

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

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

(Gender, rasa, a třída: intersekční analýza vybraných povídek a
románu *Probuzení* Kate Chopinové)

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Praha, srpen 2016

vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):

PhDr. Hana Ulmanová, PhD, MA

zpracovala (autor):

Gabriela Salajová

studijní obor (subject):

Anglistika – Amerikanistika

English and American Studies

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

V Praze dne

Podpis:

(I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.)

Prague

Signature:

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům. (I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.)

Abstract

The objective of this study is to ascertain whether the principles of recent intersectional analyses of Kate Chopin's seminal novel *The Awakening* may also be applied to Chopin's short fiction and what conclusions would be drawn from such an analysis regarding Chopin's stance on the oppression of minorities. The purpose of an intersectional analysis is to evaluate the specific type of oppression that arises on the intersection of various social categories – the categories considered here are gender, race, and class. Intersectional analysis represents one of the latest methodological approaches regarding the fiction of Kate Chopin, expanding upon the inferences formerly derived by the feminist scholars. The first chapter introduces the concept of intersectionality and describes the changes of Kate Chopin's position in the American literary canon together with the development of the methods employed by the scholarship in relation to Chopin's works through time.

The second chapter is concerned with the demonstration of the main notions of five intersectional analyses of *The Awakening* carried out by Anna Elfenbein, Elizabeth Ammons, Joyce Dyer, Michele Birnbaum, and Dagmar Pegues. The first three studies are presented along with my additions to the arguments, and are concerned with the dichotomy between passion and purity, the stereotypical representations of women of color, and the importance of the colored characters' presence in the novel, respectively. The examination shows that Chopin's stance regarding the racial and class politics of her era was quite enlightened. The works of Birnbaum and Pegues associate the heroine of the novel with women of color due to her inner appropriation of otherness. Birnbaum's reasoning is offered without commentary or supplementation because of its elaborated execution. Pegues' statements are validated, and as her findings question Chopin's enlightened outlook only partially, the only remaining study that fully denounces Chopin for her lack of empathy with the minorities is Michele Birnbaum's.

The third chapter reproduces the processes of inspection introduced in the second chapter and examines the four selected stories – "Beyond the Bayou," "Tante Cat'rINETTE," "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde" – in a similar manner. Birnbaum's study is omitted from this chapter as well, as it is included solely for

the thesis to be comprehensive. The conclusions reached in the last section hold true for the most part of the third chapter's examinations as well – Chopin seems to criticize the ambiguity of the racist Creole concept of ideal femininity and some of the African-American female stereotypes, and she also makes use of the colored characters' attitudes to call attention to the lack of freedom in American society. The only instance implying that Chopin addresses certain issues in a reactionary manner is Chopin's prolific use of the Mammy stereotype that she does not complement with any type of critique and instead presents it as an ideal state to which a woman of color should aspire.

The thesis concludes with the acknowledgment of some of its potential deficiencies, such as questioning the relevance of the selection of the stories with regard to the available intersectional analyses of the novel upon which the examination of the short fiction is performed. Finally, the thesis recognizes the steady interest in the re-evaluation of Chopin's works according to the principles of intersectionality as evidence of Chopin being a progressive author at least to a certain extent.

Key words: intersectional analysis, race, gender, class, Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, short stories, feminism, stereotypes, sexuality, oppression

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je zjistit, zda mohou být nedávné intersekcční analýzy klíčového románu Kate Chopinové *Probuzení* aplikovány obdobným způsobem na povídky téže autorky, a posléze se pokusit stanovit postoj, který Chopinová zaujímá ohledně útisku menšin. Intersekcční analýza jako taková bere v úvahu specifický typ útisku, který vzniká v místě, kde se protínají následky útisků vycházející z různých sociálních kategorií – jako kategorie relevantní pro tuto práci byly zvoleny gender, rasa a třída. Intersekcční analýza představuje jeden z nejnovějších metodologických přístupů aplikovaných na dílo Kate Chopinové a ve své podstatě navazuje na dosavadní feministické interpretace. První kapitola seznamuje čtenáře s konceptem intersekcionality a popisuje vývoj metod uplatňovaných odborníky při rozboru děl Chopinové, volených v závislosti na proměnách postavení Chopinové v americkém literárním kánonu.

Druhá kapitola se pokouší o interpretaci dílčích kroků pěti intersekcčních analýz románu *Probuzení*, jejichž autorkami jsou Anna Elfenbeinová, Elizabeth Ammonsová, Joyce Dyerová, Michele Birnbaumová, a Dagmar Pegues. První tři zmiňované studie jsou argumentačně rozšířeny. Elfenbeinová se zabývá rozporem v pohlížení na sexualitu bílých žen a žen pocházejících z etnických menšin, Ammonsová pojednává o stereotypních zobrazeních etnicky se odlišujících žen, a Dyerová zkoumá míru významu, kterou je třeba připisovat četnosti výskytu a stylu vystupování afroamerických postav v románu. Na jejich základě práce dochází k předběžnému závěru, že Chopinová zaujímá poměrně osvědčené stanovisko vůči otázkám rasy a třídy. Birnbaumová a Pegues si všímají tendencí hrdinky románu přivlastňovat si jisté aspekty jinakosti, a z tohoto důvodu k ní přistupují jakožto k ženě etnického původu. Vzhledem ke své propracovanosti není studie Birnbaumové dále rozšířena. Tvrzení, která předkládá ve svém pojednání Pegues, jsou potvrzena. Jelikož její závěry zpochybňují autorčinu pokrokovost pouze částečně, jedinou akademičkou, která v plné míře kritizuje nedostatečné projevy pochopení vůči příslušníkům menšin, je Michele Birnbaumová.

Ve třetí kapitole jsou následně podobným způsobem zpracovány čtyři vybrané povídky – *Beyond the Bayou*, *Tante Cat'rinette*, *Désirée's Baby*, a *La Belle Zoraïde*. Analýza Birnbaumové je v práci zmíněna pouze za účelem dosažení relativní úplnosti, a v této části není zohledněna. Závěry, ke kterým se došlo

v předchozí sekci, zůstávají z velké části v platnosti – v povídkách se objevuje kritika nejednoznačnosti rasistického kreolského principu ideální ženskosti a některých stereotypů vztahujících se k afroamerickým ženám. Chopinová rovněž opět znázorňuje afroamerické postavy jako nespokojené, aby upozornila na absenci svobody v Americké společnosti. Přístup Chopinové k rasové a třídní problematice se jeví diskriminačním pouze v jediném případě, kdy hojně využívá stereotypu tzv. Mammy, a nekriticky jej prezentuje jako ideální stav, o jehož dosažení by afroamerické ženy měly usilovat.

Na konci práce jsou zmíněna možná úskalí – mimo jiné také relevance zvolených povídek vzhledem k dostupným analýzám, na jejichž základě jsou povídky rozebírány. Práce přesto závěrem dodává, že přetrvávající zájem o opětovné zhodnocení děl Kate Chopinové dle principů intersekcční analýzy svědčí o tom, že její díla jsou pokroková alespoň do jisté míry.

Klíčová slova: intersekcční analýza, rasa, gender, třída, Kate Chopin, Probuzení, povídky, feminismus, stereotype, sexualita, útlak

Table of contents

1	Introduction	9
1.1	The Concept of Intersectionality	9
1.2	Local Color Beginnings – Reception of Kate Chopin in the 19 th Century	13
1.3	Through a Feminist Lens: The Rediscovery of Chopin in the Latter Half of the 20 th Century	15
1.4	Contemporary Viewpoints: Intersectional Analyses	18
2	Shifting Attitudes – Intersectional Analyses of <i>The Awakening</i>	20
2.1	The Confusing Alliance of Sexual and Racial Norms in Contemporary American Society	20
2.2	Stereotypical Portrayal of Minorities in <i>The Awakening</i>	25
2.3	The Importance of African-American Presence in <i>The Awakening</i>	28
2.4	Methodical Revision: Edna Pontellier as Racial Other	32
2.5	Fluctuating Sentiments: The Degree of Kate Chopin's Prejudice in <i>The Awakening</i>	39
3	Reforming Racial Politics: Intersectional Approach to Chopin's Short Stories	42
3.1	Kate Chopin as a Liberal Author	43
3.2	Justified Inconsistencies: Stereotypes in Chopin's Short Stories	49
3.3	Dagmar Pegues and the Tragic Mulatta Stereotype	56
3.4	Conclusion: Chopin's Attitude Towards the Issues of Race and Class	59
4	Conclusion	62
5	Bibliography	67
5.1	Primary Works	67
5.2	Secondary Literature – Works Cited	67
5.3	Secondary Literature – Works Consulted	69

1 Introduction

1.1 The Concept of Intersectionality

Intersectionality serves as a theoretical basis for intersectional analysis, which is an approach recently adopted by many different academic disciplines of humanities and social sciences, including literary theory. It wasn't coined as such until the year of 1989, when Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor and an advocate of civil rights, came up with the term in her revolutionary essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics."¹ In spite of that, intersectionality as a concept has been considered already at the beginning of the 1980's, with the appearance of a number of works by women of color, who were reacting to the ongoing segregational practices of the Second Wave Feminism.

As early as 1981 an anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* was published by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, consisting of poems, personal narratives, and essays by women of various ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds. These pieces are tied together by the very notion of intersectionality – the belief that various social categories create various types of oppression, with the convergence of these categories and the oppressions stemming from them shaping the individual oppressive experiences of the women in question. Even though the publication precedes such influential works as bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* and Angela Davis' *Women, Race, and Class*, the importance of the social categories of race and class is already recognized and partially sidelined; the prime significance is assigned to the categories of sexuality and ethnicity. What might have affected this is the fact that, as Moraga emphasizes in the preface, the authors are *radical* women of color, fighting primarily for the revelation of their own particular kind of oppression. This is supported by the pieces being generally of a very personal nature, drawing on the individual experiences of the women who are mostly lesbian, and of Asian or Latin American descent. Despite the fact that the book is not a conventional theoretical treatise, it does rank among the firsts of its kind regarding the subject matter, and, most importantly, it touches upon certain issues that are later developed in the writings of others, who assume a more academic stance.

¹ Sharon Smith, "Black Feminism and Intersectionality," *ISReview.org*, Center for Economic Research and Social Change, Winter 2013-14 <<http://isreview.org/issue/91/black-feminism-and-intersectionality>> 16 Apr 2016.

