in the early stories. “The Story of an Hour” epitomises this shift in style.

The condensed nature of the story is evident at a mere glance: it is truly a *short* story - the story of an hour. This moment in time is captured of itself, with no attempt to provide contextual background, to account for every action as part of a larger whole. But brevity alone is not the key to its effect. The story *is* the moment, is the hour of Mrs Mallard’s response to the news of her husband’s ‘death’ and eventual return. It is of this response that the story is made, and all leads to the moment which reveals the truth behind this response, the moment which at once kills the response²⁵ but simultaneously brings its real significance to life. All focuses towards that single point: the final revelation of Brently Mallard’s ‘death’ and the death which the news of his life paradoxically brings for his wife in the story’s final, double twist. All is composed with this end in mind. In the very nature of Poe, “unity of impression” is thus achieved.

²⁵ That is, the moment of Brently Mallard’s return not only literally ‘kills’ his wife, but also, more symbolically, ‘kills’ the selfhood which, through his death, she temporarily attains. Self-realisation is the response which is killed.

Rereading the story with knowledge of the final turn of events highlights this “totality of effect.” With knowledge of the story’s outcome, words and actions take on new meaning and their significance is more fully recognised. The opening sentence of the story serves as a prime example: its words carry much more weight than is initially conceived. Chopin succeeds in adhering to Poe’s plan for the short story from the outset: her “very initial sentence tend[ing] . . . to the bringing out of this effect” (Poe Rev. *Twice Told Tales* 60). The story begins: “Knowing that Mrs Mallard was afflicted with *a heart trouble*, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death” (352 emphasis mine), an innocent enough opening, but on reading the story for a second time these words may be assigned greater significance. The evidence in point is that part of the sentence which is italicised, that part which indicates the physical state of Mrs Mallard’s health. Or so it may appear on a first reading. On reaching the story’s ending, however, understanding of her problem deepens: its significance becomes more spiritual than physical. The more that is revealed about the heroine’s marriage, the better understood is the condition of her heart (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 89). Her heart trouble is a trouble which vanishes with her husband’s death and only reappears as he does. Indeed, it is very specifically *a heart trouble*, and as Madonne M. Miner suggests, the use of this indefinite article implies much (30). Mrs Mallard does not simply suffer from heart trouble, she suffers from a particular kind of heart trouble, one that is identified in relation to her husband. And this trouble is central to the story. It is the trouble of marriage in a patriarchal world and it is this ‘trouble’ that Chopin sets out to critique. Focus is attained from the very start.

And focus is sustained throughout. Chopin responds to Maupassant’s request for “selectivity” with affirmation. In “The Story of an Hour” she has taken “only the details

useful to [her] subject" (Maupassant "The Writer's Goal" 1457).²⁶ The story is free from trivialities and over-contextualisation. Maupassant's proposal of form is adhered to, and the gains are great. At this point in Chopin's career, the short story has become, for her, more condensed, more concentrated and organically focused in its treatment of 'the woman question,' and simultaneously, as a result of this achievement of "unity of impression," as breadth of scope decreases, attention delves deeper. The flat, one-dimensional characters of old are brought to life; they become 'real.' In no way can Mrs Mallard be labelled "extraneous and underdeveloped," nor does she support any of the charges laid against Chopin for her early characterisation. In Mrs Mallard's story, actions and surface details give way to interiority, the internals of experience. Chopin enters into and explores the female psyche: Louise Mallard becomes a living individual, a "fully developed, complex character." The concentration of 'plot' on a single moment in time provides the opportunity which allows Chopin to make psychological investigation a reality, and a powerful artistic, and feminist, tool.

B.M Ejxenbaum would argue that in adopting this tool Chopin was writing against the trend of her time, a claim which is explained in his taking of O.Henry as the 'norm' by which to judge. Ejxenbaum sees O.Henry's work as embodying a shift in short story writing which stands in complete opposition to that captured in the works of Chopin. The 1880s, he argues, saw universal changes in the writing of the genre, "structural devices purposely laid bare in their purely formal meaning, motivation becom[ing] simpler, psychological analysis disappear[ing]" (87). Such may have been the case for O.Henry and others whose artistic focus lay in 'playing on plot,' but Chopin lies outside this 'universal' claim. In her work the reverse process can be seen in action.

²⁶ See the Introduction for the discussion on Maupassant's theories on the short story writer from which this quote is drawn.

Plot, in terms of the scheming of events, becomes less apparent; psychological analysis comes increasingly to the foreground. And in relation to her mentor Maupassant, this is in no way surprising. Chopin's psychological interest is the very same as that identified in the Frenchman's work by Henry James. Writing of Maupassant's charge that psychology should be hidden in a book as it is in real life, James points out that hiding does in no way mean avoiding: "all depends upon the observer, the nature of one's observation, and one's curiosity" (131). Maupassant explores the psychology of human life through implication, indirectly but certainly centrally. What lies underneath is what is important - hidden depths, not surface superficialities. As Maupassant claimed, it was his intention to get inside his characters, to explore their inner beings, explore "how minds are modified under the influence of environmental circumstances, and how sentiments and passions are developed" ("The Writer's Goal" 1457). The interior takes precedence in his work, and Chopin appears to have learnt from this: aim for the deep, not for the broad; the internal moment, not the external scope.

"The Story of an Hour" is this internal moment captured in its very essence: an hour of the inner psyche of Louise Mallard. But it is, at the same time, very much more than simply *an* hour. It is an hour of resounding significance, capturing, as it does, that which Ian Reid calls a "moment of crisis," an "essential quality" he claims, of the short story (55). Reid elaborates in citing Theodore Straud: the "moment of crisis" is that which can be seen to occur when "a character undergoes some decisive change in attitude and understanding" (56). What he describes is James Joyce's moment of epiphany and in the story considered here Chopin captures this very notion. "The Story of an Hour" embodies Valerie Shaw's claim for the common element of the short narrative form: "a crisis which momentarily halts the flow of time, leaving everything permanently altered once it has passed" (47). This moment of epiphany lies at the very

core of "The Story of an Hour;" it is the story's quintessential being. Through it, Chopin "conscientiously analyzes that moment in a woman's life when the boundaries of the accepted everyday world are suddenly shattered and the process of self-consciousness begins" (Papke 62). Mrs Mallard's gradual recognition of selfhood is the story's "single effect," her recognition of that self which lies outside the bounds of marriage, that identity which is her own as opposed to that which defines her in relation to her husband, her own name: Louise. It is the process of awakening. As Mrs Mallard retreats to her room, the flow of time is halted, but on the passing of a single hour, all, for her, is permanently altered. In that hour Mrs Mallard has found something which necessarily changes her life, for it gives her life. She has found the 'true selfhood' which marriage has repressed, and in doing so, has recognised her oppressor. She has become the animal of "Emancipation." She has discovered and been freed from the cage which has held her in, the patriarchal cage of marriage, and when this 'moment' of discovery is over, her perception of the world is forever changed. She can see life only as lived through the 'true self.' She will not return to the cage. When her husband's return denies her this life, death is the only escape. Mrs Mallard's hour is over. The moment has changed everything - an epiphany.

At least, it has changed everything for Louise Mallard, for it is she who has undergone transformation, transformation of a strikingly psychological nature. It is the inner dimension of the moment which is captured and explored, the inner psyche of the heroine: her emotions, her feelings, her senses. As Sara Desaussure Davis suggests of the new direction of writing style evident in *A Vocation and a Voice*, a "fantasy" world is created for Mrs Mallard, a world in which she can be in touch with the "vital forces of nature," and thus, with the sensations thereby aroused (200). To explore her inner being, to explore the full depth of her response to the news of her husband's death, Mrs

Mallard must leave the bounds of the social world; she must physically remove herself. She must move from a place “in which the community’s moral standards prevail” to one in which the “burden of public behaviour can be suspended and the ‘private’ self can emerge” (Fluck 157). Through enforcement of a spatial division, Mrs Mallard can become Louise. She can obtain the power of selfhood which patriarchal society denies her, removed as she is from the usual social codes. The room of her own²⁷ to which she retreats, “alone” and “hav[ing] no one follow her” (352), is illustrative of Guidici’s notion of the “domain” - the usual divisions of society, in this case those between men and women, are reversed in a spatial fashion (26). Here Louise can be herself, can realise that ‘true self’ which society denies her, and the process of this is precisely what unfolds behind the room’s closed doors.

A journey is taken: a journey of self discovery. Louise Mallard “reach[es] into her soul” (352). Chopin presents an uncensored account of emotions and desires which, as Richard Fusco argues, human beings often hide from others (153), the practice of hiding or concealing being one in which the woman ruled by patriarchy has no choice but to partake. In the room of her own, freed from the bounds of patriarchy, Mrs Mallard’s emotions and desires are revealed, albeit indirectly. The sensual is explored through Mrs Mallard’s response to the natural world which she contemplates through the window of her sanctuary, her emotional reaction lying in images of nature. She, like all of nature around her, is “aquiver with the new spring life,” and like the fresh breath of rain that fills the air, the prospect of this new life, life as a ‘true self’ is “delicious” (352). “Patches of blue sky” show themselves “here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other” (352), and a like process is occurring within.

²⁷ In Virginia Woolf’s sense of the term as well as its literal meaning.

Mrs Mallard's initial "storm of grief" (352) is breaking. Until now her 'true self' has been oppressed, clouded by the conventions of patriarchy, but now her eyes are fixed on the patches of blue in the sky above. The clouds of patriarchal convention are parting with the removal of her husband's presence and her subsequent removal of self from the outer social world, and like the blue patches of sky, her 'true self' is ready to shine through. Here is seen what Patricia Hopkins Lattin claims to be Chopin's "favourite way of stimulating the process of self discovery: having her heroine "react sensuously to an element of nature" (224). The feelings are "subliminal," coming to Mrs Mallard by way of "natural undercurrents" (Bender 257), but they are feelings none the less. The journey is very much an inner one. The female psyche has been entered.

Chopin has, it seems, reached a new dimension of characterisation in her writing. No longer does her heroine remain a mere abstraction of a feminist theme: she becomes a living and feeling individual. Mrs Mallard is transformed. She becomes Louise, her 'true self.' And that 'true self' is explored, not superficially, but psychologically, probing beyond mere appearances of grief and "reach[ing] into her soul" (352) wherein lies her 'true' emotional response. The reader is taken deep inside Louise's experience of reality, beyond the easy interpretation of those behavioural responses expected from her as Mrs Mallard, in the wifely role, to that which occurs within, beyond her "fair, calm face" to the "coursing blood" which pulses beneath the surface (353). The heroine is, thus, brought closer to the reader; sympathies are aroused, and herein lies support for Poe's claim: that through brevity and effect - the "single effect" - the short story writer is able to "capture" readers, emotionally involving them in the moment (61). Through her adoption of Maupassantian depth of psychology Chopin achieves this. Rather than simply telling, here she does more; she touches, moves, even shocks. To play on Poe: "During ['The Story of an Hour'] the *soul* of the

reader is in the writer's control" (Rev. *Twice Told Tales* 61).²⁸ Through appropriation of the Maupassantian model, Chopin has gained from the male-centred tradition of which he was a part. She has learnt the technicalities of the genre, a lesson which shows itself in her subsequent growth in artistry, her move away from the superficial to delve into inner depths and reveal not only the politics, but the psychology behind 'the woman question.'

And here, of course, is where the interest of this study lies: in what Chopin achieves through use of this appropriated technique in feminist terms. As seen in "Wiser Than a God" and "A Point At Issue," the content of Chopin's stories was subversive from the very start. From the time of these early stories, Chopin wrote consistently and conscientiously against the conventions of patriarchy, against those conventions to which Maupassant and his male predecessors subscribed; she wrote with a feminist voice. But however consistent this voice may have been in terms of its presence, its form was constantly shifting and moving, paradoxically guided and directed by the very tradition against which it spoke. In subscribing to Maupassantian form, and the tradition of short story writing contained therein, Chopin found herself able to speak with a stronger feminist voice. Male technique lent itself to female critique. Here, in "The Story of an Hour," the feminist treatise of the early stories is surpassed.

The feminist content of the story is undeniable. In this sense, the 'moment' of the story's hour is resoundingly subversive. It is the moment of recognition of female selfhood. Alone in her room, Mrs Mallard sees beyond the "bitter moment" (353) of grief which follows the news of her husband's supposed death. She sees into the future, a husbandless future in which "There would be no one to live for her . . . she would live

²⁸ See the Introduction for Poe's use of this phrase in arguing for the effectiveness founded in brevity.

for herself" (353 emphasis mine). Mrs Mallard realises that death of her husband represents freedom from the bounds of marriage, and that oppression inherent to it under patriarchal convention. The clouds which represent this state of entrapment are parting, the freedom of blue sky is shining through, and the joy of once more being Louise, of being an identity of her own right, can be explored: only temporarily, but the very restricted nature of this moment emphasises the true freedom it represents. Having tasted of the joy of selfhood, having "opened and spread her arms out" to it "in welcome" (353), Louise cannot become again Mrs Mallard. To do so would mean death of the self, and now, knowing and owning that self, there is no option but death on her husband's return, for "what could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of *self*-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being" (353 emphasis mine). Self-realisation becomes the "joy that kills" (354). The message is indeed a feminist one. Here too Chopin speaks of female emancipation. But the voice with which she speaks stands apart from that of the early stories. The feminism is new and, more importantly, the feminism is newly powerful. Chopin speaks more effectively, and she does so through speaking less directly. The artistic move she has made is captured perfectly in a phrase from the story itself: Chopin's feminism has become more "subtle and elusive" (353).


In "Wiser Than A God" and "A Point At Issue," the feminist voice of Chopin sounds itself extremely overtly. The conflict between 'true womanhood' and 'true selfhood' is directly exposed through the actions of, and reactions to, heroines who stand against the patriarchal norm, and the tone behind this exposure is unquestionably didactic. In "The Story of an Hour" something different is seen, or rather heard. Chopin's feminist voice has undergone a transformation. It has become the hidden voice. What were overt statements are now "veiled hints that [reveal] in half

concealing" (352).²⁹ This is the process of change which Martha J. Cutter explores in her "Losing the Battle but Winning the War: Resistance to Patriarchal Discourse in Kate Chopin's Short Fiction." It is one which Cutter sees as embodied in the voices of Chopin's heroines. Giving women a 'voice' which enables them to speak out against patriarchal forces that attempt to exclude women from entering into discourse is one way in which Chopin makes women central to her stories, but Cutter claims that the voice Chopin gives her heroines does not remain static throughout her literary career, that a shift is evident in her work in terms of the way in which the female voice is projected (17). Chopin, Cutter argues, moves from depicting women who enunciate their desires and experiences overtly (only to have their voices quickly erased or negated by patriarchal structures and labelled insane or meaningless³⁰) to providing her female characters with strategies of resistance which entail a "voice couvert" - "a voice which attempts to undermine patriarchal discourse through mimicry and through hollowing out the patriarchy from within its own structures" (17). The feminist challenge in the later stories is said to go "underground . . . become less open and direct, more covert and inscribed" (18). The women of these stories are subversive from within. They behave as they should, in line with patriarchal convention, but underneath their surface compliance lies resistance. They subtly and elusively subvert those very codes to which they superficially subscribe.³¹

"The Story of an Hour" is one such story. The feminist voice which it projects is not direct and open but "subtle and elusive." It is the hidden voice of feminism. The

²⁹ Again a phrase from the story itself captures the very process of Chopin's writing.

³⁰ As is seen in "Wiser Than a God" and "A Point at Issue." Paula's voice is labelled insane; Eleanor's becomes meaningless, to the point that she no longer has faith in it herself.

³¹ This is a similar process to that undertaken by Chopin herself. Her own voice, asserted through her writing, subverts the very patriarchal discourse of the short story form to which she subscribes; she challenges the tradition from within its bounds, simultaneously subscribing to and undercutting. 

story is undoubtedly one of female emancipation, of a woman coming to a realisation of 'true selfhood' as she is freed from the imprisonment of marriage, but it is a story which describes this process from within the cage of patriarchy. Louise Mallard does not stand up to patriarchy in the direct and obvious way witnessed in the actions of Paula and Eleanor of the early stories, breaking conventions and freely asserting their rights to selfhood. She does not have to. The design of the story allows her to undergo the transformational process of self-realisation without the need to challenge openly the patriarchal status quo which denies her the right to this self. Mrs Mallard's awakening requires no conscious decision on her part. It is portrayed as something which happens *to* her, rather than something which is instigated by her with oppositional force. The conflict between the ideology of the 'true woman' and the realisation of 'true selfhood' is captured not through an explicit splitting of the two alternatives and imposition of a choice upon the heroine, but through an intimate engagement with that elusive 'true self' as it is realised. The heroine is not forced to make any conscious decision against the patriarchal tradition. As Winifred Fluck suggests, Mrs Mallard's self-assertion does not stand in the way of convention; it does not require of her rejection of her husband and the marital lore (155). The opportunity for awakening is provided *for* her by his supposed death.³² Thus, she is able to obtain engagement with the self from within the bounds of patriarchy.

