



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

**OPPONENT'S REPORT
BA THESIS**

Gender, Race, and Class: Intersectional Analysis of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Selected Short Stories

Gabriela Salajová

Gabriela Salajová departs from the criticism of white feminism advanced in the 1970s and 1980s by Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks and Angela Davis, among others. Rather than fully embracing their views, she opts for an "intersectional analysis," drawing on the work of critics such as Kimberlé Crenshaw. Ms. Salajová aims to consider "the three essential, original sociological identity categories – race, gender, and class" (13) and from an intersectional point of view analyze Kate Chopin's fiction. In the course of the thesis, she reviews a decent range of scholarship on *The Awakening*, namely by Anna Elfenbein, Elizabeth Ammons, Joyce Dyer, Michele Birnbaum and Dagmar Pegues. These critics' insights about the novel are subsequently applied to four stories by Chopin as well ("Beyond the Bayou," "Tante Cat'rinette," "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde").

The text is informed, clear and fluent. Opposing views are presented and argued with carefully. The central argument of the thesis seems to be that Chopin, despite perpetuating certain stereotypes (particularly the Mammy stereotype), sympathized with African-American women, who were depicted in her fiction as suffering from multiple oppressions. To me, this seems credible when the four stories are discussed but less so in the case of the novel; i.e., I personally do not find it convincing that *The Awakening* depicts "the awakening of the colored women that takes place simultaneously with the sexual awakening of Chopin's white heroine" (28) because these characters remain on the margins of the novel, rather overlooked by Edna as well as the author. But instead of questioning the central argument, I wonder about the category of class. As Ms. Salajová mentions in the conclusion, her focus eventually fell on race and gender. She affirms that "African-American and other people racially differentiated from the white Creole majority were already defined by default as a lower class community" (62), but could she discuss whether class cuts across race and gender here, which an intersectional analysis would involve as well?

Proposed grade: Excellent (1)

Pavla Veselá, PhD.
September 4, 2016