Among such issues is the critique of the earlier orientation of the feminist movement, and its inexcusably blatant exclusion of the women who don't meet the requirements to be considered belonging among the group of white, middle-class women who established the organization and represent its gatekeepers. Indeed, the birth of the concept of intersectionality was brought about partially by the movement's inability to overcome its internal inclination towards racism, classism, and other forms of oppression, even though the women's original and official intention was to dismantle injustice and inequity.

Moraga is concerned primarily with her own disillusionment regarding the contemporary feminists' practices, and calls the movement "reactionary"² in the preface to the collection. Together with Anzaldúa, they introduce the book's intention to "examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement"³ itself. Later in the introduction to chapter "Racism in the Women's Movement," Moraga criticizes white women for not using their economic privilege to break the institutions that fuel their own oppression.⁴ However, in keeping with the prevailingly informal character of the selection, the passage that most aptly articulates some of the questions regarding the intersectional approach is Moraga's personal narrative, "La Güera":

In this country, lesbianism is a poverty – as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. *The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression.*⁵

Moraga thus manages to voice the core tenet of intersectionality, which lies not only in recognizing that there are women of different races and classes that should be perceived as equals to the hitherto predominant group of white, middle-class women, but also in realizing that each of these women is experiencing her own, individual, *specific* type of oppression, formed at the intersection of respective oppressions that are based on the social categories of gender, race, class, and many others.

² Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983) xiv.

³ Moraga and Anzaldúa xxiii.

⁴ Moraga and Anzaldúa 62.

⁵ Cherríe Moraga, "La Güera," *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983) 29.

While the editors of *The Bridge Called My Back* denounce their own contemporaries on account of their unfortunate experiences, other scholars and black feminists⁶ tend to analyze the whole history of the development of the feminist movement in the US, documenting the initial endorsement of the black minority back in the 19th century, its later dissociation, and the manner in which it treated the oppression of black women in particular, as opposed to separate individual agendas aiming to support black men and white women, respectively.

Moraga and Anzaldúa claim that white feminists don't try to acknowledge the added struggles of race and class in the plight of black women. However, bell hooks, an influential author and social activist, contends that in the past, the privileged white women were not all to be as categorically condemned. In her first work concerning feminism, *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (published in the same year as Moraga and Anzaldúa's collection), she mentions a 19th century white female humanist, Lydia Maria Child, and cites her summary of the social status of black women during slavery, where Child expresses awareness of the injustices incurred upon them. In spite of that, hooks admits that many of Child's contemporaries⁷ saw the anti-slavery campaign as a means not to improve the position of black female women, but rather to preserve the moral standing of their white male counterparts, who were sexually exploiting the black female serfs. Even though these feminists seemingly denounced the oppression of slavery, they were still perpetuating sexual stereotypes regarding black men as well as black women – the black man as the rapist, and the black woman as the lustful wanton. Hooks even ventures to proclaim that “every women's movement in America from its earliest origin to the present day has been built on a racist foundation,”⁸ due mainly to the First Wave Feminism's focus on acquiring voting rights, even at the expense of black people.

In her second work, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, published in 1984, hooks builds upon her earlier publication, and expands on her views regarding the category of class, which up until then she has marginalized. Both hooks and Angela Davis in *Women, Race, and Class* come to the conclusion that class as a social category determines to a great extent the conditions under which people can be oppressed and exploited by the ruling patriarchal society. Domination comes to be perceived generally

⁶ bell hooks, Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins.

⁷ hooks names the Grimké sisters, Sarah and Angelina.

⁸ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1982) 124.

as not restricted only to gender, race, and class relations, but to all the relations existing “between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated.”⁹

Women, Race, and Class, issued also in the crucial year of 1981, mirrors in some respects the previous works of hooks. Davis carefully examines the history of feminism and black exploitation, enumerating and describing at length the particular injustices suffered by black females throughout the history on grounds of their race and class. What makes her study stand out among the others¹⁰ is the extraordinary number of pages dedicated to class oppression in itself, especially the one suffered by white working class women as early as the beginning of the 19th century. When compared to other works mentioned in this chapter, Davis’ contribution to the problem of class domination by far exceeds them in quantity. This fact might also reduce the qualitative merit of the whole work, as it seems to devote an unproportionate amount of attention to the category of class at the expense of the other titular categories. Fortunately, all of the aforementioned early works dealing with the burgeoning concept of intersectionality thus complement each other, attesting to the fact that there is yet much to be explored regarding this field of study.

In 1989, then, Kimberlé Crenshaw defined intersectional experience quite succinctly as “greater than the sum of racism and sexism,”¹¹ and claimed that “any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which black women are subordinated.”¹² The category of class again seems to be conspicuously lacking, yet Crenshaw does not neglect it altogether. She mentions it several times throughout the article, albeit she appears to take it for granted. Her most recent work “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” co-written in 2013 with sociologist Leslie McCall and another law professor, Sumi Cho, offers an updated and broadened definition of intersectionality as a “nodal point [rather] than a closed system – a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class,

⁹ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center* (New York: Routledge, 2015) 118.

¹⁰ *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga, Anzaldúa), *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (bell hooks), *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (bell hooks).

¹¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Anti-Racist Politics,” *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, eds. Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011) 26.

¹² Crenshaw 26.

sexuality, nation, and other inequalities.”¹³ The study moreover clarifies what makes an analysis intersectional. According to the authors, regardless of the field of discipline, it has to adopt “an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power.”¹⁴

This thesis is going to limit itself to the treatment of the three essential, original sociological identity categories – race, gender, and class. This decision has been formed on the basis of two facts. Firstly, the thesis has to be clear, concise, and coherent in conveying its objectives – as McCall indicated in her article “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” “[including] multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis”¹⁵ may make it complicated. Secondly, it has to be acknowledged that the analyzed works were composed at the end of the 19th century, and a historical perspective needs to be taken into consideration. Identity issues regarding categories such as sexuality were not of primary concern in contemporary society, and as such they will be left out of the present analysis.

1.2 Local Color Beginnings – Reception of Kate Chopin in the 19th Century

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the fiction of Kate Chopin – her defining novel, *The Awakening*, and selected short stories – from the intersectional point of view. Yet Chopin’s position in the American literary canon has not always been perceived as worthy of being studied as anything other than a local color writer. Together with Chopin, some other women writers of the latter half of the 19th century suffered a similar fate; the names which tend to be cited most frequently along with Chopin’s are Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Grace King.

Donna M. Campbell uses the term “local color literature” interchangeably with “regional literature” and defines it as “focus[ing] on the characters, dialect, customs, topography, and other features particular to a specific region.”¹⁶ The contemporary attitudes to regional writing were rather negative – the fiction was dismissed as minor

¹³ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” *Signs* 38.4 (2013): 788, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/669608>>, 20 Oct 2015.

¹⁴ Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 795.

¹⁵ Leslie McCall, “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” *Signs* 30.3 (2005): 1772, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/426800>>, 26 Feb 2016

¹⁶ Donna M. Campbell, “Regionalism and Local Color Fiction, 1865-1895,” *Literary Movements*, Dept. of English, Washington State University, Sept 2015 <<http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/lcolor.html>> 12 May 2016.

and feminine, in opposition to the masculine canonical works featuring “exploration, adventure, and conquest.”¹⁷ Despite these sentiments, which bear evidence of the woman writer’s position at the time, the genre of local color was quite popular in the United States, largely thanks to William Dean Howells. Howells was an advocate of regionalism, in no small part due to its realistic features – he supported Jewett and Freeman, admiring in their works this very element that Chopin also later commended.¹⁸ What established Kate Chopin as a local color writer was her first collection of stories, *Bayou Folk*, published in 1894. It is interesting to note that some of the reviewers already recognized Chopin’s talent and commented on “her wider vision and stylistic expertise that transcended regional circumstances.”¹⁹

Jewett and Freeman are often cited as models of Chopin – similar to Howells, she respected that they were writing about “life, not fiction,”²⁰ and tried to assume the “realistic texture”²¹ of their writings. Elaine Showalter suggests some other shared attributes of Chopin, Jewett, and Freeman, such as “female loneliness, isolation, and frustration.”²² As opposed to Jewett and Freeman, King is associated with Chopin on the grounds of shared region (both of them are Southern, Louisianan women writers), subject matter (both are concerned with a variety of women – black, white, and Creole ones) and also the predicament of having been thrust together in a group of local color writers, in the case of King up until 1973, when Robert Bush’s collection *Grace King: A Selection of Her Writings* had been published.²³ Yet Chopin does not maintain King’s self-identification with the South – for her, it only served as an inspiration. In fact, Chopin herself supposedly did not want to be compared to King²⁴, and criticized regionalism, deeming it restricted in its subject and sentimental in its dealings with the past.²⁵

Chopin’s first novel *The Awakening* surprised the readership in its frank treatment of the question of woman’s sexuality. The critical reviews of the time tended

¹⁷ Charles Crow, ed., *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003) 1.

¹⁸ Stephanie Foote, *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) 7.

¹⁹ Wendy Martin, ed., *New Essays on the Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 5.

²⁰ Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) 147.

²¹ Martin 4.

²² Elaine Showalter, *Sister’s Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women’s Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 70.

²³ Jones 127.

²⁴ Showalter 71.

²⁵ Alfred Bendixen and James Nagel, eds., *A Companion to American Short Story* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 152.

to focus on the principle of morality, and the critics reprimanded Chopin on account of the lack of her disapproval with the heroine's transgressions. Apart from immorality, they saw selfishness as one of Edna's greatest faults.²⁶ Many scholars²⁷ also mention *The Awakening* being banned from the libraries, yet Emily Toth refutes this assumption and asserts that when she herself has traveled to Louisiana to inspect the library records, she has found that no such thing had come to pass – the books were simply discarded after they came apart due to disuse.²⁸

The reception of *The Awakening* did not improve even in the first half of the 20th century. Even though the first biography of Chopin's was published in 1932, its author Daniel Rankin criticized the novel in the same manner as Chopin's contemporaries with expressions such as "erotic morbidity,"²⁹ and in other works³⁰ she was still identified as a local-color writer.³¹ After the decline of interest that Chopin's work suffered at the beginning of the 20th century, the 1940's and 1950's witnessed a shift in its recognition. Unfortunately, the dismissive attitudes did not disappear completely; Cynthia Griffin Wolff mentions three critics³² who still wrote about her fiction in "regional terms."³³ Their reactionary attitude is all the more paradoxical given the fact that they chose to analyze "Désirée's Baby," a story that later proved to be the center of attention of many feminist scholars.³⁴

1.3 Through a Feminist Lens: The Rediscovery of Chopin in the Latter Half of the 20th Century

Šárka Bubíková in her study dedicated to the transformations of the American literary canon sets forth that the feminist criticism played an important part in the re-evaluation – firstly by deconstructing the canonical status of traditionally valued works,

²⁶ Sarah M. Corse and Sandra D. Westervelt, "Gender and Literary Valorization: 'The Awakening' of a Canonical Novel," *Sociological Perspectives* 45.2 (2002) 144-5.