Mrs Mallard is placed apart from 'other' women from the outset. She reacts 'differently' to her husband's death: "She did not hear the story as many woman have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance" (352). She is at once emotional, weeping "with sudden wild abandonment" (352), and revealing a

³² Just as in the life of their marriage her husband has provided everything *for* her - including an identity irreconcilable with her 'true' inner being, her 'true self.'

passionate nature. Furthermore, she takes action on this news, physically removing herself from the outer social world: "she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her" (352). But such action can certainly be read as a conventional response of grief as opposed to a conscious act of isolation for means of self-exploration which would not be possible in the patriarchal world outside her doors. In fact, the way in which the process of Mrs Mallard's self-revelation is described suggests that it is in no way comes from within the heroine. The reverse actually appears true. The awakening of 'true self' which Mrs Mallard undergoes is portrayed as something which happens *to* her, not something which she makes happen:

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air. (353)

Mrs Mallard may take action on going to her room, but once there, as Madonne M. Miner suggests, she becomes "subject to" the feelings and emotions aroused by her husband's death. These feelings are not experienced actively; they are forced upon her (31). They seem to be beyond her control, to act independently, as impressions of the inner and outer world "wash over her" (Papke 62). The action is not her own. She does not consciously stand against the patriarchal world and overtly defy its conventions; she is unconsciously overcome by feelings and emotions over which she has no control. She merely sits and waits. What results is an "unexpected breakthrough" rather than a conscious choice (Fluck 155). When Mrs Mallard does recognise the feelings that are being aroused in her she does take action and attempts to control them³³ - "She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was

³³ These are not appropriate feelings to have on the death of one's husband, especially not in a world ruled by patriarchal convention. Ironically, it is this very patriarchal construction which makes such feelings inevitable. Death of the husband becomes a symbol of freedom, of escape.

striving to beat it back with her will" (353) - but her failure to do so is inevitable. She has not been designed to control anything within her marriage; patriarchal rule has left her "as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been" (353).

Mrs Mallard finally gives in to what has been creeping up on her - her inner self. She "abandons herself" (353) to what lies beneath the life she has been living in the conventional wifely role. As a "little whispered word escape[s] her slightly parted lips" (353) her 'true self' is freed from the clouds of patriarchal convention. At this point, Mrs Mallard recognises her emancipation. She embraces it, is reborn, begins to think for herself (Papke 63). She takes control and the word is claimed as her own: "She said it over and over under her breath: 'free, free, free!' " (353). She bids goodbye to restraint and repression. She is no longer subject to the force of the wifely role:

The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body. (353)

Her perception has become "clear and exalted" (353) and she now recognises the source of her joy. Her husband may have been adored, "kind" and "tender," (353) but he also represents a past way of life - one which she will not miss and will not be grieved to see end. He represents years of life which did not "belong to her absolutely," in which she did not "live for herself" (353), but someone lived for her. Here Mrs Mallard's "old self," that which grieves for the husband "that had never looked save with love upon her" (353), gives way to the "new self": the self that will revel in the joy of self-fulfilment "beyond ideological strictures and the repressive effects of love" (Papke 63). All that stands in opposition to her old life is welcomed. A new life is on the horizon as the clouds part, a life that will be her own: "There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to

impose a private will upon a fellow creature" (353).³⁴ Mrs Mallard has, in this "brief moment of illumination" (353), recognised the truth of her married life: her husband has been living life for her, she has been possessed by another.

The sense of female emancipation here is powerful and penetrating. Mrs Mallard has uncovered and recovered that identity which is her own outside marriage, and has become her own person once more, Louise. The love she felt for her husband and that which he showed her pale into insignificance at her new realisation of selfhood: "what could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognised as the strongest impulse of her being!" (353). Chopin has again made the woman subject, central. But, in this case, as is claimed by Madonne M. Miner, that subjectivity is limited. When alone in her room, Mrs Mallard appears to attain autonomy of being and 'true selfhood,' but throughout the hour, she remains in possession to some other force which limits her moments of 'being' (31). She may have escaped the cage of marriage but still she remains within the wifely role, a role which denies her control. She is gradually grasped by this impulse of the self and finally overcome (Fluck 155). At no point does she take any action which leads to this state of transformation. It is a response which she feels as the significance of her husband's death dawns on her. And herein lies the key to the story's feminist effectiveness: feelings take precedence over actions. There is no need for Louise Mallard to act in overt defiance of the patriarchal lores which restrain her. The psychological response of her inner self delves far deeper into the very essence of 'the woman question.' The hidden feminist voice, that which appears to speak from within

³⁴ Note the universal nature of this critique. Both men and women are held accountable. Neither sex is to blame, nor any individual, but rather the nature of patriarchal society which conditions their responses to one another. Both sexes fall prey to its dictates. This Maupassantian trait evident throughout Chopin's career is discussed in more depth later in this study.

the patriarchal discourse, is the feminist voice which uncovers the most, the voice of “veiled hints that reveal in half concealing” (352).

Through entering the psychological world of Mrs Mallard, through feeling her transformation, her awakening, with her, rather than simply being told it, a deeper understanding of her situation is created, an understanding which becomes important on reaching the twist of the story’s ending. It is only with this inner knowledge that the significance of Brently Mallard’s return can be realised. Mrs Mallard leaves the confines of her room a new person. She has become identified as Louise, and as Louise life will be worth living; her actions shall not be dictated by anyone but herself. But in leaving the room of her own, Louise also leaves that open window through which “she was drinking in a very elixir of life” (354). She returns to entrapment. The cage of marriage awaits her - a fate worse than death. And thus, with the story’s end comes the latter, an end for Mrs Mallard which only the reader who has shared in her awakening can fully understand. Her death is, as Cynthia Guidici suggests, a kind of suicide: had she not actually died Louise would be symbolically dead, for ‘true selfhood’ cannot live on within the bounds of patriarchal marriage (29). She has not died of joy, that joy which society expects a wife would feel on the safe return of her husband. She has died rather from loss of joy, loss of the joy of selfhood she had momentarily found. Having realised the possibility of life within this state of self, of life beyond the trap of marriage, Louise cannot return to its confines. Death is the only option. No simple statement is made in favour of self-assertion. In fact, the story’s ending seems to deny this very possibility, but at the same time, Louise’s death is also a victory. She does not simply become another dead woman on the alter of patriarchy: she is a dead woman whose story of temporary self-realisation exposes the patriarchal social code to the world. Exposure is achieved; questioning follows. Herein lies the subversive nature of

the story. As Winifred Fluck claims, the ending does not betray self-assertion altogether. Death may represent an end of being for Louise, but death also blocks that other option available to her: return to her former marriage (156). Through death, patriarchy is evaded; through death, the feminist voice of the story gains new life.

This new life is not only heard but felt. Emotional, rather than strictly intellectual, responses are aroused. The hour of Louise Mallard is experienced from the inside, her very inner being revealed, her sensual awakening explored. Maupassant's intention, to explore the inner beings of his characters, "how minds are modified under the influence of environmental circumstances, and how sentiments and passions are developed" ("The Writer's Goal" 1457), appears to have become Chopin's own. The result is a feminist subversiveness with resounding effectiveness, a subversiveness which is *felt* through the heroine rather than *told* through her. The didactic tone of the early stories is no longer evident. No longer is Chopin's feminist appeal necessarily feminist treatise. Instead it appears as an exploration of a moment in human experience with feminist implications. Chopin's feminism has become subtle; it lies beneath the patriarchal surface, speaking out from under the cover of androcentric form. And in their subtlety these feminist implications are emotionally moving: they speak *to* rather than shout *at*. What was didactic has now become explorative. Chopin's artistic goals have come to fall more in line with those of Maupassant. She can indeed be seen to share that sole aim of the French writer suggested by Edward D. Sullivan: "to tell stories that reveal some insight into the human condition" (10). Insight is the key to the effectiveness of Chopin's 'new' feminist voice.

"The Story of an Hour" is suggestive of quite definite appropriation on Chopin's part. Aspects of the male-centred tradition of Poe and predecessors cannot be denied as present; form has become more concentrated, more focused, psychological depth has

deepened characterisation. And through appropriation of these elements, Chopin has gained artistic strength. But more important than this is the suggestion of *reappropriation* contained within the story. Not only has Chopin's artistry gained strength, but so too has her feminism. The effectiveness of her subversive content has increased through the very process of submersion in the tradition which it subverts. Chopin is able to speak out with greater force from within the patriarchal discourse. And the voice with which she does so becomes more effective over time, as it simultaneously becomes increasingly Maupassantian. At the time of writing "The Story of an Hour," Chopin had become adept in her adoption and adaptation of male form and style; from this point on the French influence of Maupassant becomes increasingly apparent. Chopin begins to deal with more complex Maupassantian issues - issues of adultery, amorality, the despair of human existence - applying to them also her feminist voice, that voice which speaks out against Maupassant's view of the world. As his influence increases, so too does the challenge Chopin asserts against the patriarchy he represents.

Chapter Three

Maupassantian Amoralism and the 'unmentionable': The Repudiation of Patriarchal Passionlessness in "The Kiss"

Have you got a brook in your little heart,
Where bashful flowers blow,
And blushing birds go down to drink,
And shadows tremble so?

And nobody knows, so still it flows,
That any brook is there;
And yet your little draught of life
Is daily drunken there.³⁵

While "The Story of an Hour" may be most succinct in capturing the essence of the shift in Chopin's artistry evident in *A Vocation and a Voice*, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that this one story epitomises the entire scope of the 'new' feminism of Chopin, that it sounds the full range of her new voice. Chopin's final collection spans more than the passing of an hour and as some of the later stories found therein suggest, her growth in artistry should be viewed more as a progression than as a sudden shift in style. As time passes, experimentation with Maupassantian technique becomes increasingly evident in Chopin's stories, and with it comes greater complexity. A case in point is "The Kiss," a later 1894 story. Here too the shift in Chopin's writing, seen to appear in "The Story of an Hour," is evident. Chopin's style in "The Kiss" is again more controlled than that displayed in her early stories, and again 'the woman question' is treated with new insight. But here Chopin's writing gains an added dimension. Having attained proficiency in the form and style of the male-dominated tradition of the short story as presented to her through Maupassant, Chopin was, it seems, ready to take a further step, to enter more fully into the thematic world of her

³⁵ Emily Dickinson, 149.

French mentor. The result, as seen in “The Kiss,” is a feminist voice of greater complexity, and one which, for this very reason, gains even greater strength.

Parallels between “The Story of an Hour” and “The Kiss” in terms of their Poesque qualities are readily drawn. Again the capturing of the moment is the artistic endeavour, and again this moment is right there in the story’s title: the moment of the kiss. Concentration is on a single character, revealed at a particular moment in time. A slice of life is presented, free of chronological explanation and over-contextualisation. The superfluous detail of the early stories has been kept at bay. Chopin is again putting the telescope to good use and once more the result is unity. The story centres around the kiss and from beginning to end all focuses on this act. From the outset, the sense of concealment, of things hidden, which this moment reveals is established. The opening scene is a “room full of deep shadows” (379) and as the moment approaches, this image of things partly obscured is built on through repetition. So too, when the moment itself has passed, all remains centred upon the kiss and the story it has to tell of things unspoken. The single effect is sought and sustained.

But what is perhaps more evident in “The Kiss” than Chopin’s participation in the male-dominated short story tradition is the more singular influence of Maupassant. In this story, characteristics more particular to the Frenchman’s writing are adopted and adapted with increased vigour. The economy and concision which Maupassant demanded of himself appears to have become of increased importance to Chopin with her heightened emphasis on concentration of form, and Maupassant’s impact is also seen manifest in new ways. The very title of the story, for example, is a direct translation of one of Maupassant’s own (Fusco 140), a form of appropriation also seen elsewhere in Chopin’s work. But perhaps more interesting is the suggestion of her borrowing thematically from Maupassant, and on quite specific terms. Chopin’s practice of

Maupassantian translation becomes important here, for in turning to these translations, material can be found which directly parallels the concepts underlying "The Kiss."³⁶ Of particular relevance is Maupassant's "It,"³⁷ a story which tells of a marriage born not of mutual affection, but of one partner's selfish needs. The hero's words, as translated by Chopin -

. . . I have but the slightest acquaintance with my wife of tomorrow; I have seen her but four or five times all told; yet she is not disagreeable to me, and that is sufficient. She is small, stout and blonde. Day after tomorrow I shall be wishing that she were tall, dark and slender! She is not rich; she belongs to the bourgeoisie; a young girl such as we find by the wholesale, without special traits or talents, and without apparent faults.

Then why do I marry, you ask. I hardly dare confess to you the strange, unaccountable reason which drives me to this stupid act.

I marry in order not to be alone! (189)

- sound remarkably familiar to the thoughts of Nathalie of "The Kiss" on contemplating marriage to Brantain, her reasons for wanting him as a partner being slightly more materialistic in nature as they may:

. . . She knew that he loved her - a frank, blustering fellow without guile enough to conceal his own feelings, and no desire to do so. For two weeks past he had sought her society eagerly and persistently. She was confidently waiting for him to declare himself and she meant to accept him. The rather insignificant and unattractive Brantain was enormously rich; and she liked and required the entourage which wealth could give her. (379)

A parallel indeed exists between the two extracts. It appears that Maupassant's influence has reached new levels in Chopin's works, levels which, it will be argued here, allow her to reach new heights of feminism.

³⁶ Refer to the Introduction for details of those of Maupassant's stories translated by Chopin and their dates of completion.

³⁷ According to notes in the Seyersted edition, "The Kiss" was completed on September 19, 1894 (Appendix 1002), while Chopin's translation of Maupassant's "It" is dated somewhat later - February 4, 1895 (Fusco, 155). Acknowledgement of this discrepancy in dates does not, however, refute the argument surrounding Chopin's appropriation which is proposed here. As the writer herself claims in "Confidences," she first "stumbled upon" Maupassant's work in 1888 (700). Therefore, the likelihood that she was fully familiar with Maupassant's "It," itself published in 1883 (Dugan Appendix B), well before the process of translation, and before her creation of "The Kiss," is high.

One aspect of Maupassantian influence in particular aids Chopin in achieving this artistic feminist aim and it is this element which is to be central to this discussion. In "The Kiss" Chopin treats both character and subject matter in a new way: with amorality. In this story she upholds a claim made about Maupassant by Henry James: that the French writer took "no account of the moral nature of man [*sic*]," having "no window looking in that direction" (132). Maupassant's total unconcern for moral actions, that very element of his writing which most shocked many readers of his work (Sullivan 8), is here adopted by Chopin, lending a new point of view to her work, and, more importantly, a new perspective to her feminism.

Chopin's amorality shows itself in two main ways in "The Kiss." Firstly, it serves to emphasise the less didactic trend identified in "The Story of an Hour." In "The Kiss," Chopin achieves almost complete objectivity. She has learnt from Maupassant the lesson of authorial impartiality, revealing life in this story without judgement, without imposition of a personal view. She stands back from the characters and the issues within and merely presents things 'as they are' without moralising. No attempt is made to teach a particular lesson through the story. Chopin's own stance and opinions on the matters do not colour events. She writes precisely as Sean O'Faolain sees Maupassant as doing: she "does not preach or moralise, or praise, or condemn: simply presents" (114). Replacing the feminist treatise of the earlier stories, Chopin does not instruct, she simply lays bare the facts. Her voice no longer directs the reader's response but remains impartial throughout. Any reaction to the story belongs entirely to the reader, coloured, perhaps, by social expectation, but not by Chopin's personal views. Her work has become "an illustration - rather than an assertion - of woman's right to be herself, to be individual and independent" (Seyersted *A Critical Biography* 196). That early directness of treatment has been transformed into objectiveness and with this objectiveness comes

added feminist effectiveness, an effectiveness compounded by the second way in which Chopin's Maupassantian amoral stance shows itself in "The Kiss."

Not only does the adoption of amorality allow Chopin more objective treatment of 'the woman question,' it also sees her treat it with a new and shocking focus. Chopin's voice in "The Kiss" speaks quite openly, and without a hint of moral judgement, of the 'unmentionable' in American literature. It acknowledges a side to female nature denied the woman entrapped within the patriarchal cage: that of sexuality. As Emily Toth purports, Chopin "ventured where no woman had before, extending the definition of the American independent woman to include sexual freedom, at a time when women were still presumed to lack sexual feelings" ("The Independent Woman" 659), showing that "women were capable of loving more than one man at a time and were not only attractive but sexually attracted also" (Ziff 298). In "The Kiss", the passion of Chopin's early heroines takes a new form, one that is sensual rather than spiritual: music and intellectual advancement are replaced with sexuality. The turn-of-the-century reader is shocked into recognition, is sexually awakened, and it is here that the heart of Chopin's feminism, as seen in this story, lies. In allowing her heroine this side to her nature, Chopin stands in direct opposition to patriarchal convention, particularly in terms of the way in which that convention was constructed within nineteenth-century society.

In writing woman as sexual being, Chopin writes a shocking alternative to 'true womanhood.' As the above citation from Toth suggests, the 'ideal' or 'true' woman of Chopin's time was expected to be passionless, a point which is discussed at length by Nancy F. Cott in her article of the same name, and which stresses the potentially shocking effect of Nathalie's behaviour on Chopin's contemporary audience. According to Cott, the Victorian view of the time was that women "lacked in sexual aggressiveness,

that their sexual appetites contributed to a very minor part (if any at all) to their motivations, that lustfulness was simply uncharacteristic" (163). Women's sexuality was seen as standing apart from that of men; they were seen as "less carnal and lustful" than their male counterparts, and when female sexual drives were acknowledged the expected reaction was suppression: "it was objectionable for women to exercise the sexual initiative; regardless of women's sexual drives, the religious and social context required female subordination" (164). In "The Kiss" Chopin ignores this patriarchal context; she writes against every aspect of this Victorian view. Her heroine is given passion, and a passion very sexual in nature, a passion highlighted as she stands in anticipation of amorous action from Harvy: "Her eyes were bright and tender with a smile as they glanced up into his; and her lips looked hungry for the kiss which they invited" (381). As is to be discussed presently, the existence of Nathalie's sexual appetite is implied throughout the story of the kiss. She appears as lustful as any man may be, and through her feelings and actions, Chopin asserts the importance of that self-awareness which the patriarchal code undermines, restricting women's knowledge of their own sexual functioning (Cott 175). Her heroine is given her 'full' self, her 'true' self, not one limited by male definition and destined to be passionless.