²⁷ Anne Goodwyn Jones, Elaine Showalter, etc.

²⁸ Emily Toth, "My Part in Reviving Kate Chopin," *Awakenings: The Story of the Kate Chopin Revival*, ed. Bernard Koloski (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 200) 29.

²⁹ Quoted in Martin, 12.

³⁰ Such as *Literary History of the United States* by Carlos Baker (1948).

³¹ Martin 12.

³² Claude M. Simpson, Eugene Current-Garcia, Walton R. Patrick.

³³ Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "Kate Chopin and the Fiction of Limits: 'Désirée's Baby,'" *The Southern Literary Journal* 10.2 (1978): 124, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077591>>, 26 Apr 2015.

³⁴ Ann Goodwyn Jones, Emily Toth, Ellen Peel, etc.

and secondly by endeavoring to find a place in the canon for works hitherto neglected.³⁵ Yet the most crucial part in the rediscovery of the work of Chopin in particular was acted out by the Norwegian student Per Seyersted, who “shift[ed] critical focus from the regional nature of her writing to its position in the realm of women’s fiction.”³⁶ In 1969, Seyersted published two important works – *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* and *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. While Bernard Koloski also designates feminism as “the primary motive force for the Kate Chopin revival,”³⁷ he acknowledges that without Seyersted’s work, the feminists would lack the means to revive. Emily Toth moreover suggests Seyersted’s mother being a feminist leader as a possibility of his interest in Chopin and his ability to perceive the singularity of *The Awakening*, and mentions the convenient temporal correspondence between the publication of these works and the rebirth of feminism in the US.³⁸

The emergence of Seyersted’s publications might be perceived as a defining point both in the quantity and the quality of *The Awakening’s* reception, bringing about a general surge of interest and capturing the attention of the feminist critics. Yet the definiteness of such demarcation is not absolute – even before 1969, there occurred analyses that differed from the former castigating reviews regarding the question of women. In 1966, Marie Fletcher wrote a piece where she is dealing with the portrayal of Southern women in the fiction of Kate Chopin. She finds these women to be in a transitional state between the romantic representations of the Old South and the realistic renditions of the New Woman. The Cajun and Creole women of Chopin’s Louisiana are no longer the Southern dainty epitomes of perfection – they are poorer, engaging in manual labor, and most importantly, they talk frankly. Nevertheless, they retain one old-fashioned quality: they are faithful on all occasions. Ironically, the only exception (a woman who is not endowed with the innate disposition to loyalty) is the heroine of *The Awakening* – the one character that intrigued all the subsequent feminist criticism. Fletcher concludes her study by suggesting that Chopin “upholds the Creole belief in purity, [...] the feminine mystique and Southern cult of family.”³⁹

³⁵ Šárka Bubíková, *Literatura v Americe, Amerika v Literatuře – Proměny amerického literárního kánonu* (Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2007) 65-6. My translation.

³⁶ Koloski 5.

³⁷ Koloski 6.

³⁸ Emily Toth, *Unveiling Kate Chopin* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999) 243.

³⁹ Marie Fletcher, “The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association* 7.2 (1966): 131-132, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4230896>>, 26 Apr 2015.

One of the most important studies of *The Awakening* from the feminist point of view is Sandra Gilbert's article "The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin's Fantasy of Desire," which appeared in 1983. Gilbert argues that Edna Pontellier's character is a "feminist and matriarchal myth of Aphrodite/Venus"⁴⁰, and as such serves as a counterpart to the "masculinist and patriarchal myth of Jesus."⁴¹ She proposes three pivotal moments of the novel that constitute the rebirth of the image of Aphrodite – Edna's first immersion into the sea, the farewell dinner, and Edna's final, suicidal swim. The third moment is contrasted with the demises of Aphroditean heroines of other authors⁴² – contrary to those, Edna is not seen dead – "fixed, immobilized"⁴³ – but still swimming into the horizon, which Gilbert sees as a journey toward a "regenerative and revisionary genre."⁴⁴ This genre proposes "new mythic paradigms through which women's lives can be understood,"⁴⁵ as the direction of Edna's swim points either to a realistic model (death) or a mythic, pagan, and aphrodisiac one.⁴⁶ Gilbert closes the reasoning with dubbing Chopin the "pioneering feminist mythmaker."⁴⁷

Even though at the end of the article Gilbert affirms that her reading is hyperbolic, other influential and renowned critics such as Elaine Showalter and Harold Bloom did not respond favorably to its propositions. Bloom's criticism stems more likely from the fact that his general opinion of Chopin's work is quite equivocal rather than from staunch opposition to Gilbert's points – he claims that he finds Gilbert to be the "most accomplished feminist critic"⁴⁸. He deems Chopin's short stories almost negligible, and calls *The Awakening* a "flawed [...] novel"⁴⁹ that is not worthy of the enthusiasm it excited among the feminists readers, who misinterpret the book. He turns back to the accusations of the original critics when he states that he finds Edna to be a selfish character, but he ironically inverts the criticism into a positive one, comparing Chopin in her selfishness to Whitman, whom he deems "the greatest American writer."⁵⁰

⁴⁰ Sandra Gilbert, "The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin's Fantasy of Desire," *The Kenyon Review* 5.3 (1983): 44, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4335384>>, 4 May 2015.

⁴¹ Gilbert 44.

⁴² Gustave Flaubert, Pierre Louys, and Edith Wharton

⁴³ Gilbert 58.

⁴⁴ Gilbert 58.

⁴⁵ Gilbert 58.

⁴⁶ Gilbert 58.

⁴⁷ Gilbert 58.

⁴⁸ Harold Bloom, ed., *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Kate Chopin* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007) 3.

⁴⁹ Bloom 1.

⁵⁰ Bloom 1.

His ultimate issue with Gilbert's interpretation is the fact that there is nothing to revise as the instances that she opposes are "more feminist than her version of the myth."⁵¹

Showalter opposes Gilbert's article only allusively. Earlier in her study Gilbert proclaims that the Grand Isle represents a "female colony,"⁵² as it is run firmly by Mrs. Lebrun and peopled with "mother-women."⁵³ Yet Showalter argues that Grand Isle cannot be a female colony, a "feminist utopia"⁵⁴ – for her, the whole novel represents a deliberate loss of sisterly bonds in favor of the sexual bonds with men. Consequently, she does not find the novel completely proto-feministic – Showalter, as well as Bloom, finds Edna selfish. Edna is invested in her own struggle and fails to deliver any "larger social statements"⁵⁵ as she lost the connection to women.

1.4 Contemporary Viewpoints: Intersectional Analyses

Throughout the years, the focus of the criticism had shifted from the regionalist approval of Chopin's short fiction and the condemnation of *The Awakening* to the passionate feminist espousal of the novel and a partial neglect of the stories. Apart from gender, two more social categories are relevant for analysis in the 21st century – race and class. With that, Chopin's short stories are gaining back their lost prominence and the recent intersectional analyses are carried out both upon them and upon the novel as well.

The ubiquity of racial themes in the stories had not escaped the notice of Richard H. Potter already in 1971. As explained in the first subchapter, by this time in the 20th century the intersectional analysis had not yet been established, but Potter serves as an interesting forerunner to the women who later perform it. Separately, both the questions of gender and race are in the center of his attention – he talks about the injustices of womanhood and a "system which denies a woman the right to love the man she chose or the child she bore,"⁵⁶ as well as about the racial predetermination and the "victim[s] of slavery."⁵⁷ Unfortunately, Potter struggles to find the intersection between the two variables, which harms his study, yet the article yields one positive result – as

⁵¹ Bloom 3.

⁵² Gilbert 49.

⁵³ Gilbert 50.

⁵⁴ Showalter 79.

⁵⁵ Showalter 79.

⁵⁶ Richard Potter, "Negroes in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," *Louisiana History: The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association* 12.1 (1971): 49, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4231160>>, 26 Apr 2015.

⁵⁷ Potter 49.

early as the 1970's, somebody has distinguished Chopin as "departur[ing] from the traditional [racial] stereotypes that her contemporaries utilized."⁵⁸

Anna Shannon Elfenbein's is the first of the modern studies centering around the intersecting variables of race and class. She analyzes *The Awakening* and recognizes female desire, or more precisely the racist notion of identifying black women with passion and white women with purity, as the primary culprit behind the bewildered initial reactions – the novel's "sexual realism assaulted American sexual-caste mythology."⁵⁹ Out of the virgin-whore dichotomy, Edna opts for the wrong alternative. Elizabeth Ammons is also concerned with *The Awakening*, but rather than blaming the contemporary society and praising the novel as taking an anti-racist stance, she presents Edna's suicide as facilitated by the black women who will raise her children. The most valuable point that Ammons make is the reference to Mexican women and their subordination to the white woman, tantamount to the one suffered by the African-American women and their mixed-blood descendants. The same dismissive stance to *The Awakening's* treatment of minorities is assumed by Michelle Birnbaum, who blames Edna for affirming her class position by identifying herself with the marginalized⁶⁰ and charges Chopin with the accusation that she "reinforces rather than razes class and race differences."⁶¹

In the following chapters, these and similar analyses of *The Awakening* and selected short stories will be studied in greater detail and an analysis of my own will supplement them.

⁵⁸ Potter 42.

⁵⁹ Anna Shannon Elfenbein, "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: An Assault on American Racial and Sexual Mythology," *Southern Studies* 26.4 (1987): 305.

⁶⁰ Michele Birnbaum, *Race, Work, and Desire in American Literature, 1860-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 80.

⁶¹ Birnbaum 80.

2 Shifting Attitudes – Intersectional Analyses of *The Awakening*

As it was mentioned in the preceding chapters, this chapter will be concerned with various intersectional analyses of Chopin's novel, *The Awakening*. Their main lines of thought will be introduced, and then the analyses themselves will be inspected, commented, and potentially expanded upon. The five intersectional analyses employed in the second chapter will be presented in chronological order of their publishing⁶², to reflect the possible changing attitude towards Chopin's portrayal of gender, race, and class in her novel. This factor will be considered in the conclusion of the chapter.

2.1 The Confusing Alliance of Sexual and Racial Norms in Contemporary American Society

One of the first analyses of *The Awakening* that shifted its primary focus from the question of gender to the added categories of race and class was Anna Shannon Elfenbein's "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: An Assault on American Racial and Sexual Mythology," dating from 1987. The study deals with the racist dichotomy of the 19th century white⁶³ American society, which prescribes sexual passivity to white, upper-class women while assigning sexual activity to women of color and/or lower class. Elfenbein terms it a "cultural chauvinism,"⁶⁴ appoints it as the reason of the novel's unfavorable reception⁶⁵, and commends Chopin's approach as "color-blind and democratic."⁶⁶ She believes that Edna's story, culminating with the suicide, may be interpreted as a critique of not only sexism, but also racism, as "Chopin took her stand against the sexual stereotypes that deny women [...] the ability to experience and express their diversity."⁶⁷

⁶² The first analysis dates from 1987, while the last one was published in 2010, representing one of the most contemporary approaches.

⁶³ The term "Anglo-American" has been considered. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term as "of an American: that is of English or *other* white European origin; also relating to these people, their culture and customs." Yet the Creole society (despite descending from white European – French or Spanish – peoples) differs in many respects from the rest of the Anglo-American society of the 19th century. Therefore I have chosen not to use this term as it may seem to exclude the Creole society of the day, and use the term "white," which encompasses both the minority white society of the Creoles, as well as the majority white Anglo-American society.

⁶⁴ Elfenbein 304.

⁶⁵ Contrary to other critics of her era, who maintained that the novel was condemned because of the predominantly patriarchal society, where men were permitted to write about delicate issues, while women were not expected to deal with subjects deemed improper for them.

⁶⁶ Elfenbein 305.

⁶⁷ Elfenbein 313.

Elfenbein starts with presenting Edna's "obstructed vision,"⁶⁸ mentioning besides other things her inability to comprehend the correct way of not only producing, but also perceiving art. The main evidence of Edna's blindness is her confusion regarding the notion of appropriate female behavior of the Catholic Creole society, and her consequent ambivalence towards it.⁶⁹ However, at the same time, she blindly respects Creoles' "sex and caste prejudices,"⁷⁰ which may be perceived from her interaction with the women of color in the novel. Elfenbein presents the various manifestations of the combined racism and sexism of Chopin's Creole characters. The most pronounced role of the oppressor in this manner has been assigned to Victor Lebrun; he constantly narrates anecdotes about his affairs with the Mexican girls, is seen to be interacting intimately with Mariequita (a Mexican-American woman) at the end of the novel, and figures in the scene when Edna visits the Lebrun household in New Orleans, where he verbally abuses his African-American female servant along with delivering remarks regarding her need for proper training. According to Elfenbein, the Creole women are not any less reprehensible, as they raise no objections against the behavior of their male counterparts – one of the examples she mentions is Victor's mother, Madame Lebrun, who makes the little African-American girl work the treadle of her sewing machine in order to avoid compromising her physical well-being. What ultimately harms Edna is the fact that she is not able to see that her search for identity is "doubly barred"⁷¹ – not only by sexual constraints, but also by racial ones, which she herself facilitates to preserve by accepting the prevailing negative view of the women of color, whose sexuality she shares. As Edna witnesses Robert's and Arabin's "chauvinistic discussion"⁷² about their experiences with Mexican women, the connection between her as an "object of male possession"⁷³ and the women of color as "object[s] of male passion,"⁷⁴ remains unperceived by her.

Edna is not only blind to the presence of dark women due to her "unthinking reliance on [the Creole] values,"⁷⁵ she also "fails to [...] empathize"⁷⁶ with white women. Elfenbein gives evidence of the separation of women across the levels of race and class

⁶⁸ Elfenbein 313.

⁶⁹ Edna is a native Kentuckian with a Protestant background, reared in an environment exercising a strict moral code.

⁷⁰ Elfenbein 304-5.

⁷¹ Elfenbein 305.

⁷² Elfenbein 311.

⁷³ Elfenbein 311.

⁷⁴ Elfenbein 311.

⁷⁵ Elfenbein 309.

⁷⁶ Elfenbein 307.

by commenting on the scene of Adèle Ratignolle's labor, where there are three women present – two white women, Adèle and Edna, and one woman of color, the Griffe nurse Josephine. Even though childbirth is supposed to be shared universally by all women, in this particular scene, the women's experiences are isolated – Adèle “feels abandoned and neglected,”⁷⁷ Josephine calmly performs her quotidian job, and Edna is shocked and decides to depart rather than to live through the distressing memories of her own labor. Another instance supporting the notion of the dividing friction between women is the relationship between Edna and Mariequita, who keep “misperceiv[ing]”⁷⁸ each other.

In the end, Edna's blindness and refusal to accept herself as one of the darker women as well as the split between the women as represented in the novel contribute to Elfenbein's conclusion that Chopin attacked the racial and sexual norms perpetuated by the contemporary American society at large. Both Mariequita and Edna behave “according to convention”⁷⁹ in the final chapter, by which they “maintain the [established] patriarchal order.”⁸⁰ Even though Edna discovered the truth regarding women's sexuality, she needs to commit suicide as the social norms prescribe it. The truth dies with her, as Mariequita will preserve the mythical image of Edna that had been instilled in her by Victor and rendered unimpeachable by her own stereotypical jealousy of the white woman.

Elfenbein's notion of Edna's obstructed vision might be expanded upon by noticing the theme of misunderstanding that Chopin skillfully implements in the narrative by means of utilizing her experiences with writing local color stories.⁸¹ Edna is not aware of her fallacy as she struggles with perceiving the fine line that separates the Creole's habit of lexical frankness, and the propriety of maintaining the subversive thoughts themselves. As Elfenbein notes, Adèle, “the exemplar of white Creole femininity,”⁸² fears that Robert's behavior – acceptable in the Creole society – will be taken seriously by Edna, by which Chopin gives the reader to understand that it is socially tolerable to voice one's thoughts in a jest, yet to take these thoughts at face value and act upon them is unpardonable, as it violates the inner codes of feminine chastity. I

⁷⁷ Elfenbein 309.

⁷⁸ Elfenbein 310.

⁷⁹ Elfenbein 312.

⁸⁰ Elfenbein 313.

⁸¹ Local color narratives work closely with detailed description, and it is in the details that Chopin's theme of misunderstanding is initially established.

⁸² Elfenbein 305.

would like to propose that Chopin makes use of the theme of misunderstanding throughout the novel to express her belief that the contemporary societal norms are incomprehensible, therefore necessarily arbitrary and, subsequently, pointless, undesirable, and obsolete.

This theme is established at the very beginning. The novel opens with a colorful chattering bird, which is described as speaking multiple languages – French, Spanish, and “also a language which nobody understood.”⁸³ The opening scene serves as a foreshadowing for the rest of the novel, where the heroine’s actions and desires are not understood by the society, and she herself does not understand society’s norms. Especially perplexed by her behavior is her husband, Léonce Pontellier, who makes an actual attempt to understand her (apart from other characters such as Adèle). Moreover, in this very scene, Léonce is disgusted by the noise as it disturbs his tranquil activity of reading a day old newspaper. Fortunately, as Chopin writes, “Mr. Pontellier had the privilege of quitting [the birds’] society when they ceased to be entertaining” (22), and Léonce indeed moves away from the noise. He performs two similar moves later on – instead of asking Edna herself, he rather visits Dr. Mandelet to enquire after her problems, and subsequently gives in to Mandelet’s faulty counsel and goes on a business trip without her. This line of thought is reinforced by the fact that these birds are owned by Mrs. Lebrun, the proprietor of the Grand Isle vacation locale, who lets them chatter. Therefore these birds may represent either women, misunderstood by men,⁸⁴ or Madame Lebrun’s sons, Robert and Victor.⁸⁵ Robert is later said to be a skilled polyglot himself, precisely as the bird. Indeed, he spends his time in the novel chattering to Edna who won’t be able to understand him.

The theme thus established, the first chapter ends with the first instance of a real misunderstanding between Léonce and his wife. Edna already transgresses Léonce’s ideas of proper behavior, with the racial element brought into the light for the first time when he expresses his disagreement with her bathing in the sun and becoming darker as a result. Even though the societal norms are not being violated yet, the gender norms are

⁸³ Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000) 22. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

⁸⁴ An interesting read supporting this theory to some extent is Sandra Gilbert’s “The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin’s Fantasy of Desire,” where she mentions that the whole Grand Isle is a female colony, and emphasizes the importance of Madame Lebrun as the female owner of the resort.

⁸⁵ This notion would also ironically invert the usual “code of property” regarding the gender: here it is the woman owning her two male descendants, rather than the other way around.

linked to racial ones – Léonce is “looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of *personal property* which has suffered some *damage*” (24, my emphasis), and he moreover utters that she is “burnt beyond recognition” (24). Edna fails to understand the offence of resembling a darker woman, which is one of the fundamental elements regarding the rules of the society that she and her husband are part of. Later on, it is made evident that Edna does not even try to understand Léonce and his point of view – he admits that Edna “evinces so little interest in things which concerned him and valued so little his conversation” (26). This fact detracts from Elfenbein’s argument, as Edna does not seem to be “constricted by sex and class bias.”⁸⁶ It changes when Léonce obliquely criticizes Edna for her overall reliance on the quadroon, reproaching her for “her inattention [and] her habitual neglect of the children” (27), asking her “if it was not a mother’s place to look after the children, whose on earth was it?” (27). As many other critics⁸⁷ noted, and as Edna obviously deduced from her husband’s previous disturbed exclamation regarding her resemblance to the darker women, it is actually the quadroon’s place. Edna’s confusion is again demonstrated in chapter six, when “[a] certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her, - the light which, showing the way, forbids it. [...] It served but to bewilder her” (34). Her contemplation takes place after she realizes that she takes delight in Robert Lebrun’s company and her sexual awakening is underway. What bewilders Edna is the arbitrary rules of sexuality – Edna is shown that women can be sexual, but at the same time, this sexuality is ascribed to other women than her – the women of color. In chapter twenty-seven, Edna – and by extension, Chopin herself – succinctly voices for the first time her belief that the racial and sexual rules are nonsensical: “By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can’t convince myself that I am” (105). However, as Elfenbein showed, the bewilderment is not resolved any sooner than in the last few chapters.