Initially it does not appear that this is to be so. When the heroine is introduced at the story's opening it is through the gaze of the male, the eyes of her suitor Brantain: "The obscurity lent him courage to keep his eyes fastened as ardently as he liked upon the girl who sat in the firelight" (379). And these are eyes which objectify, which favour the attraction of physical appeal: "She was very handsome, with a certain fine, rich colouring that belongs to the healthy brune *type*" (379 emphasis mine). The woman in question is not seen as an individual: she is merely an example of a particular 'kind', a fact which is further emphasised in her namelessness. While he is Brantain from the

outset, she is but “the girl” (379). Such is the nature of things under patriarchal construction. And so it follows that the relationship between the two is ruled by social convention, allowing them to speak only of indifferent things, not those which truly “occup[y] their thoughts” (379). Feelings are not appropriate material for the conversation of courting in the patriarchal world: formalities such as “teas” and “receptions” take precedence. Thus, through the workings of the social code of patriarchy the heroine’s inner nature is obscured. She is seen only from the outside, much as Paula and Eleanor of the earlier stories were seen.

But it is soon revealed, and it comes as no surprise to find, that Chopin will not be satisfied with mere convention. She must transgress and explore what goes on beyond the surface appearance of patriarchal conformity. And this involves going beyond the surface of the heroine, revealing her thoughts and feelings, the ‘true self’ which patriarchy conceals. Chopin shifts, mid-paragraph, to enter the thoughts of her heroine. The narrative moves from the male to the female perspective and the heroine’s true feelings are exposed: feelings which undoubtedly defy convention. As those same words cited above, those which ring of Chopin’s Maupassantian translation, reveal, the heroine loves Brantain only for his money: “The rather insignificant Brantain was enormously rich; and she liked and required the entourage which wealth could give her” (379). These are not the thoughts of the ideal woman. Through them the roles of patriarchy are reversed. The male becomes the object of desire, desire founded in this case not on physical attraction but on what he can offer in material terms. Brantain is to the heroine a ‘thing,’ a good catch, something to be won and possessed. This is not, it would seem, the ideal woman of self-sacrifice, submissiveness, and passivity, not an embodiment of ‘true womanhood.’ But regardless, this Victorian part is the part she must play to gain the rewards Brantain has to offer. She must assert her emancipation from within the

bounds of the patriarchal cage. She can initiate nothing. She must wait for Brantain to declare himself and follow the 'proper' road of marital convention if victory is to be hers. She must play the patriarchal game.

The central moment of the story, however, disrupts the heroine's agenda. The kiss reveals the nature of her 'true self,' speaking as it does of her involvement with the young man who instigates the action: Harvy. As this man comes between the couple, Brantain acts in accordance with the patriarchal code which undoubtedly rules his view of the heroine. He sees only one possible explanation for the fact: he must be the one in the wrong, he must have misunderstood the heroine's interest in him; she is obviously engaged elsewhere: " 'I believe,' stammered Brantain, 'I see that I have stayed too long. I - I had no idea - that is, I must wish you good-by' " (380). This is the only explanation which fits the definition of the ideal woman which he has placed upon her, and so he leaves. When he does, the ideal woman comes out of her shell, or rather the shell of the ideal woman is discarded to reveal the truth of the heroine's inner being as it lies beneath. She stops playing the part. This is unnecessary, it seems, with the young man who has interrupted. Their relationship is apparently of a very different nature to that through which she was introduced. A greater intimacy is suggested by the fact that the heroine is, for the first time, named, and intimately so: " 'Hang me if I saw him sitting there, Nattie. I know it's deuced awkward for you. But I hope you'll forgive me this once - this very first break' " (380). The exchange between these two is unshrouded by social manners and formalities. The heroine shows her true feelings; she does not play the patriarchal part. Her passionate nature is revealed as she expresses her anger: " 'Don't touch me; don't come near me . . . what do you mean by entering the house with out ringing?' " (380). This man has disrupted her game and she holds him accountable, asserting her right to be in control of herself. His kiss has put her impending betrothal at

risk, and the heroine is unforgiving: “ ‘Forgive you! You don’t know what you are talking about. Let me pass. It depends upon - a good deal whether I ever forgive you’ ” (380).

Nathalie’s passionate self has been revealed. Chopin has given her heroine life beyond that which Brantain imagines for her, beyond the bounds of conventional courtship and marriage. Nathalie appears to be in no way passionless; she does not conform to Victorian ideals of passivity. But it is not simply Nathalie’s passion which places her in opposition to Maupassant’s view of the world, which makes Chopin’s voice a feminist one. Reading on, the passion which Chopin’s heroine displays becomes more focused in nature. It becomes, more specifically, sexual passion, and it is in this treatment of woman as sexual being that Chopin’s rewriting of Maupassant’s view of the world can best be seen.

Maupassant himself also acknowledged this side to female nature. Recognising that women were not passionless, that the notion of ‘true womanhood’ was not upheld, he wrote profusely of female sexual desire, of the adulteress and her cuckolded husband. But even in the process of writing this possibility for women they remain, in Maupassant’s stories, mere “*objects* of erotic delight” (Donaldson-Evans 13). The Maupassantian woman is sexual and sexually aware, but not in and of herself: her sexuality is designed to serve man. This charge of misogyny laid upon Maupassant is strongly refuted by A.H. Wallace who makes the bold assertion that “Maupassant is more kind to women than to men in his writings” (24), but the very reasoning which Wallace adopts to support this argument actually emphasises Maupassant’s androcentric view rather than disputing it. Paying particular attention to the cuckold stories, Wallace explores the notion that it is actually the male hero who is poorly treated by Maupassant, that the female is not to blame for her adulterous behaviour as she is driven to it by her

husband's inanity and inferiority, that he is deserving of contempt and she of sympathy (24). This may be so, but in no way does it serve as verification of the female self. If Wallace's theory is upheld, women in Maupassant's stories can be seen to be merely 'used' as 'tools' with which to expose male weakness, with which to open the male to critique; they are not important as individual selves. Patriarchal lore is adhered to. And further, according to Wallace, the male is not critiqued for being 'masculine', but rather for his lack of ability to assert power and superiority over the female (35), that is, for not living up to the patriarchal ideal of manhood. Male dominance, sexual and otherwise, is idealised; the sexually assertive woman should not be allowed to be.

In "The Kiss" Chopin constructs a very different female reality. That her woman here is assertive, and passionately so, has already been discussed, but on reaching the end of the story, the true nature of that passionately assertive female self is revealed - she is a sexual being. And unlike the situations in Maupassant, she is a sexual being very much in ownership of her behaviour. It is her own, and of her own choice, not simply a product of her suitor's inanity. Nathalie is the sexual female being embodied as subject, and it is at the story's end that her sexually assertive nature is captured. On reaching this point, Nathalie has been established as undeniably passionate through her earlier exchange with Harvy. Now, this passion shows itself in full bloom. Her agitation at Harvy's initial interruption, as "he pressed an ardent, lingering kiss upon her lips" (379) finds fuller explanation. When the two meet again it is at the wedding of Nathalie and her suitor of the story's initial scene, Brantain. Harvy approaches the bride with a smile, saying, "'Your husband has sent me over to kiss you'" (381). Nathalie's response is once more passionate, but this time in a way which carries her even further beyond the conventions of her social world. She does not chide Harvy for his advances; rather, she welcomes them: "Here eyes were bright and tender with a smile as they glanced up into

his; and her lips looked *hungry* for the kiss which they *invited*" (381 emphasis mine); she craves the passion patriarchal lore attempts to deny her. The existence of woman as sexual being is realised and Chopin brings her to life with a uniquely subtle directness. There is no question as to whether this woman of passion should or should not be 'allowed to be'; she simply is. The sexual woman, the woman who wants, desires, even invites fulfilment of her passions is given life. In fact, she is given more than life. Chopin does not simply allow this woman to be, as her French mentor had so allowed before her; rather, she rewrites her existence. As has been shown, when it comes to questions of gender Chopin refuses to partake in mere Maupassantian mimicry.

Initially, however, it appears that Brantain is indeed a version of the Maupassantian anti-hero: the cuckolded man. From the outset, the passivity of his character is suggested. He is not the 'typical' patriarchal male, hounded by an obsessive need for possession and dominance. He sits calmly in the shadows: "it had overtaken him and he did not mind" (379). He does not question nor fight for Nathalie when Harvy enters and the importunate kiss is delivered to his lady; he merely leaves, stammering and unsure - surely a candidate for criticism under Wallace's dictates. But Chopin does not criticise. Brantain is in no way portrayed as deserving of this treatment. Nathalie's infelicitous behaviour is not simply a tool by which to explore male response. The Maupassantian model is overturned, subverted. Chopin writes into existence a heroine whose behaviour stands as her own, and stands to reveal *her* nature, not the characters of the men who surround her.

Chopin's answer to Maupassant is not so simple as a mere reversal of his view of the world, a view which, it is argued here, is resoundingly androcentric and not at all like that proposed by Wallace. Mary Donaldson-Evans puts the Frenchman's treatment of woman characters into feminist perspective. In direct opposition to Wallace, Donaldson-

Evans argues that Maupassant in fact blames women for the fall or decline of his male heroes, that the man is made victim, the woman the monster, the agent and therefore the cause of his demise (16-17). Chopin does not simply turn this schema around and make the male the figure of evil, or the object of blame. Neither Brantain nor Harvy are held accountable for Nathalie's behaviour in "The Kiss"; it is her own. But then neither is she held accountable for any repercussions it may have on them. No judgements are made about any of the characters. Their actions are simply laid bare for consideration. Neither man nor woman becomes the target. Chopin's interest does not lie in laying blame. She means to expose, not espouse. Contradictions are present and presented in the characters of both sexes, and for reasons of exposing not the individuals but "the institutions and social frameworks in which they were trapped" (Taylor 161). The men of Chopin's stories are rarely cruel. "Perfectly decent men" are frequently fled by wives and lovers (Zlotnick 4). Both men and women are equally victims: victims of social convention.³⁸

Within the bounds of this convention, switching of the patriarchal code is not the answer, or at least Chopin does not suggest so in "The Kiss." It is not an answer which goes unexplored, but the ultimate outcome seems to suggest it is an impossibility. Following the opening scene of the story, the scene of the kiss, we see Nathalie very much 'in action' as she attempts to make amends with her suitor, to win back his entourage of wealth. She alters the power structure of her relationship with Brantain as seen at the story's beginning. No longer content to sit back and wait, or rather unable to as a result of the turn of events, Nathalie takes initiative. She defies the ideal of passivity, approaching him with a "delicious frankness of manner," taking him by the

³⁸ Note the link with "The Story of an Hour." It was marriage, the institution - which ultimately killed Louise Mallard, not her partner in that marriage. Brently Mallard is a man "kind" and "tender" in nature (353), not one word is said against him. Man and woman are alike victims and this universality of entrapment within the patriarchal cage is one which is dealt with increasingly as Chopin's career proceeds, as it will become apparent in those discussions which follow.

arm and leading him to a “retired corner” where she is “apparently very outspoken” (380). The heroine is no longer willing to play the patriarchal game. She must take action to win her man, take control of the situation. And she does, convincing Brantain of her love for him: “it makes so much difference to me what you think of - of me” (380). She has asserted herself and she has succeeded. Brantain falls under her control, won over by her charm. She is “triumphant” (380). She has won her prize: the trophy which Brantain represents is hers. Nathalie has created an “occasion” for herself, suspending normal codes of behaviour, breaking patriarchal convention and obtaining empowerment (Guidici 26).³⁹

The next scene is that of the wedding between the heroine and her ‘catch,’ Brantain, and Nathalie is in a state of bliss. She considers herself to be in complete control of the situation, becoming doubly triumphant as Harvy approaches with instructions from the groom to kiss the bride once more. At this point Nathalie thinks she has it all: marriage brings with it wealth, and that desire which union with Brantain cannot fulfil, her sexual desire, she will find with Harvy. The best of both worlds is in her grasp. Things have come together exactly as planned: “She felt like a chess player who, by the clever handling of his pieces, sees the game taking the course intended” (381). The male characters of the story have become no more than pawns in the game she has made of life. But the game is not over. With the reappearance of Harvy the tables are turned and the temporary nature of Guidici’s “occasion” is reiterated.⁴⁰ Female self-assertion cannot last in a patriarchal world. Nathalie cannot have the best of both worlds. Her empowerment is dashed as Harvy takes control, denying her fulfilment of

³⁹ See the discussion of this concept in Chapter One with reference to the empowerment Paula of “Wiser Than a God” gains through refusal of a desirable marriage.

⁴⁰ Again this point can be better understood with reference to previous discussion: In this case to “The Story of an Hour” and the temporary nature of Louise Mallard’s awakening to self-realisation. The ‘true self,’ it appears, cannot truly survive in the patriarchal world. Empowered female states are ever fleeting.

that desire which Brantain cannot provide: “‘Your husband,’ he said, ‘has sent me over to kiss you. But you know,’ he went on quietly, ‘I didn’t tell him so, it would have seemed ungrateful, but I can tell you. I’ve stopped kissing women; it’s dangerous’” (381). The situation is reversed. She becomes a pawn in his game, not the triumphant. The possibility of sensual satisfaction is lost.

The heroine has been placed in the same hopeless position as those who came before her; she is caught in a double bind just as were Paula and Eleanor. A choice must be made, a choice which involves inevitable sacrifice. She cannot have both sexual desire and marriage. Fulfilment can only be reached on a single level: material or sensual, not both. But it is a choice which comes too late for Nathalie, a choice which is made for her rather than by her. It is Harvy who withholds his kiss, and he does so when she has already wed. Marriage can be her only triumph. The similarities with the earlier stories, however, end here. The conflict between the ‘true’ woman and the passionless woman is presented very differently in “The Kiss,” and this difference, which is grounded in Chopin’s newly amoral stance, creates a truly effective feminist voice. The closing statement of the story brings this amoral stance to the forefront, highlighting the lack of authorial judgement evident throughout the story. The statement captures the heroine’s feelings on being rejected by her supposed lover: “Well, she had Brantain and his million left. A person can’t have everything in this world; and it was a little unreasonable of her to expect it” (381). These are the facts, and this is how they stand; so it is and so it must be. That is that. There is no sense of ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ Chopin merely presents things as they are. She illustrates, rather than dictates. The reader is not told what to think about the issues which the story confronts. These issues are merely laid out to be explored. Unlike the didactic technique evident in “Wiser Than a God” and

"A Point At Issue," here Chopin does not create a feminism which reaches out as a treatise. A feminist voice of greater complexity is sounded.

The result can be seen to be one of ambivalence, confusion even. A question mark remains over the problem of precisely what it is that Chopin is trying to say about the situation in which Nathalie finds herself. No indication appears of where she as a writer stands on this ground. But it is in this very ambivalence that the effectiveness of the story lies. Ambivalence leads to questioning. The story becomes an appeal to the mind, becomes thought provoking. The feminist statement is not presented overtly as it was earlier. Illustration rather than assertion is the artistic aim, and it is one which adds to rather than takes away from Chopin's feminism. Rather than the emotional level of involvement aroused by "The Story of an Hour," "The Kiss" seems to work at an intellectual level, seemingly reverting to the tract of the early stories: appeals to the mind rather than the senses. But here the mind is not directed, it is opened and stimulated. The reader is left disturbed and unsure, questioning the story's complexities. According to Cynthia Griffen Wolff, such was Chopin's goal: To "raise the fundamental questions" not answer them (12), holding the conviction that "Life's experiences are mixed and complex - far too complex for easy solutions or glib slogans" (3). The act of subversion is carried out through exposure. No judgement may be made, but the patriarchal world of Maupassant and his male predecessors is challenged from within, and this practice allows Chopin to reach new heights of feminist complexity, heights upon which she continues to build. As Nelly Furman suggests,

Although it may be impossible to escape the hegemony of patriarchal structures, none the less, by unveiling the prejudices at work in our cultural artifacts, we impugn the universality of the manmade models provided to us and allow for the possibility of sidestepping and subverting their power. (Cutter 24)

This is precisely what Chopin achieves. Her heroines in every case may fail to escape the patriarchal cage, unless it be through death, but in merely presenting this fact to the reader, the system which produces their imprisonment is exposed and opened up to questioned. In "The Kiss" this artistic process gains an added dimension. Through Maupassantian reappropriation Chopin's feminism grows in strength. And, reading on, so the pattern continues.

Chapter Four

Heights of Maupassantian Reappropriation in the Depths of Despair: The 'descending helical' of "Her Letters"

That which we love too violently ends by killing us.⁴¹

"Her Letters" is easily the longest of the later stories to be considered here, which may appear to detract from the argument previously proposed - that which suggests that over the course of her literary career Chopin's short stories became increasingly condensed and unified in nature evidencing her increased participation in what had previously been a male-dominated tradition. But appearances may be deceiving, and such is the case here. Although "Her Letters" recalls the length of the earlier stories, it does not recall their artistic flaws. Less condensed than its companion stories in the volume *A Vocation and a Voice*, "Her Letters" none the less shows evidence of Chopin's participation in the male-dominated tradition of Maupassant in many of the same areas as do "The Story of an Hour" and "The Kiss." Here again Poe's "totality of effect" (Rev. *Night and Morning* 66) is attained. Focus is established from the outset, as early as in the story's title, and it is sustained throughout. The story is entered at a precise 'moment' and this moment carries the reader through the entirety. Hedberg's description of the genre's 'norm' is again evident in Chopin's work, despite the increased length of the story. Concentration is on "*one* character in a *single* episode . . . not trac[ing] his development but reveal[ing] him to us at a particular moment in his life" (113). The letters of the title are central from beginning to end; they are the very essence of the story's being. Nothing appears which does not relate to or build upon

⁴¹ This quote is taken from Chopin's translation of Maupassant's story "Night" as it appears in Thomas Bonner's *The Kate Chopin Companion*, 199.

their significance. The uselessness of extraneous detail is eliminated; selectivity is pursued. Chopin continues to work within the bounds of the 'rules' of the short story genre - those rules laid out in her time by Brander Matthews.⁴² She continues to speak out from within the bounds of the male-dominated tradition. The patriarchal form remains, ironically, the key to her subversiveness.

More important, however, is the evidence which this story provides for even greater singularly Maupassantian influence. When examined alongside the Maupassant translations which Chopin was undertaking at the time of the story's creation, evidence points to "Her Letters" as being perhaps the most Maupassantian piece of all, with regard to both form and content. Here again, Chopin enters the realm of the sexual, but further to this, and even more true to Maupassantian interests, she also borrows from the Frenchman's obsession with madness and subsequent suicide, exploring precisely the realms of what the Frenchman claimed was his intention to explore: "how minds are modified under the influence of environmental circumstances, and how sentiments and passions are developed" ("Writer's Goal" 1457). In fact, "Her Letters" becomes almost an amalgamation of those Maupassant stories she translated - the first six of which she planned on publishing under the title *Mad Stories* (Fusco 155). New heights of Maupassantian influence have been reached. But not at the cost of Chopin's individuality. As Fusco suggests, here Maupassant's influence is "more inspirational than substantive . . . suggestive rather than prescriptive" (146). Chopin may write in a fashion that is resoundingly and undeniably Maupassantian but she does not merely imitate. She takes the same human drives as dealt with by the French writer and gives to

⁴² See the Introduction for discussion of these 'rules' and their place in the creation of the short story at the turn-of-the-century.

them new motivation. The treatment of sexuality, madness, suicide - all become tools for sounding the feminist voice - and tools which Chopin puts to excellent use.

The Maupassantian form of Chopin's stories is a point developed at length by Richard Fusco. Here in "Her Letters" he sees Chopin as experimenting with a more complex form than is seen in previous stories,⁴³ a form which Maupassant typically used, it is claimed, to portray a character's self destruction, and one which Fusco names "the descending helical" (50). In adopting this form, a chronological sequence is usually adhered to, "trac[ing] step by step every stage as the protagonist succumbs to insanity . . . each successive sentence portrays a situation more desperate, a narrator acting more frenzied, a mind one step farther removed from normality" (50). This is precisely what we find in "Her Letters:" insanity is portrayed by way of the device of the descending helical. And, as one would find in Maupassant, it is the male protagonist on which the focus of the story centres. The opening section of the story, that which centres upon the man's wife, initially appears to serve only to provide motivation for his decline. Her actions are herein portrayed as driving him to the state of insanity which ends, ultimately in self-annihilation. Nothing could be more Maupassantian than this - the feminine as the ultimate threat to man, woman as the cause of male demise. Otis B. Wheeler, in his "The Five Awakenings of Edna Pontellier," purports this very reading of "Her Letters," acknowledging the Maupassantian influence at work. "Her Letters" is a story which, Wheeler claims, "states the theme of the destructiveness of extramarital love on the *innocent* spouse" (120 emphasis mine). However, while Maupassant is seen to make a similar situation into an "ironically amusing story", Chopin supposedly "chooses here to treat infidelity with an almost heavy-handed conventionality" (120).

⁴³ A point which in itself accounts for the increased length of the piece.

Wheeler's claims, in fact, suggest that the story is very typically Maupassantian in its treatment of the woman's extramarital love affair, the conventional view being the male-centred view, that of the patriarchal, to which Maupassant subscribed, that view which is laid out in the introduction, which sees woman only in relation to man, misogynistically according her no selfhood beyond that which he defines for her. This claim shall here be refuted. "Her Letters" may be undeniably Maupassantian on the surface, but beyond this, Chopin does not follow the Frenchman's example. She does not, as Maupassant did, simply condemn adultery and set the woman up to blame, the man as innocent victim. Rather she gives her heroine's sexual indiscretion motivation which supposedly lies beyond her gender, and in uncovering this motivation, makes a feminist statement. Maupassant's theme of insanity becomes secondary, reduced in favour of one more sexual in nature (Fusco 160). Providing motivation for the woman's need to find sexual fulfilment outside the bounds of her marriage, rather than finding motivation for the hero's insanity, becomes the main aim, and the reasoning which lies within the story speaks out against the male-dominated tradition which chose to do the latter. Read with this feminist theme in mind, the story takes on a different perspective which stands in opposition to, rather than in adherence to, Maupassant's androcentrism.

An interpretation of the story such as Wheeler's may be supported on a first reading of its opening section. The beginning of the story sees the introduction of the heroine and her letters, and it is soon understood that these letters are love letters, the remnants of an intimate relationship, all of them "addressed in the handwriting of one man and one woman" (398). And this is not just any relationship, it is one which carried with it possible consequences and fear of these coming about: "He had sent her letters all back to her one day when, *sick with dread of possibilities*, she had asked to have them returned" (398 emphasis mine). The reason for this fear, this dread, is soon

revealed: there is someone else in her life, another man, and one who does not know about the letters - "She shrank from inflicting pain, the anguish which the discovery of those letters would bring to others; to one, above all, who was near to her, and whose tenderness and years of devotion had made him, in a manner, dear to her" (399). This man is her husband, the affair of the letters was adulterous, and she fully acknowledges what their discovery would mean: "they would stab more keenly than knife blades" (399). Regardless of this acknowledgement, however, she cannot bear the thought of one moment of life without the letters and thus makes a startling decision "that frightened and bewildered her to think of at first" (399). She will not destroy the evidence of her love affair before she dies, for "how does the end come and when? Who may tell?" (399). Instead, she will leave the letters in her husband's charge, the package inscribed with the following: "I leave this package to the care of my husband. With perfect faith in his loyalty and love, I ask him to destroy it unopened" (400), a seemingly cruel request, at this point, to make of a tender and devoted husband. Sympathy is, it appears, directed toward this as yet unmet male. The heroine is destined to be the key to his demise, her secret letters and the actions which lie behind them the source of his misery. Wheeler's argument appears to be upheld. Chopin can be seen as subscribing to the patriarchal tradition, writing from within the patriarchal discourse, mimicking the path taken by her French mentor.

Reading on, however, this perspective is subject to change; those initial reactions formed are opened up to revision. It is her husband's reaction to the letters on the heroine's death which prompts, even necessitates, this change, being a reaction which, as Peggy Skaggs identifies in her Chopin biography, sheds light not only on the man himself, but also on the nature of the marriage (42). The vows of this marriage were clearly made under the veil of patriarchal lore. Here, Chopin lifts that veil,

exposing the weaknesses of patriarchal rule, and thus, opening the social and sexual codes which it constructs to questioning. Her subversive voice is heard once more.

Months have passed before the woman's husband stumbles upon her letters⁴⁴ and he is initially puzzled by their appearance. The opening of the story indicates that before his wife's death, this was indeed a man in possession of those qualities of love and loyalty which she demands: his "tenderness and years of devotion" (398) are spoken of directly. And as the letters are uncovered this judgement of character is again highlighted: "She had made no mistake; every line of his face - no longer young - spoke loyalty and honesty, and his eyes were as faithful as a dog's and as loving" (400). But despite these characteristics embedded in his nature, the male protagonist cannot bring himself to carry out the action requested of him by his wife - to "destroy [the package] unopened" (400). If the letters had been found earlier, it is claimed, "there would not have been an instant's hesitancy. To destroy it promptly and without question would have seemed a welcome expression of devotion - a way of reaching her, of crying out his love to her while the world was still filled with the illusion of her presence" (400), but now, as time has passed, he cannot fulfil her dying wish without questioning it: "'Destroy it unopened,' he re-read, half-aloud, 'but why unopened?'" (401). He cannot destroy the package without knowledge of its contents. In typically patriarchal fashion, the male protagonist immediately begins to construct his own answer to the question which plagues him - that which asks precisely what it is that lies hidden within this package. He turns the package about, he feels it, and, within moments, supposition

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note here that the desk within which he finds the letters - "He had happened accidentally upon the package in that remote nook of her desk" (400) - is the very one which his wife's body was found to be reaching for as death removed her from the world - "months had passed since that spring day when they had found her stretched upon the floor, clutching the key of her writing desk, which she appeared to have been attempting to reach when death overtook her" (400). Had she perhaps, in the last moments of life, changed her mind about the fate of the letters? Or was she rather making a final attempt to grasp at all that gave her life in the world? This is an opening for speculation.

becomes fact: "So here were letters" (401). He has imposed an identity upon the letters, and thus upon she to whom he supposes they belong. He has, in his own mind, found an answer to his question, found the knowledge he sought to possess.

The result is not one of triumph, however, but rather of disbelief. The existence of the letters suggests that his wife was not the wife that he knew her to be. They suggest that her life held a secret - contained in these letters which in life she kept from him - and this is, for him, an impossibility: "She never seemed in her lifetime to have had a secret from him. He knew her to have been cold and passionless, but true, and watchful of his comfort and his happiness" (401). In fact, the opening of the story has shown that his wife was, at least as she was seen at that moment, far from cold and passionless.⁴⁵ The image of her that her husband holds does not appear to be true to her self as that self existed, at least when she was alone with the letters. He does not, it seems, hold knowledge of her 'true' and full self. He describes her not as she is, but as he wants her to be, as he has made her, placing her in the exact same position as that identified by De Beauvoir - the universal state of the woman under patriarchal rule: "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being" (26). The fact that his wife may have a nature which lies outside of that perceived by him is not considered. Until the appearance of these letters, the male protagonist has believed himself to be in possession of all that his wife was, of all her being. The letters directly challenge this very patriarchal supposition.

A sense of male domination, possession and objectification continues as the male protagonist considers his wife's death. His thoughts appear to be those of the

⁴⁵ This point will be returned to in more detail later.

loving husband in mourning - "he could not think of her in any far-off paradise awaiting him. He felt that there was no smallest part of her anywhere in the universe, more than there had been before she was born in the world" (401) - but when read with the previous discussion in mind, in light of the disparity which appears to exist between the woman as we see her in the story's opening to the image of her constructed by her husband, these thoughts can be viewed very differently. Now that his wife is dead she is, to him, completely gone. Her body was all that existed to him, her physical being was her sole being, and nothing can remain now that has gone⁴⁶. He is wrong, and ironically so, for it is through the very letters which he clutches in his hands that her presence in the world remains. He recognises this - "she had embodied herself with terrible significance in an intangible wish, uttered when life still coursed through her veins; knowing that it would reach him when the annihilation of death was between them, but uttered with all confidence in its power and potency" (401) - but the initial effect the letters' power has upon him is to heighten his own sense of superiority, "lift[ing] him above the head of common mortals" (401). He fails to see that their true power lies in the secret which they hold - the essence of his wife's 'true self.' His focus is on himself; the male is the centre. This is the patriarchal view of humanity.

The questioning continues, however, as he seeks to explain to himself the existence of the letters and the secret which must lie therein: "What secret save one could a woman choose to have die with her?" (401). In patriarchal society the answer is clear and unquestionable. It is the same answer as is found by the male protagonist of Maupassant's "Mad,"⁴⁷ as he declines into insanity on detecting an indifference toward

⁴⁶ This point recalls that argument of Mary Donaldson-Evans outlined in the introduction: "the pleasure that the possession of a beautiful woman affords is *entirely physical* and is coupled by an absolute disdain for her 'being'" (14 emphasis mine).

⁴⁷ As noted in the introduction, this is another of the Maupassant stories translated by Chopin and included in the Bonner Kate Chopin companion.

him in his wife's behaviour. She *must* have been unfaithful. The letters come to stand for infidelity, and as such become dangerous to any man in the patriarchal world. Their very existence threatens all: the ownership rights which the laws of patriarchy grant Chopin's male protagonist over his wife are placed in jeopardy. He is agonised to think that another may have shared his 'goods:' "As quickly as the suggestion came to his mind, so swiftly did the man-instinct of possession stir in his blood." (401). The letters become a voice "speaking to the soul" (401) of the male protagonist, speaking out in defiance of those patriarchal conventions he has come to hold as true. They speak out against the definition he had constructed for his wife, suggesting something more to her being, something beyond that which he saw as her utter existence: another life.

At this point, his wife becomes to him the "unknown" (402). The letters hold the key to her mystery, but his love and loyalty prevent him from uncovering their 'truth.' He can but suppose, speculate as he destroys the package unopened, fulfilling his wife's dying desire. But even before this act occurs, destruction of another kind has taken place. All that the male protagonist believed in has been destroyed by what he 'instinctually' saw to lie within the package he has now discarded. He thought he knew his wife, but any such belief has been subverted by the very existence of the letters. Now, nothing is certain; all is opened to question. The male protagonist has lost faith: "His face was pale and deep-lined with suffering" (401). Images of the night, of despair and isolation, surround him, images strongly reminiscent of those found in Maupassant's "Night."⁴⁸ The male narrator of this story is obsessed by the night. He becomes lost in the dark streets of Paris, "black thick as death" (201), finally meeting his end in the depths of the Seine. A similar destiny is suggested for Chopin's own hero.

⁴⁸ Again a translation completed by Chopin.

The letters have undermined the husband's "sense of knowledge and subjectivity" (Cutter 25). Through their existence Chopin achieves that which Mary Papke identifies in the work of many women writers: a questioning of "traditional ways and means of representation, interpretation, being" (2). The letters see the male protagonist respond in precisely this manner,⁴⁹ but he will not give in to them, he will not give up. Rather, just like Maupassant's protagonist in "Night," he becomes obsessed, obsessed with a need to find answers to the mystery of the letters, obsessed by the need to know others (Papke 67), or at least one 'other.'⁵⁰ his wife. He is all consumed by the possibility of her infidelity:

This one thought was possessing him. It occupied his brain, keeping it nimble and alert with suspicion. It clutched his heart, making every breath of existence a fresh moment of pain. (403)

On and on, he continually attempts to penetrate the secret he believes his wife to have held. His suspicions colour everything. What used to appear 'normal' and harmless is now questioned. All is seen in relation to his wife and in light of her letters. Nothing is certain. The letters have challenged not only his perception of his wife, whom he thought he knew but must now attempt to reconstruct - "striving to recall conversations, subtleties of facial expression that might have meant what he did not suspect at the moment, shades of meaning in words that had seemed the ordinary interchange of social amenities" (403) - they have challenged his perception of the whole world. His whole male-centred power base of knowledge has been called into question. Everything is "charged with a new meaning" (403). Old friends become potential enemies: every word spoken by his male companions is seen to have new hidden significance. He

⁴⁹ The very act of questioning which Chopin proposes for her reader is enacted within the story itself.

⁵⁰ Before encountering the letters his wife was his 'other,' ownership was not questionable. Now he must seek to regain, to reaffirm that ownership, by reconstructing his wife as 'other,' by gaining knowledge of her 'self' that he may once again possess her.

becomes increasingly possessed by the need to know, a need which, in his case, is the epitome of the patriarchal dream: to know, and therefore possess, the 'true' identity of the woman. This, he thought he did possess, but the letters suggest otherwise. They suggest that his wife has dared to defy his construction of her identity and asserted her own selfhood.

The search he undertakes proves useless. He cannot find evidence anywhere that will uphold his suspicions. Instead, he finds evidence only for the wife he thought her to be: the "true and loyal woman he had always believed her to be" (403). All the men he questions share this image of his wife. She is remembered as cold, lacking in passion. Other women appear to have viewed her more favourably⁵¹ - "most of them had loved her; those who had not had held her in respect and esteem" (404) - but they too offer little explanation. The woman he thought he knew so well has become unfathomable. All perceptions he held of her have been undermined by the letters (Cutter 26). He can find no confirmation of this in the world around him but the letters seem to prove that his wife had "a hidden, more sensual nature . . . which he could not discover while she was alive and cannot fathom after her death (Cutter 27). As Martha Cutter surmises it, he is forced to question his "monolithic perception of his wife" (26), and even further to this, to question his whole understanding of the world. No longer can the discrepancy between truth and untruth be discerned. He has lost control of knowledge.

But the search continues. He does not give up, as knowledge is power. It is vital that he gain knowledge of this 'other' self of his wife: without truly knowing her he cannot possess her fully and in a patriarchal world male possession is the ultimate goal. As attainment of this goal slips further from his grasp, the male protagonist becomes

⁵¹ This is perhaps because in their company she was able to be herself - her 'true self.'

less and less in touch with reality, less and less at peace with himself. Maupassantian images of the world surrounding him capture his sense of disillusionment: “he could hear and see dimly the dark river rushing by, carrying away his heart, his ambitions, his life “ (403)⁵². He can find nothing to incriminate his wife. Her secret has been lost, cast into the river with the letters. Without them he can but wonder and speculate: they were the key to unlocking the ‘true’ identity of his wife. Reaching the story’s end, the male protagonist is still hounded by the need to know. He has become maddened, possessed, reaching the point at which he no longer cares what is to be known - he simply must know, craving knowledge of any description: “An assurance of the worst that he dreaded would have offered him peace most welcome, even at the price of happiness” (404). Life has lost all former appeal. All that remains is the hope that the mystery of the letters may be uncovered, “the mystery which he had held in his hands and had cast into the river” (404). The river becomes the very key to solving the mystery: “only the river knew” (405). Here the letters now lie.