What Elfenbein does not mention is that there are a few instances in the novel where men also express their uncertainty regarding the established norms. In chapter four, after his and Edna’s quarrel concerning the care for their children, Léonce Pontellier addresses the discrepancy between the society standards and his own instincts : “It would have been a difficult matter for Mr. Pontellier to define to his own

⁸⁶ Elfenbein 305.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Ammons, Michele Birnbaum.

satisfaction or any one else's wherein his wife failed in her duty toward their children. It was something which he felt rather than perceived" (29). Even though Léonce feels that that the quadroon nurse should be relieved from her responsibilities from time to time, the standards that he sees and perceives in his environment tell him otherwise. Similarly, Robert Lebrun questions the importance of the code of behavior of his own society in chapter eight. Adèle warns him that Edna might take his flirtatious statements seriously, and Robert replies in the following manner: "You Creoles! I have no patience with you! Am I always to be regarded as a feature of an amusing programme?" (41). Robert verbally excludes himself out of the community of Creoles, presumably to emphasize his indignation over being misunderstood by his own people.

These extracts were employed for the purpose of showing the way in which Chopin indicts the codes of contemporary white American society. She utilized the Creole community of New Orleans and their own specific codes of proper behavior to show that they are arbitrary and obsolete, primarily because the members – both women and men – of the society that invented these codes and keep to uphold them question their meaning and importance. The selection of the members sustains this argument, as Chopin chose the central characters to convey these ambivalent attitudes – the heroine of her novel, her husband, and the man who ignites her inner awakening.

2.2 Stereotypical Portrayal of Minorities in *The Awakening*

The second of the analyzed studies is Elizabeth Ammons' "The Limits of Freedom: The Fictions of Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Kate Chopin, and Pauline Hopkins," issued in 1992 in her comprehensive study *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*. While Anna Elfenbein believes that Kate Chopin was a progressive, democratic author, Ammons questions this theory to a certain extent.

Ammons starts with establishing that Edna Pontellier undergoes a journey from the characters of Léonce and Adèle, which is "played out [...] against race and class issues."⁸⁸ She needs to journey from these two characters as they represent the two worlds – the masculine and the feminine – between which Edna cannot decide, as she covets two privileges of the men's world: art and sex. The journey ends in Edna's suicide,

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 71.

and the reason of her being able to commit this act is the fact that “black women will raise her children.”⁸⁹

Ammons explains the importance and inevitability of Edna’s suicide by stating that the two prerogatives of the masculine world are in opposition when exploited by a woman. The version of passionate sex accessible to Edna is embodied by the character of Adèle, yet Adèle’s version of it entails faithfulness, which is unavailable to Edna. Moreover, the novel suggests only two options for Edna: either Robert, who is not ready to enter an affair with a married woman, or Arobin, who only sees Edna as one of his many mistresses. Neither of them constitutes a suitable partner for Edna. The art is embodied by Mademoiselle Reisz, yet it stands in opposition to sex, as it demands celibacy. Besides, Edna is not in possession of the talent that would accompany her aspiration. As Ammons maintains, these oppositions are the inherent characteristics of the white western culture – there is no possibility for Edna to embrace them. The only manner in which this tension may be resolved is to journey out of culture to nature – to commit a suicide by swimming out in the sea, “the womb of life.”⁹⁰

As Ammons reveals that Edna’s self-destruction in fact stands for deliverance, she declares that the enablers behind it are the “nameless, faceless black women,”⁹¹ who primarily relieve Edna from various labor as they perform the jobs of cooks and nurses, and even of sexual providers and educators. Edna is “able to dream of total personal freedom”⁹² for two reasons – firstly, these women provide her with the time to pursue the artistic and sexual freedom, and secondly, as aforementioned, they will care about Edna’s children after her demise. Ammons admits that some critics may find Chopin’s perspective concerning race “liberal”⁹³ and “enlightened,”⁹⁴ because along with Edna’s awakening, the colored women change from “nameless parts of the scenery to individuals with names and voices.”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Ammons insists that the manner in which these individuals are portrayed is still “stereotypical and demeaning.”⁹⁶

Before moving over to the next part of Ammons’ argument, the question of the progression of the racially other characters deserves a closer inspection. As Ammons

⁸⁹ Ammons 74.

⁹⁰ Ammons 74.

⁹¹ Ammons 74.

⁹² Ammons 75.

⁹³ Ammons 74.

⁹⁴ Ammons 74.

⁹⁵ Ammons 74.

⁹⁶ Ammons 75.

pointed out, at the outset of the novel the reader is confronted with mere descriptions of the amount of the African blood in these characters' veins, which are presented as denominations. The quadroon⁹⁷ nurse who remains unnamed for the entirety of the novel appears primarily in the country resort of Grand Isle, and is presented only a few times in the city, until she disappears from the narrative in chapter twenty-four when she accompanies the Pontellier children on their way to Iberville to visit their grandmother. She is portrayed as dissatisfied, yet instead of developing into a more independent and outspoken character, she rather assumes a "fictitious animation and alacrity" (75). Other than her, the country part of the novel is filled with unspecified black women and one little black girl whose character arc is abandoned once Edna moves back to New Orleans for the rest of the year. In the city, and especially after Edna purchases her own "pigeon house" (108), the characters are either given names (the mulatto boy turns to Joe, the maid changes to Ellen), or are introduced with a name from their first appearance (Old Celestine, Josephine the nurse). Furthermore, the characters are allowed to actively shape Edna's world – Ellen is mentioned as the author of the nickname "pigeon house," which Edna continues to use. The most profound change in the narrative regarding the minor, colored characters is presented in the scene of Adèle's labor. Her Griffe⁹⁸ nurse Josephine, hired for the occasion, is given the opportunity to speak out in a manner that differs from the previous deferential demeanor of the quadroon and other black servants. When Adèle "crie[s]" (133) that she is "abandoned" (133) and "neglected" (133), Josephine voices her disagreement in equal intensity by exclaiming "Neglected, indeed!" (133). Besides, Josephine is the first character whose disgruntled thoughts continue to be conveyed via the free indirect speech – "Wasn't she there? [...]" (133).

Of course, some might object that Chopin's intention was not to portray the awakening of the black voice along with Edna's (as I assume), because the shift from the mute quadroon nurse to the outspoken Griffe nurse entails an added drop of the black blood, which might allude to the fact that Chopin meant to express a contrary sentiment – to represent the whiter character (the quadroon) as more compliant, while the "more colored" character (the Griffe) is rendered brazen and rebellious. I would like to counter

⁹⁷ The term "quadroon" indicates a person whose ancestry is $\frac{1}{4}$ African – that is, one parent is a mulatto (a descendant of one African and one Caucasian parent) and the other parent is of Caucasian descent.

⁹⁸ The term "Griffe" indicates a person whose Ancestry is $\frac{3}{4}$ African – that is, one parent is wholly African, and the other parent is a mulatto.

such ideas by acknowledging a character whose blood is not African, yet she is still a woman of color and lower class – the Mexican-American girl, Mariequita. From the offset, Mariequita is named, described as “sly” (55) and “saucy” (55), making unabashed eye-contact with Robert Lebrun and quarrelling courageously with Mr. Beaufort, the boatman of the Grand Isle. Interestingly enough, she not only stands up to white people, but also to males, as opposed to Josephine who only talked back to a woman in distress. Even though Mariequita is introduced as already emancipated to a certain extent, she is the only other non-white character whose thoughts are made available to the reader via the free indirect speech. Considering the fact that Chopin has decided to employ the free indirect speech regarding the minor colored characters only twice and towards the end of the book, I contend that her choice was a deliberate one, and it stands to represent the awakening of the colored women that takes place simultaneously with the sexual awakening of Chopin’s white heroine.

Ammons’ argument continues by her statement that *The Awakening* “formally derives from African-American culture.”⁹⁹ This line of thought is supported by the fact that the novel is structured as a pregnancy – the thirty-nine chapters represent the thirty-nine weeks of the gestation cycle. As such, the novel’s feminine form contrasts with the usual linear plot-structure of a “white, western, masculine”¹⁰⁰ one. Furthermore, as Elfenbein previously noted, it is a shared female experience that crosses the categories of race and class. Ammons finally posits that the “maternal and African aesthetics”¹⁰¹ influencing the novel’s form are countered by the “privileged and western”¹⁰² ones that are included in its contents. Therefore, Ammons’ conclusion is quite skeptical: even though she acknowledges the influence of African-American culture on Chopin, she believes that the portrayal of blacks in *The Awakening* is degrading and clichéd.

2.3 The Importance of African-American Presence in *The Awakening*

Joyce Dyers’ “Reading ‘The Awakening’ with Toni Morrison,” is influenced by Toni Morrison’s theory that the African presence in the works of white writers (especially

⁹⁹ Ammons 76.

¹⁰⁰ Ammons 76.

¹⁰¹ Ammons 76.

¹⁰² Ammons 76.

those of the 19th century) is detectable by noticing the “codes and silences”¹⁰³ in these works. Morrison compares these works to a fish-bowl – while the critic is amid the analysis of the minute details of the contents of the bowl, they might miss the bowl itself. Dyer compares the minor, colored characters of *The Awakening* to the fish-bowl, and maintains that they only appear to be situated in the background of the novel. Opposing Ammons’ study, Dyer claims that the function of these characters is not to “facilitate Edna’s awakening”¹⁰⁴ – on the contrary, Dyer believes that the African presence is essential to the notion of South or freedom.¹⁰⁵ She then adds that this presence might become detrimental to the white characters and the very literary work in which it appears.

The first part of Dyer’s study is quite laudatory of Chopin, as Dyer considers the black presence a sign of the universal lack of freedom in American society.¹⁰⁶ She compares the attitude of the African-American characters – the quadroon nurse in particular – to that of Edna’s. Dyer interprets their absent-mindedness and restlessness as the anger and violence that seethe below the surface of their seemingly temperate demeanor. She also recognizes that for the contemporary readership and criticism, it was already too difficult to put up with the portrayal of the confident defiance of a white woman.¹⁰⁷ Depicting such a revolt concerning a woman of color would be impossible. Therefore, Chopin had no choice but to hide them behind clichéd descriptions, such as the one of the dissatisfied African-American. Similarly to the servants, the stereotypes with which Chopin furnishes the discourse of her characters warrant a revision. Dyer mentions a specific scene where Edna visits her children in Iberville, the childhood home of their father Léonce. While describing the scene, Edna utters such phrases as “picking pecans with Lidie’s little black brood” (117) and “darkies laying the cane” (117). Dyer claims that the racist language employed in the countryside scene contradicts the peace that the setting is supposed to emanate.

I would like to question Dyer’s statement that by staying at the plantation in Iberville, Edna’s children will grow up to become equivalents of their racist father. In fact, I hold that Léonce is the only prominent white male character who is redeemed by

¹⁰³ Joyce Dyer, “Reading ‘The Awakening’ with Toni Morrison, *The Southern Literary Journal* 35.1 (2002): 140.

¹⁰⁴ Dyer 142.

¹⁰⁵ Dyer 142.

¹⁰⁶ Dyer 144.

¹⁰⁷ The issue of the reception of *The Awakening* is addressed in chapter 1.2.

Chopin's narrative – especially when contrasted with other white males such as Victor Lebrun – and he might even be perceived as a liberal, open-minded, non-oppressive man. As I see it, Chopin might have been resolved to defend her own upbringing, as she herself spent her childhood on a Southern plantation.¹⁰⁸ Chopin's aim is to show that racism stems from the mentalities of individual people, rather than from the surroundings that they were reared in.¹⁰⁹ This notion is also supported by Edna's mindset and attitude to her environment – even though she was brought up in a strict, patriarchal household, Edna questions its values and refuses to submit to them.

As I have already pointed out, in the third chapter, Léonce admonishes Edna for neglecting the children and relying wholly on the nurse to care after them, and subsequently he inwardly casts doubt upon the norms established by his community. In chapter seven, Chopin makes it known that Edna's family opposed her marriage to Léonce – whereas Edna comes from a Protestant, traditional southern American background, Léonce is a Catholic Creole. Edna's father is exposed as a patriarchal and racist ex-soldier. His disagreement with Edna's choice of a husband distinguishes Léonce from the Colonel and suggests that Mr. Pontellier is endowed with different moral attributes. Their dissimilitude is emphasized in chapter twenty-four, when the Colonel gives Léonce advice on Edna's restriction. Chopin makes use of the free indirect speech to reveal Léonce's inner, deprecatory sentiments about the Colonel's counsel – “The Colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his own wife into her grave. Mr. Pontellier had a vague suspicion of it which he thought it needless to mention at that late day” (94). Overall, Léonce's treatment of Edna is also fairly gentle and understanding. Even though in chapter eleven Edna defies Léonce quite persistently, he does not reproach her – he rather goes out to stay with her on the veranda through the night. In chapter seventeen, he questions the societal norms once again when he reasons with Edna regarding the observation of her Tuesday visiting hours. Edna has left the house while there were important people to entertain, such as the wife of his business associate, Mrs. Belthrop. “I'm not making any fuss over it. But it's just such seeming

¹⁰⁸ Toth 63-64.

¹⁰⁹ Dagmar Pegues mentions Kate Chopin's insistence on the concept of free will in her study “Fear and Desire: Regional Aesthetics and Colonial Desire in Kate Chopin's Portrayals of the Tragic Mulatta Stereotype,” pages 15-16. Emily Toth moreover mentions a French naturalist writer, Guy de Maupassant, as one of Chopin's most significant influences, and Mary E. Papke refers to Chopin's “intellectual attraction to determinist philosophies and sciences.” Mary E. Papke, “So Long As We Read Chopin,” *Awakenings: The Story of the Kate Chopin Revival*, ed. Bernard Koloski (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press: 2009): 87.

trifles that we've got to take seriously; such things count" (73). Léonce is aware that for some, these matters may appear to be trivial, he sympathizes with Edna, and does not become furious. The fact that he is able to admit this might indicate that he does not fully agree with the norms either, even though he acknowledges the convenience of observing them.

Dyer continues her study by explaining the social and literal sabotage performed by the black characters. She observes that whiteness alternates with shadow quite frequently in *The Awakening*. According to Morrison, the importance ascribed to whiteness in such narratives represents an "antidote for and meditation on the shadow [accompanying it]."¹¹⁰ Dyer believes that the "shadows are a persistent reminder of the [...] connection between race and freedom"¹¹¹ in America. She mentions Morrison's study of Hemingway's writings that incorporates black nurses who modify the self-image of the white characters and disturb their reality. Similarly, Josephine disturbs Adèle's world, self-image, and class assumptions¹¹² in the pivotal labor scene. Dyer notices the emphasis on whiteness in the scene and relates it to the notion of Hemingway's black nurses, stating that the black characters enact the role of a subversive element, reminding the whites (and especially women) of their loss of freedom.

The literary sabotage takes place in chapter eight, where the little black girl works the treadle of Madame Lebrun's sewing machine. Dyer suggests that the issues of race are disconcerting to such a degree that the narrative temporarily slips out of control.¹¹³ As the black girl occupies the "center of Chopin's consciousness,"¹¹⁴ the noises brought about by the girl's unrelenting duty at the machine interrupt the conversation. Since a great deal of the conversation obliquely includes the issues of freedom, Dyer insists on the constant intrusion of the onomatopoeic sound implying that "without the reminder of black servitude, [...] no discussion of freedom [is complete]."¹¹⁵ Chopin apprehends the possibility of fully embracing the topic, yet she does not shun it altogether. Eventually, it escapes her hold, resulting with the surfeit of onomatopoeia. Dyer concludes with commending Chopin for reminding the reader that "there can be no

¹¹⁰ Toni Morrison, cited in Dyer 145.

¹¹¹ Dyer 146.

¹¹² Dyer 147.

¹¹³ Dyer 149.

¹¹⁴ Dyer 148.

¹¹⁵ Dyer 149.

freedom [...] without the recognition that black servitude in any form dare not remain.”¹¹⁶

2.4 Methodical Revision: Edna Pontellier as Racial Other

The last two of the considered studies – Michelle Birnbaum’s “‘Alien Hands’ in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*” and Dagmar Pegues’ “Fear and Desire: Regional Aesthetics and Colonial Desire in Kate Chopin’s Portrayals of the Tragic Mulatta Stereotype” – both revise the approaches hitherto employed by the other scholars and instead of focusing on the colored women and the relevance of their stereotypical portrayal in the novel, they work with the notion of Edna as a woman of color. Birnbaum’s analysis is one of the more recent ones¹¹⁷, and the attitude towards Chopin’s inclusion of the question of race and class becomes less approving. Birnbaum’s study is extensive, inclusive, and very carefully executed, and thus, for the purposes of this thesis, it does not require any further elaboration.

Birnbaum aligns Edna with the women of color by stating that Edna finds her sexual self in the sexual difference of others.¹¹⁸ To understand her objective, it is important to recognize the significance that Birnbaum attributes to Edna’s sleep. Edna’s awakening takes place not only on the figurative level, but also on the literal one, as she falls in and out of a real slumber in the course of the novel, such as when she dozes off in Madame Antoine’s bed on Chênrière Caminada. The two states of being awake and being asleep represent Edna’s two selves – the ruling, and the ruled. This dichotomy leads Birnbaum to believe that Edna’s self in general may be regarded as a “colonial self,”¹¹⁹ as opposed to the “imperial self,”¹²⁰ hitherto utilized by feminist critics in their analyses of *The Awakening*. She posits that the self of the colonizer consists of both of these contradictory aspects – the ruling together with the ruled. In order for the colonizer to be liberated, they have to erase the authorizing principle. As Edna declares herself¹²¹, the authorizing principle that puts her to sleep – that is, into a state in which she becomes “the ruled” – are the alien hands, represented by the black characters in the novel. Birnbaum parallels Edna’s intermittent sleep with the notion of the “silent South,

¹¹⁶ Dyer 152.

¹¹⁷ Published in 2003.

¹¹⁸ Birnbaum 79.

¹¹⁹ Birnbaum 79.

¹²⁰ Birnbaum 79.

¹²¹ “She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility” (54).

part of the collective amnesia regarding the abuses and uses of interracial intimacy in the postwar South.”¹²² Furthermore, Birnbaum believes that Edna’s identification with the marginalized “reinforces rather than razes class and race differences,”¹²³ as it increases the distance between them: “By emphasizing and identifying with the subjugation and silencing of the slave, the white woman ‘asserts her right to speak and act, thus differentiating herself from her brethren in bonds.’”¹²⁴

Birnbaum continues with commenting on her premise that “the oppressed become the oppressors,”¹²⁵ obliquely structuring white sexual experience. For Edna, the colored people – the mulatto servant Joe in particular¹²⁶ – symbolize the markers of social status and hierarchies, and as such they become reminders of the social realities that Edna tries to break away from. The colored people turn into obtrusive elements – they are deemed the keepers, rather than the victims of the Southern society.¹²⁷ At the same time, they remain essential for Edna’s emancipation – when Edna moves out to the pigeon house to experience a “feeling of freedom and independence” (102), she needs Old Celestine to help her with the management of the household. Birnbaum supports her claim that the African-Americans act both as a hindrance and a necessity¹²⁸ with another example – the scene where Victor Lebrun quarrels with his African-American female servant. In order to become a man and ready himself for a white woman, a boy needs to overcome his mother, represented in this particular scene by the black “mammy,” who also (space-wise) represents the “woman before Edna.”¹²⁹ Edna, as the object of Victor’s desire¹³⁰, is patiently waiting for Victor to conquer the sexual hindrance in the form of the black servant.