The realisation that he has lost all ability to know the ‘true self’ of his wife, that he is forever alienated from her, brings with it emptiness and despair (Papke 67). In casting the letters into the river he also drowned his masculinity, his authority, all power and control that he had over his wife. All was dependent on knowledge of what only the letters could tell him. The male protagonist is left, as Papke goes on to argue, “emasculated by his inability to know” (67). In the madness that results, he is drawn to the river and so begins the descent of the helical form. Death becomes the only option in

⁵² Again the parallels with Maupassant’s “Night” are striking, the end of this story also ending with the linking of river images with death and despair:

I could not hear the current boiling beneath the arches of the bridge. . . . More steps . . . then sand . . . slime . . . then water. I submerged my arm . . . it ran . . . it ran . . . cold . . . cold . . . cold . . . almost freezing . . . almost dead.
And I felt plainly that I would never have the strength to retrace my steps . . . and that I would die there . . . I also, of hunger of fatigue of cold. (202)

the eyes of the grieved husband, that same inescapable response identified by Richard Fusco in Maupassant's 'insane' protagonists: a response to an "inability to resolve the perceptual complexities of a situation" (51) and that same inescapable response seen in the patriarchal world of Mrs Mallard in "The Story of an Hour." Just as the news of her husband's supposed death changed everything for her, so too do the letters for the husband of their story. Both are forced to view the world in a different light, and for both, the result is necessarily dissatisfaction. Chopin's protagonist believes that to join the letters in the river's depths and gain knowledge of the secret they hold - the secret of his wife's 'true self' - will be to bridge the gap between them. He is sadly deluded. For the letters to uncover the secret he sees as the only one they can possibly hold would be to widen the rift between husband and wife, for they would reveal that she has broken all the patriarchal social rules constructed to govern the unity of man and woman in their world. The two would be forever alienated in death as they were in life. The passionate longing for union with his wife that the male protagonist feels will lead not to self-fulfilment but to self-death (Papke 67). He has loved too violently, too possessively, and, just as the chapter's opening quotation forewarned, "That which we love too violently ends by killing us." The violence of the possessiveness of patriarchy is destructive not only for the woman whose selfhood it attempts to overpower and destroy, it is also, for the man, self-destructive.

Herein, it is revealed, lies the pivotal problem with husband, wife, and marriage: male possessiveness (Skaggs 42). Unlike Maupassant's "Mad?" wherein, as A.H. Wallace suggests, the male protagonist's decline into insanity is clearly presented as the fault of the woman, and that the provocation of her (supposed) adultery justifies the crime (her murder) (112), "Her Letters" reveals Chopin rewriting the descending helical with that resounding feminist voice by which she has come to be recognised. The male

protagonist of "Her Letters" is driven mad not by his wife but by his own suspicion and possessive nature. It is the pervasiveness and the power of this nature in this man that the letters uncover, and thus, subvert, for even though the husband of the story appears as the central figure, Mary Papke's claim that in Chopin's fictional world "woman's experience and desire are no longer marginalised or effaced but have become critically central" (88) is indeed upheld in "Her Letters." The woman's experience does not die in the story's opening section. It does not disappear with her but lives on through the letters. These chronicles of desire represent the female voice; they speak out against the social codes which attempt to bind her husband and her, imprisoning them forever in the cage which patriarchy makes of marriage. The resulting feminist comment is clear and becomes more so on rereading the opening section of the story with what we have learnt of the woman's husband in mind.

Again we find here a woman in retreat, a woman who has concealed herself within the walls of her 'room of one's own' - "She had given orders that she wished to remain undisturbed and moreover had locked the doors of her room" (398) - and again the result is that of escape: escape from patriarchal convention. Chopin has re-entered the realms of Guidici's "domain" (26). In retreating to her room in such a manner, the woman of the story reverses the divisions of society and gains that power denied her beyond the walls of her sanctuary: the power of selfhood. Just as Louise Mallard did before her, the heroine of "Her Letters" experiences, within these walls, an exploration of the inner self. The contrast between this inner world, the sanctuary of her apartment, and that which lies beyond its bounds is immediately apparent. Inside a fire glows, brightening the room with its flames; outside "the rain was falling steadily from a leaden sky in which there was no gleam, no rift, no promise" (398). This is what lies beyond the 'safety' of her personal space: a world in which life has "no gleam, no rift,

no promise,” the world of her marriage. What lies within the room of her own is something resoundingly different, something she is drawn to with a passion.

Again, as insight into the world of this ‘room of one’s own’ is offered, an uncensored account of emotions and desires unfolds. Within the confines of her own room, the heroine, free from the bounds of patriarchal convention, can realise her ‘true self’, she can become what she cannot be in the world outside: a full and sexual being. It is through the letters that this being is acted out with “strong deliberation” (398). The letters correspond to the patches of blue sky of Mrs Mallard’s inner journey; they represent the heroine’s ‘true self,’ that self which exists beneath and beyond the veils of patriarchal convention. In her response to these letters the inner psyche is entered. It is a response which is at once passionate, but further, even sexual: “with a quick movement [she] *thrust* her fingers among them” (398 emphasis mine). These letters have been her sole motivation to live in the years that have passed since their exchange: “She had been feeding on them ever since; they had sustained her, she believed, and kept her spirit from perishing utterly” (398). They have carried her through her marriage, providing her with something it appears her husband was unable to, fulfilling a need he could not meet. Even when lost in the world of the letters, however, she does not disregard her partner in marriage; she does feel regret for the guilty actions which the letters represent. She even decides to destroy them, recognising the pain that they would cause her husband if discovered. She begins to throw them into the fire, one by one, but the heat of passion soon overcomes her. The letters, it seems, have been feeding the flames which burn deep within her, those flames which patriarchy attempts to extinguish. Her hands “beg[in] to tremble” (398) and breathlessness replaces her composure. She becomes weak with the loss she has suffered, the part of her ‘true self’ lost in the flames, and the regret she felt for her husband now turns inward, upon herself. But it

does not last. Overwhelming pleasure warms her once more on discovery that the letter most precious to her, “in which every word of untempered passion had long ago eaten its way into her brain; and which stirred her still to-day, as it had done a hundred times before when she thought of it” (398), has not been turned to ash. She devours its contents with animalistic fervour:

She crushed it between her palms when she found it. She kissed it again and again. With her sharp white teeth she tore the far corner from the letter, where the name was written; she bit the torn scrap and tasted it between her lips and upon her tongue like some god-given morsel. (398)

This is clearly not that woman described as “cold and passionless” by her husband. The woman of the story is presented, just as Mrs Mallard was before her, rather as a living and feeling individual. The sensual responses the letters arouse within her pulse through our veins in synchrony, they touch and emotionally involve us. Here, the inner depths of her passion are revealed, depths which her husband has, it seems, been unable to penetrate. In the letters, and the love affair they represent, the woman of the story has found something which she cannot obtain within the bounds of her marriage. Through them her sexual selfhood has been realised. They provide her with “erotic pleasure,” are “wholly sensual” tokens of her and her lover’s mutual esteem (Cutter 25). They are all that her marriage is not. Here stands Chopin at her most overtly sexually passionate. While the strength of “The Kiss” lies in the mere implication of sexuality, in “Her Letters” Chopin takes one brave step forward, speaking directly and with even greater force. The heroine’s sexuality cannot be denied. The passionless woman is again overwritten with the ‘truth’ of passionate selfhood, but here with even more passion on Chopin’s part.

Through the letters, the woman of the story has been living what Peggy Skaggs identifies as a “double life” (42). To her husband and his friends she has appeared cold

and passionate, but as the opening of the story reveals her nature has its secret side. As is captured in her response to them, the letters “substantiate a hidden, sensual life - her real life - and she prefers the memory of that life to the empty reality of her marriage” (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 106). The reality of her marriage is empty not of love - her husband was tender and devoted - but in other ways it seems to have fallen short of the ‘ideal’ partnership within which, in de Beauvoir’s eyes, the couple would be regarded not as a unit, a closed cell: “each individual should be integrated as such in society at large, where each (whether male or female) could flourish without aid” (497). The male protagonist of the story appears to think of his wife not as an individual, but as a possession, and consequently, as a being with no identity of its own. She is what he constructs her to be, and in terms of patriarchal definition this means the ideal of ‘true womanhood’ - the passionless ideal. This aspect of female nature must be controlled and repressed. It is a threat to male ownership, and thus it is denied woman. Again Chopin writes of the double bind of patriarchy: to be ideal, the woman must deny her passionate self, yet to be a ‘true’ woman, to be true to her self, the woman must fully realise and embrace this aspect of her nature. Under the lore of patriarchy she cannot do both. The woman is either passionless or regarded as less than a woman. Here, however, the woman in question will not accept these restrictions. As the letters testify, she attains both: marriage and sensual, sexual fulfilment. But this sexuality she takes ownership of can be asserted only from beneath the guise of ‘true womanhood’ and the restrictive state of patriarchy is further emphasised. It cannot be recognised openly; it must be a secret. Satisfaction and fulfilment of the ‘true self’ must be sought outside marriage, and outside the bounds of social convention.

The secret affair which the letters keep was clearly one in which the woman of the story found this unconventional, patriarchally unlawful fulfilment. The affair itself

now over, she has only the letters to satisfy her but these alone seem enough. They give her the hope of existence beyond the bounds of the ideal of 'true womanhood:' "How desolate and empty would have been her remaining days with-out them" (399). The relationship which they record brought new life to her body: "This man had changed the water in her veins to wine, whose taste had brought delirium to both of them" (399). It is in and through these letters that her inner self, her 'true self' lives and breathes. They represent the awakening of sexuality, an awakening which is not made possible within the marital institution, at least as this institution is constructed under the conventions of a patriarchal social world. The heroine knows that her end is near and she dearly wants to spare her husband from the pain which discovery of the letters would bring to him but she cannot, in the end, bring herself to destroy them. She cannot bear the thought of the pain of living without them. It is through the letters, and only through the letters, that she can be her 'true self,' realise 'true selfhood.' As long as the letters remain in existence that self is within her grasp:

It was not sealed; only a bit of string held the wrapper, which she could remove and replace at will whenever the humor came to her to pass an hour in some intoxicating dream of the days when she felt she had lived. (400)

To untie the string is to let her 'true self' loose once more. It is always within reach.

Even after her death, this 'true self' remains as the letters live on. They capture the female self, asserted as a full and sexual self, in timelessness. The letters have a life of their own, a life which, as Martha J. Cutter claims, speaks out against and subverts the "master plot" of the patriarchal story. The "official version" of her life told in this story, that constructed by her husband and his friends, is, through the very existence of the letters, undermined; patriarchal ideals and discourse are subverted (27). They speak out in affirmation of female self-assertion, and even more daringly, female *sexual* self-assertion - an act which lies well beyond the bounds of societal convention in the

patriarchal world. And in the voice of the letters lies a challenge, Chopin's challenge, directed at all those who hold power in this male-dominated world. Male definitions of women, of everything, male knowledge of the world, is opened up to questioning, stripped of its power. The female voice is heard; woman becomes subject (Cutter 27). Blame cannot be laid upon the heroine. The plight of her marriage is revealed; it has been founded on suppression of the true female self, on the loss of all individuality, all autonomy of being, governed by the "male-instinct of possession."

Wheeler's claim is in no way upheld. Chopin's treatment of sexual infidelity could not lie further from the bounds of "heavy handed conventionality." She has not followed Maupassant's example beyond form and content. Treatment of material is her own. Maupassant provided Chopin's artistic potential with the clay it required; she moulded the final work with her own two hands and that feminist instinct which directed them. Through the creation of "Her Letters," Maupassant's version of female sexuality and the woman as adulteress is rewritten. Chopin has again given woman back her selfhood. But again, as in "The Kiss," it must be noted, she has not merely done so by reversing the patriarchal view. She does not simply turn the Maupassantian view of the world upside down. She does not merely make woman subject and thus reverse the Maupassantian way. While in Maupassant's "Mad?" the male protagonist's decline into insanity is clearly presented as the woman's fault (Wallace 112), in Chopin, this innocent male does not simply become the one to blame. The woman of Chopin's story is not driven away from her husband for any individual fault of character he possesses. Her male protagonist is moved by other drives. The instinct of possession which surges within him and which turns his wife away is indeed a fault of character on his part, but it is not his alone - it is the *man*-instinct of possession; it is a trait universal among his sex, a product not of the individual, but of society. It is a product of patriarchy and the

codes of sexual behaviour it sanctions. It is not only the heroine whom is destroyed by this trait, forced into a self-less marriage, but her husband too is driven to death of the self under its power. Again, death is the only escape from the imprisonment of the patriarchal cage, but this time doubly so. For man too there is no other option. Patriarchy will release no-one alive. Suffering is universal. Both man and woman feel the burn of patriarchy and are eternally scarred. Both are oppressed, locked within the cage of its making, the making of the male-dominated world, and again the only true escape is through death.⁵³

Chopin appears to have recognised that fact later suggested by de Beauvoir: “the fact . . . that it is the masculine code, it is the society developed by the males and in their interest that has established woman’s situation in a form that is . . . a source of torment *for both sexes*” (500 emphasis mine). Her comment is not against man as an individual. Rather, as Barbara Ewell suggests, Chopin speaks of “the conflicts engendered by social and sexual roles” (*Kate Chopin* 106) which arise in an atmosphere of prevailing domination, against the “institutions and social frameworks within which they [are] trapped” (Taylor 161). Patriarchy produces the man-instinct of possession, that instinct which both drives woman to find sexual fulfilment outside of marriage and man to insanity in quest of ultimate knowledge of his wife’s self which their marriage will not allow. Patriarchy must be held accountable: this is the final message the letters have to tell. The claim for Chopin’s writing being feminist as opposed to feminine is upheld. She not only writes woman as subject but further addresses the deeply entrenched patriarchal codes which deny women this possibility in the world of male domination.

⁵³ The woman finds temporary escape through the letters - through them she finds her ‘true self’ - but she can do so only from within the bounds of patriarchy. When the affair is over, marriage, and suffering, await.

As a writer, Chopin does not choose the path of the male protagonist of "Her Letters." "Traditional conventions and accepted forms" of Maupassant do not force her to drown herself, her "individuality, originality and creativity in a sea [or, in this case, a river] of banalities," as Kathleen Wheeler argues they do (53). She swims on through and transverses the boundaries of patriarchy, stepping farther beyond them, it seems, on each occasion at which she takes the pen. The patriarchal system of imprisonment is repeatedly exposed and opened up to questioning. The boundaries are constantly re-negotiated. With increasingly forceful feminism Chopin claims more ground as her own.

Chapter Five

Drowning in the Wake of Maupassantian Pessimism?: The Climactic Dream of Ultimate Despair in “An Egyptian Cigarette”

A dreamer is one who can find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.⁵⁴

The artistic movement evident in Chopin's writing of the short story as it is represented here cannot be acclaimed for its optimistic output. The stories so far considered have shown that Chopin's feminist voice does not gain its strength through the enlivening nature of its treatment of social issues. The bleak reality which these stories expose, that which lies beyond the picture of order which patriarchy attempts to impose upon the social world, is far from positive; they are permeated by a sense of Maupassantian pessimism. Chopin herself may not drown in the Frenchman's influence upon her, but, heroine after heroine, she writes her female characters into a dismal existence which can be, and is, escaped only through death; they are indeed left lost forever “in a sea of banalities” (K. Wheeler 53). This end becomes quite literal in her climactic novel, *The Awakening*, as Edna Pontellier meets her final destiny in the ocean's depths, fleeing the patriarchal demands of wife and motherhood:

The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

She went on and on . . .

Her arms and legs were growing tired.

She thought of Leonce and the children. They were part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul . . .

Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her.

‘Good-by - because I love you.’ . . . but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone . . . (*The Awakening* 1000)⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist.” 407.

⁵⁵ For a full discussion of the Maupassantian pessimism and portrayal of the hopelessness of isolation evident in *The Awakening* see Elaine Jasenas’ “The French Influence in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*.”

It may be claimed, however, that Edna's destiny was decided well before these words were etched. Well before embarking on the fictional journey of Mrs Pontieller's awakening to sexual selfhood, Chopin's short story writing became entrenched in Maupassantian pessimism, delving "more and more into a darker perspective of humanity" (Fusco 156). In this respect, one story in particular anticipates *The Awakening*: the "strange tale," as Barbara C. Ewell labels it (*Kate Chopin* 140), of an Egyptian cigarette. This story was the last fictional piece written by Chopin before the creation of that novel which shocked American society on its publication and, more recently, brought Chopin new-found critical acclaim through its rediscovery, and thus, marks the end of her short story career.

"An Egyptian Cigarette" is continually noted for its similarities to *The Awakening*. It is said to resemble the longer work "in both tone and technique" (Davis 201), in its "subtle incantations," its rhythmic repetitions, its brief, sometimes broken, deceptively simple phrasing, its symbolic details (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 140). What is of interest here, however, is not what the story speaks of in terms of the novel, but rather what it has to say in itself, and, more particularly, what it has to say of Chopin's feminist reappropriation of Maupassant. The question being asked is one of how Chopin adopts the Frenchman's stance of pessimism to achieve feminist ends, of how a feminist assertion can be caged within, yet speak out against, the hopelessness of the social situation it portrays. Having written the 'true self' for her heroines, Chopin writes on allowing this self no life, no existence beyond the bounds of that 'room of one's own.' She seems to have given up, to have lost hope, to have resigned herself to the fact that her feminist treatises are a farce. Closer investigation of her rewriting of the male-dominated tradition in "An Egyptian Cigarette," however, refutes this suggestion. Chopin is revealed not as lost, engulfed in the pessimism of Maupassant, but rather as

having adopted and adapted this pessimism to fulfil her own needs. Chopin's feminism does not die along with the hope of true selfhood for her heroines; it not only speaks of, but speaks out through, this loss of hope. The dream of selfhood lives on, the need for its realisation struggling on against the currents which pull its actual realisation into the depths below. And from the depths of this struggle Chopin's feminist voice speaks out. This is the voice of survival, the voice which lives to tell the tale of those who have suffered, and thus makes their suffering not submissive and silent but subversive, speaking out against the patriarchal world, exposing the very fact of its denial - the denial of female selfhood.