Another instance of a woman of color “authoriz[ing] white sexuality and self-knowledge” is Madame Antoine, whom Edna meets on the trip to the Chênrière. Birnbaum posits that men (such as Robert) only mediate the white woman’s sexuality, while it is the women of color who initiate it. As Edna doesn’t understand the language

¹²² Birnbaum 79.

¹²³ Birnbaum 80.

¹²⁴ Birnbaum and Karen Sánchez-Eppler, cited in Birnbaum 80.

¹²⁵ Birnbaum 84.

¹²⁶ Joe is present at one of the first dinners in the Pontellier house in New Orleans. He is listed as one of the items of local color, adding to the “suffocating drawing-room atmosphere Edna loathes.” (Birnbaum, 84)

¹²⁷ Birnbaum 83.

¹²⁸ Birnbaum 83.

¹²⁹ Birnbaum 85.

¹³⁰ Chopin incorporated an interesting parallel between Edna and Mariequita – they both serve as objects of the desire of the Lebrun brothers.

of Madame Antoine, Robert translates the conversation, and consequently becomes attractive to Edna solely “as a guide to [the] “local color”¹³¹ that Edna seeks. When Edna later falsely credits Madame Antoine as the author of a narrative of infidelity that she tells at one of the dinners in the city, Birnbaum identifies it as a mounting tension between Edna’s longing to occupy the place of the alien, and the contradictory impulse of rejecting the negatives associated with the other. Similarly to Ammons’ previous notion of Edna’s conflicting desires regarding the worlds of the masculine and the feminine, according to Birnbaum, Edna also craves both the world of the colonizer, as well as that of the colonized.

Birnbaum finally asserts that Edna’s self-definition is brought about via “occupation without conflict”¹³² – as Edna invades places which do not belong to her, such as Madame Antoine’s bed or her husband’s chair at the head of the table, the owners of these places vacate them deliberately before Edna’s arrival, evading the potential conflict. When Edna eventually discovers an owner-less place to inhabit, it “bears the shadow of the Other”¹³³ as well. Birnbaum compares the pigeon house to the cabins at the Grand Isle, which are former slave quarters. As the cabins complement the main house on the Isle, the pigeon house likewise complements the main house of Edna’s residence in New Orleans. In these abodes, Edna enjoys sexual freedom and thus aligns herself with the women of color.¹³⁴

The tension between the alien and the domestic rises in Edna as she internalizes the colony,¹³⁵ and by extension also the “intimate distance [of] Southern interracial relationships.”¹³⁶ Edna’s inner intimacy between the passion and sexuality of a black woman and the mores of a white woman corresponds to the intimacy of interracial relations. In the final scene, the tension comes to be resolved, as it represents the “anxiety about the influence of the Other,”¹³⁷ which Edna comes to fear. Similarly to Dyer, Birnbaum employs Morrison’s theory regarding the conspicuous, meaningful gaps in the text and accuses Edna of the “fetishization of whiteness,”¹³⁸ which symbolizes her

¹³¹ Birnbaum 86.

¹³² Birnbaum 88.

¹³³ Birnbaum 88.

¹³⁴ The notion of the passion and purity racial dichotomy has been dealt with by Anna Shannon Efenbein and mentioned in chapter 2.1.

¹³⁵ Birnbaum 91.

¹³⁶ Birnbaum 91.

¹³⁷ Birnbaum 91.

¹³⁸ Birnbaum 91.

“insistence on racial privilege.”¹³⁹ Edna’s quest for identity is then inevitably influenced by race – the tension between the two warring principles is resolved by the conquering whiteness, which establishes Edna’s liberation. Birnbaum concludes by declaring that the feminist reading of *The Awakening* is complicated by the consideration of the issue of race, and the frequent enthusiastic celebration of the white woman’s sexual liberation is challenged.

Finally, the most recent intersectional analysis of *The Awakening* has been undertaken by Dagmar Pegues. Even though she draws on Birnbaum’s notion of colonial self, Pegues positively acknowledges Chopin’s attempt to “resist [...] the nineteenth-century racist discourse”¹⁴⁰, albeit she admits that Chopin has not succeeded completely, because she depicts the racially-mixed characters as threats. Due to the plenitude of different cultures¹⁴¹ and a lenient approach towards segregation and miscegenation¹⁴², Louisiana’s role in the construction of the tragic mulatta stereotype is distinguished from that of the other Southern states.

Pegues’ aim is to reconsider the tragic mulatta stereotype and its ambiguous nature. Instead of focusing on the “virgin/whore dichotomy”¹⁴³ like the majority of the feminist critics, Pegues addresses the “fetishization of the black body,”¹⁴⁴ which involves the co-existence of two antithetical feelings – sexual desire and fear. These two sentiments constitute the ambiguity inherent in the tragic mulatta stereotype. Chopin acknowledges the aspect of desirability, and allows the character of Edna to appropriate it.¹⁴⁵

Pegues also notices other manners in which some writers utilized the stereotype. Abolitionists such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lydia Maria Child incorporated it in their anti-slavery fiction. They presumed that their white readers would be able to relate to lighter-colored slaves and pity them, but ultimately, this approach resulted in further perpetuation of the white privilege.¹⁴⁶ Other, more recent interpretations focus either on the virgin/whore dichotomy, or they profess that the figure of the tragic mulatto/a was a predecessor to the typically American hybrid national identity. Pegues objects to these

¹³⁹ Birnbaum 91.

¹⁴⁰ Pegues 17.

¹⁴¹ Pegues cites French, Spanish, African, and Anglo cultures.

¹⁴² White people and African-Americans were mixing more freely in Louisiana.

¹⁴³ Pegues 1.

¹⁴⁴ Pegues 2.

¹⁴⁵ Pegues 2.

¹⁴⁶ Pegues 4.

approaches and contends that both the “invisible blackness”¹⁴⁷ and the hybridity of identity pose a threat to the local Southern hierarchy.

Pegues deals primarily with Chopin’s short stories “Désirée’s Baby” and “La Belle Zoraïde,” but she believes that the emotions of fear and desire accompanying the stereotype might be extended to the character of Edna Pontellier as well. She claims that Edna is a tragic mulatta figure, struggling to harmonize her identity. This hybridity of identity corresponds with the racial hybridity of the tragic mulatta.¹⁴⁸

Pegues then moves to the associations of desire with the tragic mulatta characters in “Désirée’s Baby” and *The Awakening*. She draws a parallel between the two heroines, Désirée and Edna. Both of them internalize otherness, balancing their authentic and their assumed identities.¹⁴⁹ As the Creoles associate passionate sexuality with dark women, Edna corrupts her white social status by internalizing the “dark” ardor. As for the analysis of fear, both Désirée and Edna disappear into death as the consequence of their fear of the racial other in themselves. Furthermore, both Désirée and Edna are “solitary figures”¹⁵⁰ – they are not the victims of the passion versus purity dichotomy, but of “slavery’s commodification of the colonial subject, [...] imposed isolation, and lack of community structures.”¹⁵¹

Due to the fact that Pegues primarily focuses on the short stories, the analysis lacks more textual evidence of the white characters’ fearful and desirous attitudes towards Edna, as well as that of Edna’s identification with the mulatta. I am therefore going to provide some examples of these issues.

Many white male characters in *The Awakening* approach Edna in a manner which manifests either a fearful or a desirous attitude towards her. Yet it is only her husband, Léonce, who shows the signs of both fear and desire. In the aforementioned scene from the first chapter where Léonce reprimands Edna for being tanned, he looks at her “as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property” (24) – he recognizes Edna as a coveted object which he desires to possess. His desire is quelled only by his concurrent demonstration of fear stemming from Edna’s imprudent sunbath, as it results in the modification of her external features¹⁵², which Léonce perceives as “suffer[ing] some

¹⁴⁷ Pegues 10.

¹⁴⁸ Pegues 8.

¹⁴⁹ Pegues 11.

¹⁵⁰ Pegues 13.

¹⁵¹ Pegues 13.

¹⁵² “You are burnt *beyond recognition*, [...]” (24, my emphasis).

damage” (24). By reproaching Edna, Léonce expresses his apprehension regarding her identification with women of color. Léonce’s desire is moreover evinced in chapters three and eleven – he claims that Edna is the “sole object of his existence” (26), and Edna herself utters the word “desire” in relation to Léonce when she admits that she occasionally, “through habit, [yields] to his desire” (53).

The general attitude of desire towards Edna is professed quite profusely. A number of young men in the novel – Robert Lebrun, Victor Lebrun, and Alcée Arobin – constitute Edna’s potential love interests. Even though Victor is never explicitly seen to be involved with Mrs. Pontellier in any way that would indicate an ongoing sexual relation, it was stated earlier in this subchapter that Michele Birnbaum established Edna as an object of his desire when she investigated the scene where Victor is trying to subdue his African-American servant in front of Edna – Birnbaum states that Victor is “described as having a childish crush on Edna.”¹⁵³ His brother Robert keeps flirting with Edna throughout the whole novel, and eventually admits his love for her – “I love you. Good-bye – because I love you” (136). Finally, Alcée Arobin seduces Edna in her pigeon house – “He did not answer, except to continue to caress her. He did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties” (116).

Unfortunately, the frequent and varied occurrence of desirous feelings does not quantitatively correspond to the manifestations of fear. Apart from Léonce, the only white male character whose behavior may be interpreted as resulting from fear is Edna’s father, the Colonel. He indirectly likens Edna to a dark woman when he treats her as a servant – “He kept her busy serving him and ministering to his wants” (91) – and when he later gives Léonce advice on the management of a disobedient wife, Chopin suggests that the Colonel does not eschew violence¹⁵⁴ in the treatment of his servants: “Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife” (94).

Even though the instances of the feelings of desire and fear are fairly scarce, there are some other interesting examples of Edna’s association with women of color, or rather her development towards one throughout the course of the novel, which stresses Edna’s gradual transformation by a noticeable emphasis on the dichotomy between the light and the shadow. In chapter five, Edna is differentiated from the other women that

¹⁵³ Birnbaum 84.