Written in April 1897, "An Egyptian Cigarette" shows even clearer evidence of Maupassantian influence than that apparent in "Her Letters," almost two and a half years its predecessor.⁵⁶ Her re-workings of the Frenchman's form and content show an increase in familiarity, and also in complexity. Here, Chopin reverts to the shorter style of story seen in "The Story of an Hour" and "The Kiss"; a moment in time is again captured with clarity, precision and economy, with what can again be identified as "unity of impression" (Poe Rev. *Twice Told Tales* 60). The stance taken remains objective, the position amoral, and the portrayal and treatment of character psychologically directed - even more so in this case as Chopin switches to first person narration, a form highly typical of Maupassant, drawing the reader closer to the central protagonist, exploring the inside from the inside, rather than attempting to penetrate from without. The pattern of appropriation continues, and again this is not limited to the realms of form. Again, Chopin's content is also drawn directly from Maupassant, and

⁵⁶ "Her Letters" is said to have been written in November of 1894 and published in *Vogue*, April 1895. (Dates are according to details in the appendix of Seyersted's *Complete Works*) [Check the corresponding translation dates of Maupassant's short stories.]

again, this becomes most apparent in the light of her translations of the French artist's work.

The Maupassant stories which Chopin chose to translate are highly charged with pessimism and a claim made by A.H. Wallace about this element of the Frenchman's work highlights the very way in which Chopin draws upon it in her own writing. Wallace proposes that the suggestion inherent in Maupassant's pessimistic philosophy is that "we are all in a desert where no one understands anyone else and where all the distances between us remain greater than those between the stars" (107). Ironically, the imagery Wallace adopts in the wording of this claim could be drawn straight from "An Egyptian Cigarette". It almost seems that he may have read the story himself. But Chopin's Maupassantian translations, providing as they do no more than a superficial, limited sampling of the Frenchman's interests, reveal, none the less, the true source of Wallace's images. It is of Maupassant he writes and it is from Maupassant he draws. Wallace's images are Maupassant's own, the appropriation of them something which he shares with Chopin. One story in particular abounds with the imagery which Chopin brings to "An Egyptian Cigarette", that piece entitled "Solitude" which she translated in March of 1895, two years prior to writing her own version of the themes which lie therein. The male narrator of "Solitude" is exposed in the midst of suffering the pain of isolation of the self. Darkness and barrenness surround him:

... since I have realised the solitude of my being I feel as if I were sinking day by day into some boundless subterranean depths, with no one near me, no other living soul to clasp my outstretched groping hands. There are noises, there are voices and cries in the darkness. I strive to reach them, but I can never discover whence they come, in the darkness, in this life which engulfs me. (196)

The narrator of the dream found within the tale of the Egyptian cigarette finds herself in a like place. Her lover has fled never to return; she is alone and will be always. And Chopin's portrayal of desertion is further foretold as Maupassant's narrator of "Solitude"

goes on to describe his situation with a quote from Flaubert: “we are all in a desert where no one person understands another” (196). The desert is precisely where Chopin’s dream vision of isolation and despair unfolds. Further to these, perhaps rather obscure, similarities is the odd reference to Egypt made in Maupassant’s story. His setting may be resoundingly French, but a touch of the long ago and far away enters the narrator’s description of the here and now:

We had ascended the long avenues as far as l’Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile, and we descended to la Palace de la Concorde . . . the granite obelisk stood before us, *its long Egyptian profile lost amid the stars*. (197 emphasis mine)

Such an image could certainly have sparked Chopin’s creative energy in the direction of “An Egyptian Cigarette,” especially when seen coupled, as it is, with the notions of solitude and desertion. The parallels between the two stories are readily identified, appropriation of Maupassantian content on Chopin’s part reaching even greater heights.

According to Fusco, these heights are reached not just in terms of content. Appropriation of Maupassantian form and structure also reaches new levels as Chopin’s artistry grows. “An Egyptian Cigarette” sees Chopin engaging in experimentation with Maupassantian forms of increasing complexity, characterised as it is by those very elements which Fusco associates with these forms. In this story the turning point becomes less restrictive; it no longer dominates our perception of character, functioning rather as a point which divides and invites us to compare two parallel phenomena, marking, as Fusco proposes, “interesting changes in a protagonist’s situation, behaviour, [and] insight” (47). Chopin can be seen to be adopting the form of the “contrast story,” dealing as she does with a character discovering some elemental truth in life but being unable to alter it, feeling instead that “[her] suffering intensifies with [her] deeper insight into the bleakness of existence” (Fusco 66).

But on the whole, the story is comprised more of those elements which mark Maupassant's most complicated structure: the "sinusoidal story," a direct derivative of the contrast form. In this structure a second point of inflection is inserted mid-text; a new section is added which allows for comparative analysis of the first and last passages - "the interlude" takes form (Fusco 67). This is the dream vision of "An Egyptian Cigarette." Fusco suggests that the interlude often functions as an escape from the realities of existence, as a Romantic alternative for the character, a mystical experience offering transcendence, but it is an experience, as is seen in Chopin's writing of it, which is but temporary. The character is returned to an existence made all the more difficult to bear, is doubly damned by the return to normal life having, as Fusco purports, "tasted of a better but untenable alternative, and so consequently [having] a standard by which he must now always condemn his present and future life" (87-88). The futility of dreams of escape is realised. Maupassant's pessimism is embodied in his form, and it is here that the effectiveness of Chopin's appropriation lies, not simply in her adoption of his form, but in her adaptation of its pessimistic outlook to serve her feminist interests.

The story does not open on a resoundingly dark note. The situation within is established quickly with precision and economy, with little need for lengthy contextualisation. The narrator of the tale has gathered with others to observe the Oriental "curios" of an architect friend, a returned traveller, and the gift which this friend offers introduces the cigarette which makes for the story's seemingly strange title: " 'Here is something for you,' he said, picking up a small box and turning it over in his hand. 'You are a cigarette smoker; take this home with you' " (570). What follows is an in-depth discussion of the box and its contents, a discussion which serves to create an atmosphere for the story, a mood of mystery. The narrator of the story

questions the architect's confident claim of knowledge of the contents which lie therein: "It bore no label, no stamp - nothing to indicate its contents" (570). The box is likened to a letter, a sealed letter, a source of speculation and mystery - "'How do you know they are cigarettes?' I asked, taking the box and turning it stupidly around as one turns a sealed letter and speculates before opening it" (571) - and thus, harkening back to "Her Letters," a source of knowledge and power. Will the narrator of "An Egyptian Cigarette" find these same strengths within the cigarettes said to lie inside? As the box is opened, the truth of the architect's claim is revealed, "The box contained six cigarettes" (570), but the sense of mystery which surrounds their existence remains. There is something different about these cigarettes. "Evidently handmade" (570), the tobacco of their creation is odd in colouring and "of finer cut than the Turkish or *ordinary* Egyptian" (570 emphasis mine) - they stand apart. More knowledge is craved. What makes these cigarettes different? What is their significance? The urge to read on is embedded within their mystical qualities.

The first revelation made, however, is one which, although vital to the story's message, until mentioned directly, evades consideration: the gender of the narrator. "'Will you try one now, *Madam*?' " asks the architect friend (570 emphasis mine). The narrator is a woman. Not an astounding divulgence for the modern-day reader perhaps, but turning to consider the late nineteenth-century audience for whom Chopin was writing a more emotional reaction may have been expected. The fact that the narrator is female has the potential to literally shock any reading audience schooled in the conventions of patriarchy. The ideal woman as she was defined by the nineteenth-century codes which adhered strictly to the tradition of male-domination was not one who smoked cigarettes of any description. From the outset, it may easily have been presumed by Chopin's readers that the narrator was indeed male. The behaviour

reported is more suited to this gender, in a highly patriarchal society at least, and such an assumption is furthered by the architect friend himself being unquestionably male - who else would a travelling man buy cigarettes for but a fellow man? The narrator's sexual identity appears unquestionable according to the codes of patriarchy, and thus, the revelation made has the power to overturn reader certainty. Chopin sets her audience up only to pull their beliefs rapidly out from under them, critiquing, in the process, the very patriarchal laws of definition to which such readers have subscribed and forcing them to view the world from a different perspective, to see that the faults she finds in the social world around her and explores through her stories are indeed faults of their own. No-one living within the bounds of its cage is free from the biases of the patriarchal world.

That the behaviour of the narrator, her smoking, is unconventional is further emphasised in her response to the architect's question: " 'Not now and not here' " (570). The woman of the story appears to recognise smoking as an act which is socially inappropriate for someone in her position - for someone, that is, who is female. It is an act which she feels she can undertake only in removing herself from the social world, through the act of withdrawal into what Barbara Ewell describes as the private meditative space required for her singular experience (*Kate Chopin* 139). And this she does, finding retreat in the smoking den of her male companion, escaping the presence of those other women about her who, in line with nineteenth-century patriarchal ideals of femininity and womanhood, "detest the odor of cigarettes" (570). Her retreat appears as an act of pure consideration for these other women but on removing herself the narrator becomes secretly self-congratulatory: "I was feeling quite comfortable, and congratulated myself upon having escaped for a while" (571), asserting, as Ewell purports, her singularity among females (*Kate Chopin* 139). The environment of the

smoking den further emphasises the removal from the everyday, 'ordinary' world of the narrator which it represents. It is exotic, Orientally appointed, its atmosphere captured through the view which the window provides, a view reminiscent of that glanced in "The Story of an Hour." Again the images are natural: "A broad, low window opened out upon a balcony that overhung the garden. From the divan upon which I reclined, only the swaying tree-tops could be seen. The maple leaves glistened in the afternoon sun" (571). Louise Mallard's earlier retreat into the self is recalled. The "fantasy" world in which the heroine is placed in touch with the "vital forces of nature" (Davis 200) is re-entered. The narrator has entered, as did those heroines before her, that 'room of one's own,' moving from a place "in which the community's moral standards prevail" to one in which "the burden of public behaviour can be suspended and the 'private' self can emerge" (Fluck 157). The difference here is that the room is not, strictly speaking, the room of one's own - it is the room of a man, a room equipped for *male* pleasure, containing as it does "the complete paraphernalia of a smoker" (571). Only here in this realm of the male world can the narrator feel comfortable and self-congratulatory, "having escaped for a while the incessant chatter of the women" (572), that female discourse to which she seems not to relate, which she sees as trivial and pointless. Chopin's later female narrator truly stands apart from the world of the 'ideal,' the 'true' woman.⁵⁷

Here, in the smoking den, the narrator can relax and be her 'true self,' embrace those parts of that self which patriarchal convention restricts to the realm of the male. And so she does, entering this world of the self through an Egyptian cigarette. As she

⁵⁷ The "voice couvert" (Cutter 17) has become, to an even greater extent, the *hidden* voice of feminism. Subversiveness is enacted from within the patriarchal world. The narrator of "An Egyptian Cigarette" is not afforded the female sanctuary of her predecessors. Her process of discovery must be undertaken from within the male realm. Patriarchal order is challenged from within, exposed but not disrupted.

smokes the cigarette its "gray-green" vapours fill the room, clouding convention, as it were. The outside world becomes increasingly distant with each inspiration taken. She is overcome, intoxicated: "A subtle disturbing current passed through my whole body and went to my head like the fumes of disturbing wine" (571). Body and mind are taken out of the world as it exists outside the doors of her male sanctuary and into another. Shaw's moment of crisis is again enacted, "a crisis which momentarily halts the flow of time, leaving everything permanently altered once it has passed" (47). The boundaries of the everyday world are broken and the journey of self-consciousness begins. The Romantic tradition of the short story genre, as identified by Mary Rohberger, appears to be at work. In "An Egyptian Cigarette" the short story becomes a vehicle for probing the nature of the 'real.' "Reality lies beyond the ordinary world of appearances," Rohberger writes, "so in the short story, meaning lies beneath the surface of the narrative" (81). Here, through intoxication, Chopin takes her narrator beneath this surface, uncovering 'reality' through the hidden meanings of the dream vision which results. "The framework of the narrative embodies symbols which function to question the world of appearances and to point to a reality beyond the facts of the extensional world" (Rohberger 81).

This journey 'beneath the surface' into the most intimate realm of the self, the realm of the dream, epitomises a shift in Chopin's writing style identified by Sara Desaussure Davis in her "Chopin's Movement Toward Universal Myth." Davis suggests that Chopin's post 1894 stories deal increasingly more with universal themes than the earlier local colour variety, that a shift away from the Bayou myth and toward one more universal in nature can be charted over her writing career (199). This movement she sees as resulting in a feminism more indirect, a feminism which "appears not as tract or treatise but as myth" (200). The argument at the crux of this thesis is

supported. Through the working of this “Universal Myth” Chopin is able to strengthen her feminist voice through subtlety. Indirection becomes the source of subversion. Chopin can be seen to bring to these later stories a dreamlike quality which Charles E. May recognises as being inextricably bound up with the short story genre, founded in its continual concern with “emotion, intuition, and fleeting moments of truth,” the short story being, he goes on to propose, “primarily a literary mode that embodies and recapitulates mythic perception itself” (“The Unique Effect of the Short Story” 291). This mythical quality provides for the possibility suggested by Poe - that of complete absorption. The narrative experience is likened to that of being under the spell of mythic thought. The outside world is annihilated and all that exists is the immediate content of the myth (May “The Unique Effect” 292).

This mythic world has been touched on to some degree in previous discussion. In “The Story of an Hour” the shocking news of her husband’s death allows Louise Mallard entry into the world of the self, and in “Her Letters” the letters themselves provide the woman of the story with mythical freedom, putting her in touch with her true, passionate nature. The female characters of these stories do indeed enter their own “fantasy” worlds, worlds which free them from nineteenth-century restrictions, artificialities and pretences, which put them in touch with the vital forces of nature and a different vision of society (Davis 200). In “An Egyptian Cigarette,” however, the mythical approach reaches new heights. The internals of experience which come together in *A Vocation and a Voice* are explored more deeply, Chopin entering further still into her heroine’s psychological being. Here those dreams of selfhood which are seen to provide Chopin’s heroines with access to the larger mythic world, those “altered states of consciousness in which a character transcends mundane reality and enters a fantasy, an illusion, a dream, a vision, to return with different options, a changed

perspective” (Davis 200), become even further removed from the reality of the outside world. The metaphorical dream becomes a reality, a literal occurrence. The heroine of “An Egyptian Cigarette” truly enters the mythic underworld of the transcendental state (Davis 201), and the result which is written for her is one of even greater significance. The pain and suffering of the patriarchal reality is fully realised and exposed. The full extent of Maupassant’s pessimistic outlook becomes Chopin’s own, and it is through this pessimism that the feminist ‘truth’ of her social ‘reality’ is uncovered.

The shift in narrative which marks the narrator’s entry into the world of the dream is sudden and abrupt. The first person point of view remains but the story being told is no longer that of the narrator to whom we were initially introduced. Another voice is heard, another female consciousness entered. The story becomes the story of the dream, of a new speaker; the Maupassantian interlude is entered, and it is indeed, as Mary Papke suggests, a “distorted and perverse vision of passion and despair” (68). Immediately the narrative launches into an account of the new narrator’s feelings of despondency, feelings which have reached the depths of suicidal contemplation, indicated in true Maupassantian style: “I shall drag myself to the river” (571). Motivation for this state of utter despair is provided: “He will never come back” (571). The speaker has been deserted, both metaphorically and literally, for it is in a desert she is pictured, “the sun blister[ing] all [her] body . . . crushing [her] with hot torture” (571), a setting which controls her feelings of bleak erotic despair (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 138). She lies abandoned by her lover, driven mad with longing, and Maupassantian images of death and isolation abound. She is drawn to the river, and to the night. Death is inviting and the woman of the dream suffers further in its pursuit. The sweetness of past life is not forgotten. Memories of happier times when she worshipped a god named Bardja are recalled with longing: “That was when I decked myself with lilies and wove

flowers into a garland and held him close in the frail, sweet fetters” (571). But the only reward for such acts has been desertion. The male god she worshipped in the patriarchal style of true womanhood, of submission and subservience, has now abandoned her, and cruelly so: “He will never come back. He turned upon his camel as he rode away. He turned and looked at me crouching here and laughed, showing his gleaming white teeth” (571). He had left before, it seems, with either a kiss or the stinging words of anger, but this time is different: “to-day he neither kissed me nor was angry” (572). Boredom was his sole motivation: “He only said: ‘Oh! I am tired of fetters, and kisses, and you. I am going away. You will never see me again’ ” (572). He has tired of the romance she believed would last forever, the “real dream of feminine life” (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 139). All that remains for the dream’s narrator is the memory of his cruel smile as he rode away, she crouched, closed up, submissive, in his wake.⁵⁸ She has only the nourishment of despair on which to feed, a “bitter” food which nourishes only “resolve” which eats away at the soul (572).⁵⁹

Death has, thus, become welcome. It approaches with the falling of night, and the attraction of the river’s waters increases. They stand as a symbol of peace, an end to the pain of suffering: “My body is sore and bruised as if broken. Why can I not rise and run as I did this morning? Why must I drag myself thus like a wounded serpent, twisting and writhing?” (572). Death arrives, or the illusion of it, an oasis shining through the desert sands. She finds the river. “I hear it - I see it - Oh! The sand! Oh! The shine! How

⁵⁸ Note that despite this portrayal of the deserter as cruel, unkind, unfeeling, the critique of the story is not directed toward the individual, nor indeed toward his sex. More important is Chopin’s exposure of the social codes and conventions which condition such behaviour as his, and also that behaviour with which his deserted lover responds. Patriarchy is held accountable.

⁵⁹ Although caged within the bounds of patriarchy, projected through the act of male worship, the lustful drives of the woman of the dream none the less speak of Chopin’s acknowledgement of the existence of female sexuality. The woman is far from cold and passionless, her sensual being awakened, her responses full of sexual longing.

cool! how cold!” (572) she cries. Her senses are alive, fulfilled at last (Papke 69).⁶⁰ Death is welcomed with the possibility it provides of being reunited once more with her god of worship. It becomes paradise, “the sweet rapture of rest” (572). Her fear dissolves, but ironically so, drowned in “sensual images of the romantic raptures that have led so ineluctably to this mortal despair” (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 139):

There is music in the Temple. And here is fruit to taste. Bardja came with the music - The moon shines and the breeze is soft - A garland of flowers - let us go into the King's garden and look at the blue lily, Bardja. (572)

The happiness of death lies only in its promise of a return to the past, to that very past which led to the suffering and despair, the past of worship of man, the past of the patriarchal ideal for woman. Even in death, the narrator of the dream of “An Egyptian Cigarette” is trapped within the patriarchal cage. Here the bars are finally inescapable. Absolute dependency upon her male god is revealed. He provides her with the only reason to live (or to die), her attraction to death founded only in the dream that there the two will be forever joined in paradise, a dream which, in reality, serves only to highlight her internalisation of patriarchal codes. Death can only promise a return to life, life unchanged, life in which female submission is the only route to happiness, where suffering is silent.

With these words the dream is over. The narrative returns to the smoking heroine and, with her awakening, the true significance of the despair of the dream vision is realised. What the woman of the story awakens from, the sleep of intoxication and hallucinatory transcendence she has just experienced, is not only important in itself, but for what it causes her to awaken into. The room which greets her eyes has cleared of the smoke's fumes, but the perspective she brings to it is far from unclouded. The

⁶⁰ Sensual responses are evoked throughout the story, again directing a like reaction in the reader; touching, emotionally moving, rather than simply telling. A deeper level is reached.

hallucinogenic-induced dream-vision has, as Davis suggests, tortured her (201). She awakens from it sadly oppressed: "I could hardly lift the lids of my eyes. The weight of centuries seemed to suffocate my soul that struggled to escape, to free itself and breathe" (572). Like the letters of the previous story, the cigarettes have provided Chopin's heroine with the opportunity to escape patriarchal reality, but the dream which the letters represent to the woman of "Her Letters" is worlds apart from that experienced by the narrator of "An Egyptian Cigarette." The letters become for their owner a source of life, of pleasure, to turn to "at will whenever the humor came to her to pass an hour in some intoxicating dream of the days when she felt she had lived" ("Her Letters" 400), but the escape from the patriarchal world which the cigarettes represent serves only to undermine any possibility of further escape. Theirs is a dream she does not wish to repeat. Maupassantian pessimism has come to cloud the feminist view. The dream of "An Egyptian Cigarette" does not speak of the female self-assertion captured in the very existence of the letters. The vision the cigarettes provides is not that of the emancipated woman. Rather, the portrait contained therein is that of the bleak reality of conditioned subservience, of a woman crawling on hands and knees through the hot desert sand to find an illusory paradise in the god-like worship of man - the epitome of the internalisation of the cult of true womanhood: patriarchy is inescapable. The freedom of Chopin's early animal, her first sketch of the awakening to liberty, is undermined by a pervading sense of ultimate despair.

The moment of epiphany has been recorded once again, but its outcome here is far removed from the joys of passionate selfhood experienced by the heroine's of "The Story of an Hour" and "Her Letters." While the heroines of these stories live and breathe the freedom of being oneself, the narrator of "An Egyptian Cigarette" sees only the

inevitable truth of patriarchal denial of female selfhood.⁶¹ Her journey into the fantasy world of the self, the dream world of the universal myth, provides the narrator of "An Egyptian Cigarette" with nothing but that bitter taste of despair passed on to her from the woman of her dream. Her awakening is not the awakening of the self to the joys of its 'true' being and nature, it is the pessimistic awakening of the self to the 'truth' of life in the patriarchal world, the 'truth' of inescapable despair: "I had tasted the depths of human despair" (572). The female narrator and the woman of her dream have become one, their realities intertwined. In the guise of the dream vision the narrator's inner reality has been revealed. The pain and suffering of the woman of the dream, the vision of eternal hopelessness which her story portrays, is the narrator's own. The dream has brought the reality of its dreamer, and the despair inherent to it, to light. She has seen the dark bleakness of the dawn. She has awakened not to a new day but to the darkness of night. Evening is closing in.

In the space of only fifteen minutes⁶² the narrator's entire view of life has been irreversibly altered. The smoking of the extraordinary Egyptian cigarette has enabled her to see beyond the mask of patriarchal order, to see the 'truth' of human existence, the 'reality' the male-dominated society of a patriarchal world attempts to conceal beneath its construction of 'ideals.' The narrator has experienced the truth of despair. The futility of life has been exposed. Even at death, relentless isolation cannot be curbed. Maupassant presented his readers with the same portrait of gloom: the

⁶¹ Pain and suffering does, however, also come to these earlier heroines. Their joy is but temporary. It is soon revealed that the experience of being which brings them such delight and release cannot exist in the world outside their private sanctuaries. The pessimism of "An Egyptian Cigarette" is in no way new to Chopin but it is deeper having gradually darkened into a vision of utter hopelessness.

⁶² The time span of the dream is made quite clear within the story through reference to the specific positioning of the hands of its keeper. The dream begins upon the hour: "I took a cigarette and lit it, placing the box upon the stand just as the tiny clock, which was there, chimed in silvery strokes the hour of five" (571). On awakening from its clutches she finds "The little clock upon the stand pointed to a quarter past five" (572).

individual downtrodden by the strictures of the surrounding social world. It was a condition the Frenchman saw as being universal, inevitable, and inescapable. His stories ring with the pessimistic outlook that doom will come to all. Here, Chopin seems to have joined him in this perception of the world. The view of 'reality' to which her heroine awakens equals any Maupassantian piece in its despondent philosophy. Her mentor's viewpoint has become her own. But, as is the recurring pattern in Chopin's work, adoption tends toward adaptation. The specific content of the dream vision central to "An Egyptian Cigarette" sees the French writer's pessimism take a new direction. Chopin has again adapted his material, his patriarchal interests, to serve her feminist purpose. The dream is not simply a dream of human despair, it is a dream of "an explicitly feminine despair, caused by the suffocating restraints of dependence, of godlike social conventions, of the oppressions of chatter and romance" (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 139), the oppressions embedded in patriarchal rule. The despair of the woman of the dream is a gender specific despair. It is a despair which is fed by the social expectations of ideal womanhood, by patriarchal attempts to oppress true selfhood. Through the writing of the dream vision, Chopin speaks out not only against society and its general oppression of the individual. She speaks more specifically, of a male-dominated society and its oppression of the female individual. She speaks of the patriarchal cage which cannot be escaped. She speaks as feminist.

The change in Chopin's outlook, that shift toward increasing pessimism evident in her work, is rightly identified by Fusco as inextricably bound in her adoption of the Maupassantian helical form, "An Egyptian Cigarette" capturing the full scope of this despairing view:

... as she rethought her attitudes toward life, religion, sexuality, and art she arrived at the negative conclusions that paralleled Maupassant's belief that every individual may ultimately yield to the inherent degradation of existence. .

. . . we may exert much energy to elude a futile solitude but an invariable universal current relentlessly washes us out to a forlorn and enveloping sea. (166)

What Fusco fails to recognise, however, is the scope of this change, and its prompting. He sees the source of Chopin's pessimistic vision to lie merely in her appropriation of Maupassantian form, in the pervading sense of pessimism which dominates the descending helicals of the French writer, those very stories which she chose to translate. The evidence which supports such a claim cannot be disregarded, but Maupassant's influence cannot be seen as absolute, as mastering her formation of the short story. The growing pessimism of her work cannot be accounted for in the simple fact of her adoption of Maupassantian form. While Maupassant's pessimistic outlook is grounded in the patriarchal view of the male dominated short story tradition, highlighting once again that "escape from tradition and authority" (Chopin "Confidences" 701) was not his strength, Chopin takes this outlook and gives it new direction. Her pessimism is unquestionably feminist pessimism. While Maupassant's pessimism can be seen to be founded in the haunting state of old age, a state which A.H. Wallace claims caused the Frenchman to envision "the frightful hopelessness of its victims caught in a world where none of their ideas or wishes is heeded, where they can make no imprint whatsoever" (117), Chopin is haunted more by the condition of her gender. It is not only with the coming of old age that the ideas and wishes of women in the patriarchal world go unheeded, that they can make no imprint. The position which Fusco describes above is precisely that of women in the patriarchal world, continually engulfed by the currents of the social world, its codes and conventions. This is their life-long penalty; sentenced to eternal imprisonment within the patriarchal cage, silenced by the forces of male domination. It is against this specifically female penalty which Chopin writes, and it is

the nature of this penalty which necessitates the pessimism evident in her feminist voice.

The ending of "An Egyptian Cigarette" intensifies the despair surrounding this specifically female penalty highlighting, as it does, the eternal nature of the sentence. Imprisonment on the grounds of gender is inescapable. Awakening from her dream of despair, the remaining cigarettes become a source of wonderment to the story's heroine. They represent to her the possibility of a vision more wondrous, "a vision of celestial peace; a dream of hopes fulfilled; a taste of rapture, such as had not entered into my mind to conceive" (573). Who knows of the wonders that may lie within their clouds of smoke? The temptation to discover the secrets they contain is strong. But it is a temptation undermined even before its pull is fully felt. The disappointing adventure she has just experienced has left the narrator threatened by the prospect of further experiments with the cigarettes (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 140). The risk of repeating such a vision of inevitable despondency is too great. The smoking of another cigarette may promise the possibility of extraordinary insight, but it also carries the possibility of utter despair (Rocks 17), and the cost of this possibility is recognised as too painful. The narrator denies herself the possibility of pleasure, of rapture. She destroys the remaining cigarettes:

I took the cigarettes and crumpled them between my hands. I walked to the window and spread my palms wide. The light breeze caught up the golden threads and bore them writhing and dancing far out among the maple leaves. (572)

The life they may represent, the freedom from the bleak reality of patriarchal life which their writhing and dancing suggests, is not worth the risk of further despair.

True selfhood is cast out into the elements. Only here can it be embraced.⁶³

Self-denial becomes, for the heroine, the key to well-being. Restraint becomes a kind of wisdom (Rocks 117). Destroying the cigarettes protects her from further visions of despair. It is an act of self-preservation. But the only self which this act preserves is that self which exists within the patriarchal world, that self from which she sought escape in retreating to the smoking den of her male companion. In casting the cigarettes to the wind the narrator denies herself the existence of 'true selfhood,' of any being beyond that defined by patriarchal convention. She gives in to the situation that awaits her beyond the walls of her borrowed sanctuary. Power must be returned to its true owner - to the male. The dream has highlighted the hopelessness of her own existence and the bitterness which such recognition arouses stands in the way of "any further challenges to the conventional surfaces of the conscious life" (Ewell *Kate Chopin* 140). The only escape possible, escape through the cigarettes, has been revealed as illusory. The narrator has paid the price of the dreamer. She has, through smoking the cigarette and entering the dream-world the experience creates, escaped the patriarchal reality, but the vision of dawn presented to her is a source of punishment rather than inspiration.

⁶³ The maple leaves written of here are alluded to repeatedly by the narrator of the story. The view of them which is provided by the positioning of the smoking den is one of the first aspects which she comments upon, and their significance is highlighted as they appear to her at each moment of emotional transformation: firstly, as she slips into the dream state - "I could see the maple leaves dimly, as if they were veiled in a shimmer of moonlight. A subtle, disturbing current passed through my whole body and went to my head like the fumes of disturbing wine" (571); and secondly, as she awakens to the bleak reality of existence - "The maple leaves looked as if a silvery shimmer enveloped them" (572). It is not until reaching this final reference to the leaves, however, that their true symbolic value may be recognised. Here, the crumpled cigarettes, the narrator's discarded key to possible "rapture" and "hopes fulfilled," writhe and dance "far out among the maple leaves." They are filled with life, the life of true selfhood, of being one's own self, the life which she has cast away, which patriarchy has denied her. And what better tree to represent such freedom of self than the maple? Consider this description taken from Donald Peattie's *A Natural History of Western Trees*:

"Nor could there be a finer shade tree than this, for each leaf is frequently a foot long (and broad) and yet, deeply lobed as the blades are, they do not form an oppressive shade - windless and somber - but they act, rather, like lattices, letting the light through but not the heat of the day" (606). The maple provides shade, protection, but not at the expense of all light. It is not oppressive. It allows those under its shelter to see beyond its boughs, lighting their way rather than obstructing their path to selfhood as patriarchal lore would have it. The leaves embrace, bring to love the true selfhood which the cigarettes represent.

She awakens into the despair of existence, a despair which is now recognised as inescapable. The reality of female selfhood cannot be realised within the reality of the patriarchal world (Davis 205). She must return to the patriarchal world. She cannot challenge the reality of despair which her dream has exposed; she cannot lift the mask of appearances constructed by patriarchal convention. Rather, she must submit to it, simply ““a little worse for a dream”” (573). There is no escape. The story closes in the depths of pessimism.

Maupassant's world view has lived and breathed through the text. On reaching the end of her short story career, Chopin is found to be immersed in the fictional world of her French mentor, both formally and thematically. The turning point in the narrator's life which the dream represents serves the same purpose as those found mid-text in many of the Frenchman's tales. The change is not one which sparks action. The Maupassantian turning point does not necessarily constitute any shift in the protagonist's life. Rather, it serves to mark a change in their degree of understanding which surrounds their place in this life, to increase their perception of tragedy and hopelessness inherent to their situation (Fusco 74). In “An Egyptian Cigarette” Chopin applies this formula to her feminist concerns. The dream of her narrator brings not revolution against the patriarchal world; it simply brings the hopelessness of the patriarchal situation of women to life. It increases the narrator's understanding of her own existence in such a world but arouses no response, no shift in behaviour, no challenge. The “masculine ideal” identified by de Beauvoir is indeed betrayed by the narrator of the story, as it has been by those heroines before her, written to “think, dream, sleep, desire, breathe without permission” (496). But here, as for all, this betrayal is limited. The passivity of the actions allowed women even in the act of subversion cannot be denied. Chopin's heroines can desire, can think about, can dream

about true selfhood, but they cannot act it out. They cannot elicit change. Escape is but temporary; it occurs only within the individual. The closing statement of the story is resoundingly dismissive; the experience of the dream is trivialised. No hope of improvement is hinted at, no suggestion of change made. Chopin adopts the same attitude as that of her French mentor: that “the game is rigged and we shall lose in the long run” (Butler 11). He too presented characters who, although unhappy and dissatisfied with their circumstances and/or station in life, could do little to alter them (Butler 7). The path which Chopin follows is Maupassant’s path of descent, the downward spiral embodied in the descending helical. On reaching the end of her short story career, the pessimism of Maupassant has become Chopin’s own, her final words in the genre speaking out from the deepest depths of bitter despair.

Conclusion

The Victory of Subversive Survival: Swimming on Against the Currents of Maupassantian Patriarchal Tradition

The Haunted Chamber⁶⁴

Of course 'twas an excellent story to tell
Of a fair, frail, passionate woman who fell.
It may have been false, it may have been true.
That was nothing to me - it was less to you.
But with bottle between us, and clouds of smoke
From your last cigar, 'twas more of a joke
Than a matter of sin or a matter of shame
That a woman had fallen, and nothing to blame,
So far as you or I could discover,
But her beauty, her blood and an ardent lover.
But when you were gone and the lights were low
And the breeze came in with the moon's pale glow,
The far, faint voice of a woman, I heard,
'Twas but a wail, and it spoke no word.
It rose from the depths of some infinite gloom
And its tremulous anguish filled the room.
Yet the woman was dead and could not deny,
But woman forever will whine and cry.
So now I must listen the whole night through
To the torment with which I had nothing to do -
But women forever will whine and cry
And men forever must listen - and sigh -

From her very beginnings as writer of the short story Chopin took a risk which was two-fold in its possible ramifications. Firstly, Chopin took the risk of the revolutionary. She chose to write of freedom, of emancipation, escape, of the quest for

⁶⁴ "The Haunted Chamber" is one of a handful of poems written by Chopin. Cited here from *The Complete Works* (733-734), where this piece was published for the first time and in which Seyersted claims the date of its creation to be February 1899, "when the author in all likelihood had just read proofs of *The Awakening*" (1032), the poem can be seen to capture that same Maupassantian pessimistic sense of inescapable despair identified in the short stories of Chopin.

liberty in a world of imprisonment, and she did so not only in general terms, writing for the good of 'man'kind, but in terms specifically female. From her earliest stories onwards, Chopin took the pen as a weapon against the cage of the patriarchal world, that cage to which women were, as she saw it, unjustly confined. She wrote as feminist, subverting the patriarchal ideology of 'true womanhood' and in doing so faced the risk of censure by a world of readers entrenched in these very conventions.⁶⁵ For Chopin, however, the 'risk of writing' did not lie solely with her feminist concerns. It also lay, as this study has shown, with the specific way in which she chose to voice her feminism: in the act of Chopin's Maupassantian reappropriation.

In adopting the male coda of her French mentor, Maupassant, and his predecessors, Chopin took another risk, one with the potential to prove much more costly to a female writer in a male world: the risk of losing her individuality. In entering the androcentric tradition of short story writing, under the influence of Maupassant, Chopin took the risk of becoming immersed in this tradition, of drowning, and of taking with her to the depths that very feminist voice which marked the revolutionary nature of her writing, the risk of not sounding that voice through her own text but losing it, thus endorsing the patriarchal norms of silence and submission.

The driving force of this thesis has been to show Chopin's victory in the act of reappropriation, to show that she took this risk and that she survived it, that she in fact did more than survive it, she overcame and subverted it, sounding her feminist voice

⁶⁵ Censure which she indeed met with on publication of her highly controversial novel *The Awakening*. As Edmund Wilson writes in his "Foreword" to *The Complete Works*, Chopin's attempt to "put on record the real inner emotions of women in relation to their men and their children" was what made "the hairs stand on end of those genteel readers of the nineties" and "caused her to be reprobated by the so sniffishly moral reviewers of that era" (14). The *St Louis Republic*, Wilson goes on to purport, wrote of *The Awakening* as "too strong drink for moral babes", claiming it "should be labeled poison" (14 cited from Prof. Kenneth Eble's introduction to a reprint of the novel). But even before the banning of Chopin's climactic novel, censorship played a large part in her literary career. As Toth writes: "Literary moralists and censors always offended Kate - and they dogged her from the beginning of her career" (*Kate Chopin* 192).

forcefully,⁶⁶ and that she did so, ironically, under the literary influence of a male writer very much entrenched in those patriarchal conventions against which her feminist outlook stood. Chopin challenged patriarchal tradition from within, subverting the French androcentric form of the short story as it presented itself to her in the work of Maupassant through the very act of subscribing to it. Chopin found victory in reappropriation. She borrowed from Maupassant on many levels - formally, technically, thematically - but ideologically to herself she remained true. It was to fulfil her own individual and specifically female needs that she adopted the French writer's working of the genre, to explore the woman question, to voice her feminist concerns and in the act of doing so victory was hers.

It is the progression of this very act as it occurred over the course of Chopin's short story career which has been charted and explored here - the growing evidence of Maupassant's influence on her writing style in terms of the nature and complexity of form and themes, and the subsequent shift in Chopin's feminism as the overt feminist treatise of her early work is replaced by the more subtly effective "voice couvert", the hidden voice of feminism - and throughout this exploration Chopin's skill and strength in the subversive act of reappropriation has been investigated. Under the guidance of Maupassant Chopin has been seen to have refocused her portrayal of women. The lengthy expositions of the externalities of experience of her early Paula and Eleanor are replaced by concentrated and deeply insightful psychological journeys in which feelings and emotional responses take precedence over action, strengthening the feminist message carried therein by bringing the reader closer to the inner psyche of the female

⁶⁶ The very fact that Chopin was unable to overcome entirely the first risk taken, the risk of censure, testifies in itself that her feminist voice survived the risk of immersion in an androcentric form. For a voice to threaten a voice must be heard.

protagonist. In true Maupassantian style, plot has become secondary and herein lies the key to a more effective form of feminism for Chopin - a feminism which is not only read but also felt.

But what is the result when that which is felt is bitter despair and hopelessness? For it is here, in this very black pit that Chopin leaves her reader as her short story career draws to a close: in the depths of a pessimistic hole from which cries for escape are met only with echoes of impossibility, the wordless wails of "infinite gloom" which resonate through the walls of patriarchy's own "Haunted Chamber." This is the bleak reality laid bare in "An Egyptian Cigarette:" the inescapable sentence of imprisonment with which women of a patriarchal world are faced. And it is a reality which has been explored by Chopin time and time again. Repeatedly, the only escape from patriarchy for her female characters is through death. Even in the overt, direct feminist treatise of her early stories the message is clear: if a woman is to choose life the patriarchal reality is inescapable. In her final short piece this portrayal of gender specific hopelessness merely reaches its climax, Chopin's outlook plummeting even deeper into the depths of pessimism. So what is she saying? In writing of the patriarchal condition of women as a life-sentence, impossible to escape, does Chopin in fact resign herself to the same, to the very androcentric literary world which this study has claimed she writes against and reappropriates? What feminist value can such a pessimistic outlook carry? On reaching the end has Chopin's feminist voice lost all the strength it has been seen to have gained through her Maupassantian reappropriation?

To answer such questions with a simplistic affirmative nod would be to reverse the entire argument for Chopin's subversive power as it has been laid out here. Instead, it must be asked how such pessimism can in fact be used by Chopin as a powerful tool in achieving her feminist ends. A glance at what lay ahead for Chopin on completion of

"An Egyptian Cigarette" provides some valuable insight. As suggested in the previous chapter, Chopin's novel *The Awakening* can be seen as climactic in terms of her increasingly pessimistic outlook, Edna's literal drowning at its end suggesting that death is indeed the only escape from the demands and expectations placed upon women under patriarchal rule. But the fact that this novel has reached great heights of critical acclaim for the revolutionarily feminist nature of its content suggests that a pessimistic ending of death does not necessarily negate any feminist message carried therein. Rather, it can be argued, as it is here, that such a pessimistic outlook can in fact strengthen that message through the very exposure of the hopelessness which is reality to women trapped within the patriarchal cage. From this pessimistic perspective, Chopin gives such hopelessness voice and in doing so subverts patriarchal silencing of female suffering.

A more insightful answer to those questions posed may, therefore, be said to lie in the fact that by the time of writing "An Egyptian Cigarette" a shift has occurred in Chopin's writing on more than one level. Form and content are not the only aspects of her stories touched by the influence of Maupassant. So too, it seems, has her aim in writing - the writer's goal. At the end of her short story career Chopin appears to have come to share the very aim of her French mentor: "to tell stories that reveal some insight into the human condition" (Sullivan 10). Communication rather than sermonisation has become the key to Chopin's feminism; didacticism has been replaced by exploration, her criticism becoming deeply embedded in character, plot and theme (Papke 6). The comments of Toth cited earlier, in the introduction, are recalled. Chopin's storytelling has indeed, in "An Egyptian Cigarette," become like Maupassant's, "a matter of letting stories unfold not hammering home morals" (272). The result is a non-polemical art, a non-obtrusive stance, highlighted by and embodied in a complete lack of resolution. No answer is suggested, no political attack on social structures made.

Yet herein lies Chopin's feminist goal: to expose the limitations which patriarchy places on women. She does as Maupassant did, she "does not preach or moralise, or praise, or condemn: simply presents" (O'Faolain 114). Her aim is not to suggest an alternative social structure, or an alternative way of life for women within the existing social world. It is to illustrate rather than to assert; to simply lay bare the facts, not instruct in the process of political change. As Cynthia Griffen Wolff purports, Chopin sought to "raise the fundamental questions," not to answer them (12), to "explore human enigmas that over the years have defied solution" (Bonner xi), and adoption of the pessimistic outlook of Maupassant she found to be ideally suited to achieving this form of exposition.

Through Chopin's appropriation of the Frenchman's despondent philosophy, patriarchal rule is challenged from within the very cage of despair it creates. The hopelessness of the social reality it imposes upon both women and men is exposed. It is a hopelessness to which there is no end in sight, but it is in this very inevitability and inescapability that the feminist voice of Chopin lies, that her feminist voice is sounded. She is not silenced by the destiny of despair, but turns it back upon itself as a tool of subversion. She reveals the patriarchal world from within, lifting the mask of appearances to open the male-dominated social reality up to questioning. No prescription for change may be offered but the need for change is subtly yet forcefully implied. The words of Nelly Furman are recalled:

Although it may be impossible, in the end, to escape the hegemony of patriarchal structures, none the less, by unveiling the prejudices at work in our cultural artifacts, we impugn the universality of the manmade models provided for us and allow for the possibility of sidestepping and subverting their power. (24)

Chopin's own 'letters' as they are given voice in the stories considered here contain the same subversive power as those belonging to the heroine of "Her Letters," challenging

the 'known' and the 'accepted,' revealing the status quo in all its androcentric glory, exposing its blinding faults to the reading world and eliciting a process of questioning.

Maupassantian pessimism gains new strength through Chopin's feminist adaptation. Even when emulation takes the form of despair and hopelessness, abandonment of the creative self is not the result. Pessimism becomes for Chopin a means by which to subvert the ideals which lie behind the very work from which it is drawn. The patriarchal view of the French writer is opened up to questioning from within the bounds of its very own schema. "An Egyptian Cigarette" stands as final testimony in the short story form to Chopin's ability to overcome the tensions inherent to the nineteenth-century woman writer: the tension between "the tradition they aspired to enter and the lives and fictions they sought to create as women" (Ammons 10). She claims the two, supposedly mutually exclusive, options available to female writers of her time together as her own, both pursuing her resemblance to the masculine literary tradition through appropriation of the Maupassantian way, and stressing her separation from it. She will not be restricted by the either/or dichotomy suggested by Sulenick (28).⁶⁷ Chopin's work, as represented here, answers in itself the very question which Cutter sees as central to any woman engaged in the act of writing; it exemplifies "How to speak in a voice which disrupts patriarchal discourse without being censored by patriarchal structures" (33-34). The answer, Chopin's work suggests, is to write from inside the bounds of these structures with a voice which covertly speaks against them, to disrupt the discourse from within, to simultaneously subscribe and subvert. Chopin

⁶⁷ See the introduction for this discussion.

succeeds in using means which appear as 'conventional'⁶⁸ - that is, androcentric - to meet ends resoundingly 'unconventional' - that is, feminist.

The victory of subversion is claimed by Chopin, reached out and grasped from the depths of despair. She refuses to drown in the patriarchal ocean of her mentor. Her voice is the voice of a true survivor, and the voice of a truly creative individual. Chopin maintains a sense of self and a sense of the concerns of gender which are enmeshed in that self allowing her the strength of subversion. The power of her reappropriation is fully realised. The prejudices of the patriarchal world are unveiled and in the simple act of that unveiling lies the possibility of change - the need for it, if nothing else, is clear. The influence of Maupassant gives Chopin the system of life support she requires, the air vital to survival in the male-dominated tradition from within which she must write, but each breath she draws in becomes her own, becomes a part of her being, and thus each expiration which results marks her unique feminism. She, more than Maupassant, was one "who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into [her]self and looked out upon life through [her] own being and with [her] own eyes" (Chopin 701), looked out upon life with the being and eyes of a woman, writing of woman's experience from a woman's perspective, as woman herself caged in a patriarchal world. Urged beyond the act of mere imitation by, ironically, Maupassant himself,⁶⁹ Chopin speaks out from the depths of patriarchy with a voice which must be recognised as her own, her individuality proven in its strength to swim against the currents of tradition. She writes as the freed animal of her early "Emancipation" lives, moving beyond the

⁶⁸ 'Conventional' at least in the eyes of a male reader schooled in patriarchal 'convention' such as Otis B. Wheeler. See discussion in Chapter Four.

⁶⁹ Recall Chopin's own words regarding this 'urging' from Maupassant, as cited in the Introduction.

bounds of the cage of patriarchy, “seeking, finding, joying and suffering” (38), and ultimately, surviving the subversive struggle to assert the victory of the feminist within.

Works Cited

- Ammons, Elizabeth. *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Tr. H.M. Parshey. London: Picador, 1988.
- Bender, Bert. "Kate Chopin's Lyrical Short Stories." *Studies in Short Fiction* (Summer 1974): 257-266.
- Bonner, Thomas. "Introduction." *The Kate Chopin Companion: With Chopin's Translations From French Fiction*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. xi-xii.
- . "Kate Chopin's European Consciousness." *American Literary Realism 1870-1910* (Summer 1975): 281-85.
- . *The Kate Chopin Companion: With Chopin's Translations From French Fiction*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Butler, A.S.G. "Maupassant's Malefic Mechanisms." *New Zealand Journal of French Studies* 5.1 (May 1984): 5-18.
- Chopin, Kate. "As You Like It." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 706-720.
- . "The Awakening." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 881-1000.
- . "Confidences." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 700-702.
- . "An Egyptian Cigarette." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 570-573.
- . "Emancipation. A Life Fable." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 37-38.
- . "Her Letters." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 398-405.
- . "The Kiss." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 379-381.
- . "A Point At Issue." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 48-58.
- . "The Story of an Hour." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 352-354.

- . "Wiser Than A God." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 39-47.
- Cott, Nancy F. "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850." *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*. Eds. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979. 162-181.
- Cutter, Martha J. "Losing the Battle But Winning the War: Resistance to Patriarchal Discourse in Kate Chopin's Short Fiction." *Legacy* 11.1 (1994): 17-36.
- Davis, Sara Desaussure. "Chopin's Movement Towards Universal Myth." *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*. Eds. Lynda S. Boren and Sara Desaussure Davis. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1992. 199-206.
- Dickinson, Emily. *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993. Rpt. of *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. 1924.
- Donaldson-Evans, Mary. *A Woman's Revenge: The Chronology of Dispossession in Maupassant's Fiction*. Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1986.
- Dugan, John Raymond. *Illusion and Reality: A Study of Descriptive Techniques in the Works of Guy de Maupassant*. Paris: Mouton, 1973.
- Eagleton, Mary. "Gender and Genre." *Re-reading the Short Story*. Ed. Clare Hanson. London: MacMillan, 1989. 55-68.
- Ejxenbaum, B.M. "O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story." Tr. I.R. Titunik. *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. 81-88.
- Ewell, Barbara C. *Kate Chopin*. New York: Ungar, 1986.
- . "Kate Chopin and the Dream of Female Selfhood." *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*. Eds. Lynda S. Boren and Sara deSausure Davis. Baton rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1992. 157-165.
- Fluck, Winfried. "Tentative Transgressions: Kate Chopin's Fiction as a Mode of Symbolic Action." *Studies in American Fiction* 10.2 (Autumn 1982): 151-171.
- Furman, Nelly. "The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle?" *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. Eds. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn. London and New York: Methuen, 1985. 59-79.
- Fusco, Richard. *Maupassant and the American Short Story: The Influence of Form at the Turn of the Century*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994.

- Gaude, Pamela Parker. "The Awakening: A Study of Maupassant's Influence on Kate Chopin." *Louisiana Review* (Winter 1975): 19-27.
- Gerlach, John. *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story*. Alabama: The U of Alabama P, 1985.
- Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.
- Guidici, Cynthia. "Kate Chopin's 'Occasional' Women." *Conference of College Teachers of English Studies* 56 (September 1991): 25-34.
- Gullason, Thomas A. "The Short Story: An Underrated Art." *Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1976. 13-31.
- Hedberg, Johannes. "What Is a 'Short Story'?" *Moderna Sprak* LXXIV.2 (1980): 113-120.
- James, Henry. "Guy de Maupassant." *Henry James: A Study of the Short Fiction*. Richard A. Hocks. Boston: Twayne, 1990. 129-136.
- Jasenas, Elaine. "The French Influence in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." *Nineteenth-century French Studies* (Spring 1976): 312-322.
- Kolodny, Annette. "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts." *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays On Women, Literature, and Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. London: Virago, 1986. 46-62.
- Lattin, Patricia Hopkins. "The Search for Self in Kate Chopin's Fiction: Simple Versus Complex Vision." *Southern Studies* 21.2 (Summer 1982): 222-235.
- Matthews, Brander. "The Philosophy of the Short Story." *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 73-80.
- Maupassant, Guy de. "It?" Trans. Kate Chopin. *The Kate Chopin Companion with Chopin's Translations from French Fiction*. Ed. Bonner Thomas Jr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. 189-193.
- . "Mad?" Trans. Kate Chopin. *The Kate Chopin Companion with Chopin's Translations from French Fiction*. Ed. Bonner Thomas Jr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. 185-187.
- . "Night." Trans. Kate Chopin. *The Kate Chopin Companion with Chopin's Translations from French Fiction*. Ed. Bonner Thomas Jr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- . "Solitude." Trans. Kate Chopin. *The Kate Chopin Companion with Chopin's Translations from French Fiction*. Ed. Bonner Thomas Jr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. 195-197.

- . "The Writer's Goal." *The Story and its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*. Fourth ed. Ed. Ann Charters. Boston: St Martins, 1995. 1456-1458.
- May, Charles E. "Introduction: A Survey of Short Story Criticism in America." *Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1976. 3-12.
- . "The Unique Effect of the Short Story: A Reconsideration and an Example." *Studies in Short Fiction* 13 (1976): 289-97.
- Miner, Madonne M. "Veiled Hints: An Affective Stylist's Reading of Kate Chopin's 'Story of an Hour'." *Markham Review* 11 (Winter 1982): 29-32.
- Newman, Judie. "Kate Chopin: Short Fiction and the Arts of Subversion." *The Nineteenth Century American Short Story*. Ed. A. Robert Lee. London: Vision, 1985. 150-63.
- O'Faolain, Sean. *The Short Story*. Old Greenwich, Conn: Devin-Adair, 1951.
- Papke, Mary E. *Verging on the Abyss: The Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1990.
- Peattie, Donald Culross. *A Natural History of Western Trees*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Philosophy of Composition." *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. 67-72.
- . Rev. of *Twice Told Tales* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. 59-63.
- . Rev. of *Night and Morning: A Novel* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. 65-66.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It." *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. 91-113.
- Reid, Ian. *The Short Story*. London: Methuen & Co, 1977.
- Rocks, James E. "Kate Chopin's Ironic Vision." *Louisiana Review* (Winter 1972): 110-120.
- Rohberger, Mary. "The Short Story: A Proposed Definition." *Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. Athens: Ohio UP, 1976. 80-82.
- Seyersted, Per. "Introduction." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969.
- . *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1969.

- Shaw, Valerie. *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York: Longman, 1983.
- Skaggs, Peggy. *Kate Chopin*. Boston: Twayne, 1985.
- Sulenick, Lynn. "On Women and Fiction." *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism*. Eds. Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1977. 28-44.
- Sullivan, Edward D. *Maupassant: The Short Stories*. London: Edward Arnold, 1962.
- Taylor, Helen. *Gender, Race and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989.
- Toth, Emily. "The Independent Woman and 'Free' Love." *Massachusetts Review* 16 (Autumn 1975): 647-64.
- . *Kate Chopin: A Life of the Author of The Awakening*. London: Century, 1990.
- Wallace, A.H. *Guy de Maupassant*. N.P.: Twayne, 1973.
- Welter, Barbara. *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Athens Ga: n.p., 1976.
- Wheeler, Kathleen. *'Modernist' Women Writers and Narrative Art*. London: MacMillan, 1994.
- Wheeler, Otis B. "The Five Awakenings of Edna Pontellier." *Southern Review* XI (January 1975): 118-128.
- Wilson, Edmund. "Foreword." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 13-15.
- Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. "Introduction." *Classic American Women Writers*. Ed. Cynthia Griffin Wolff. New York: Harper & Row, 1980. 1-14.
- Ziff, Larzer. *The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation*. New York: Viking, 1966.
- Zlotnick, Joan. "A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood and Motherhood." *Markham Review* (October 1968): n.pag.