¹⁵⁴ Pegues maintains that portrayals of violence may result from the fear of racial Otherness. (Pegues, 2)

Robert has previously chosen to accompany at the Grand Isle resort. While “for two consecutive seasons [Robert] lived in the *sunlight* of Mademoiselle Duvigné’s presence” (31, my emphasis), “he had lived in [Edna’s] *shadow* during the past month” (31, my emphasis). This may serve as a foreshadowing of Robert’s burgeoning sexual passion for Edna – contrary to her, Mademoiselle Duvigné was presumably old, as she “died between summers” (31), and therefore less likely to be sexually desirable for Robert. It is noteworthy that later on in the novel, Edna is also likened to sunlight, yet this time by older women to whom she does not pose a threat. Madame Antoine “welcome[s Robert and Edna] with all the native hospitality, as she would have opened her door to let the sunlight in” (58), and Mademoiselle Reisz exclaims “Ah! here comes the sunlight!” (101) when Edna visits her in the city.

At the outset of the novel, Adèle and Edna are juxtaposed while visiting the beach – Adèle is said to be clad “in pure white” (36), while Edna, whose garments are mostly white as well, wears a “cool muslin [...] with a waving vertical line of *brown* running through it” (36, my emphasis). Later on when Edna leaves the Grand Isle and the cottage,¹⁵⁵ she loses her tan¹⁵⁶, but “there [are] a few freckles on her face, and a small, dark mole near the under lip and one on the temple, half-hidden in her hair” (76). These little dark blemishes on her otherwise “smooth, white, and polished” (76) countenance might signify a more permanent change that has taken place in Edna’s inner self – a permanent connection to women of color. Similarly, as Edna wears white clothing in nearly all the scenes in which she appears up until her desertion of the New Orleans residence, the one where she is remodeling the pigeon house stands out, since she “has never appeared handsomer than in the old *blue* gown, with a *red* silk handkerchief knotted at random around her head [...]” (107, my emphasis). Finally, Chopin alludes to the change of Edna’s hair color. Edna is introduced as having eyes that “were a yellowish brown, about the color of her hair” (24). This specific hair-color is mentioned once again when Edna’s tan starts to fade in chapter eighteen. However, in chapter thirty-three, after Robert returns from Mexico, Edna’s hair presumably darkened and instead of being yellowish-brown, they are now only brown. Edna notes that Robert has been “absent but a few months, and was not changed. His hair – the color of hers – waved back from his

¹⁵⁵ As Birnbaum notes, the cottages are the previous homes of the slaves that worked for the masters who lived in the main house on Grand Isle. When Edna resides in the cottage or at her pigeon house, which Birnbaum likens to the cottage, she feels more sexually liberated than elsewhere.

¹⁵⁶ The tan that Léonce was complaining about in chapter one.

temples in the same way as before” (121). Robert’s hair-color is referred to in chapter twenty-six, when Mademoiselle Reisz asks Edna why she loves him. Edna answers that she loves him “because his hair is brown [...]” (104). Robert’s hair-color has always been brown and had not changed while he was in Mexico. Thus, the reader is confronted not only with the change of Edna’s complexion and clothing, but also with the slight transformation of her hair-color.

Therefore, even though the instances of Pegues’ particular approach toward the identification of Edna with the figure of the tragic mulatta are very limited, other examples from the text that do not make use of the theory of fear and desire support Pegues’ (and also Birnbaum’s) key notion that Edna represents a woman of color.

2.5 Fluctuating Sentiments: The Degree of Kate Chopin's Prejudice in *The Awakening*

None of the analyses considered in this chapter denounces Chopin completely as a prejudiced, racially intolerant author. Yet the degree of praise eventually decreases. In 1987, Anna Shannon Elfenbein presented Chopin as a liberal writer who has made an attempt to defy the limiting norms of the passion/purity dichotomy. Similarly to the last two analyses produced by Michele Birnbaum and Dagmar Pegues, Elfenbein focuses on the white heroine, Edna, rather than on the non-white characters of lower class, and claims that Edna’s final suicide stemmed from her final understanding of the stereotype that assigns white women the attribute of purity, and her consequent inability to come to terms with the fact that her passion resulted in her being associated with women of color. I have expanded upon Elfenbein’s notion of Chopin’s progressiveness by commenting on the white men of the Creole society – Léonce Pontellier and Robert Lebrun – who question the societal norms as well, emphasizing the arbitrariness and pointlessness of maintaining rules that confound their originators and perpetrators as well as their victims.

In 1992, Elizabeth Ammons refused to endorse Elfenbein’s theory of Chopin’s “color-blind and democratic”¹⁵⁷ method of portraying the minor characters and instead proclaimed that Chopin’s representation of these is clichéd. I have opposed Ammons and shown that not only do the colored female individuals receive names and more lines in the text throughout the course of the novel, but they also assume different, more

¹⁵⁷ Elfenbein 305.

outspoken attitudes and Chopin allows them to voice their thoughts directly to the reader via the free indirect speech. These changes are particularly evident after Edna submits to her sexual awakening and moves out to the pigeon house. Instead of understanding the initial insignificance attributed to these characters as a flaw on Chopin's part, I proposed that Chopin in fact remembered to include women of color into the general concept of awakening that defines the novel. Despite Ammons' ambivalent sentiments regarding the content, she recognizes the African influence in the form, which assumes a cyclical plot-structure instead of a traditional, masculine, Western, linear one.

A decade later, Joyce Dyers utilized Toni Morrison's theory of conspicuous vacancies in the texts of white authors to refute Ammons' belief that the minority, colored characters function only as the background for a narrative preoccupied with Edna, asserting instead that their presence signifies the general absence of freedom in American society, which Dyer deems commendable. She even justified Chopin's use of some derogatory terms that were supposedly applied to disrupt the seeming peace of the rural setting and alert to the fact that Edna's children are being reared in the same racist environment as their father was. I have made an attempt to contradict Dyer's critical view of Léonce, and present him as a liberal man to a certain extent, particularly in contrast with other white men in the novel, such as Victor Lebrun or Alcée Arobin.

The two most contemporary analyses both turn their attention back to the character of Edna, whom they associate with the women of color in the novel. Birnbaum's is the most condemnatory study – she deems that Edna's discovery of her sexual self via the identification with the women of color underlines the separation on the levels of race and class. Pegues is pleased with Chopin's attempt not to succumb to the widespread racist rhetoric of the 19th century, but she dislikes Chopin's use of the tragic mulatta stereotype that portrays the racially-mixed characters as threats.

There may be seen a progression in the attitudes regarding the evaluation of the degree of Chopin's racial prejudice. While the first study appreciates Chopin's enlightened perspective, the contemporary works highlight the discriminatory demerits of the narrative. Besides, Elfenbein, Birnbaum, and Pegues all focus on Edna in their studies, contrary to Ammons and Dyer. Birnbaum's belief that Edna's suicide is a result of the mounting tension concerning the alien presence within her corresponds closely with Elfenbein's thesis that the drowning is brought about by Edna's dissatisfaction with

her internalized, yet stigmatized passion, and with Pegues' notion of Edna yielding to her fear of the racial Other.

3 Reforming Racial Politics: Intersectional Approach to Chopin's Short Stories

The intersectional analyses presented in the second chapter will form the foundation of my examination of the four short stories that I have chosen to be relevant for such a study – “Beyond the Bayou,” “Tante Cat’rinette,” “Désirée’s Baby,” and “La Belle Zoraïde.” In the following subchapters, the suitability of the application of the hitherto examined approaches will be considered. I have decided to exclude the analysis of Michele Birnbaum from the examination. Her argumentation is very detailed, elaborated, and closely following the text of *The Awakening* – the attempt to apply her principles to the stories might result in taking her findings out of context.

The main motive for the selection of these stories was the fact that they all feature a woman of color as a heroine,¹⁵⁸ instead of including them in the stories in a similar way as Chopin did in *The Awakening* by portraying them only as servants and assigning the main role to a white, upper-class woman. These stories also reflect Chopin’s interest in people of color and may prove essential for the determination of the nature of Chopin’s stance concerning the oppression of minorities. Moreover, the selected stories may be further divided into two groups according to their shared attributes.

“Beyond the Bayou” and “Tante Cat’rinette” mirror each other – they both feature a heroine suffering from a fear that prevents her from leaving her home. Apart from that, both of these heroines undergo a change throughout the course of the story – they are initially portrayed according to the Sapphire stereotype and later transform into the image of the Mammy stereotype.¹⁵⁹ The protagonists of “Désirée’s Baby” and “La Belle Zoraïde” are both racially mixed and exposed to the prejudice of the society – Chopin deals with the arbitrariness of assigning importance to race in these works. These last two works of fiction are also cited on the official webpage of Kate Chopin as “her most famous stories.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Apart from “Désirée’s Baby,” which, however, presents as its heroine a woman with questionable origin. The racial affiliation of the heroine forms the gist of the story and therefore I have decided to include her in the selection.

¹⁵⁹ The reasoning behind this claim will be further explained in the second subchapter.

¹⁶⁰ “Reading and Studying Kate Chopin’s Short Stories,” *Kate Chopin.org*, The Kate Chopin International Society <<http://www.katechopin.org/short-stories>> 26 Apr 2015.

3.1 Kate Chopin as a Liberal Author

According to Anna Shannon Efenbein, Chopin revealed herself as an author with democratic, open-minded tendencies. She believes that *The Awakening* was rejected by the general public and especially by the contemporary critics due to Chopin's critique of the passion/purity dichotomy, since Chopin reversed the stereotypical racial distribution of passion and purity by making her white upper-class heroine Edna Pontellier discover her sensual self. Moreover, according to Efenbein, Chopin depicted the relationships between the female characters in the novel as dysfunctional to emphasize the impact of the stereotype that prevents women from demonstrating their diversity. Efenbein's reasoning begins with presenting Edna's conspicuous uncertainty regarding the appropriate conduct of a woman in the Creole society.¹⁶¹ It is followed by her description of the white characters' comments and manners that expose their joined racism and sexism. She concludes her examination by clarifying the instances of the women's indifference and lack of compassion towards each other.

The setting of "Beyond the Bayou" is a Creole plantation named Bellissime – "every one on the plantation call[s] [the heroine] La Folle."^{162,163} Despite that, the story does not feature any prominent white woman struggling with the discrepancy between the concept of her own sexuality and the notion of sexuality endorsed by the society. The existence of white women is acknowledged sporadically and the women stay nameless for the whole of the story – they include the deceased wife of the former owner, Old Mis', together with the daughters and the wife of the current owner, referred to by the heroine as P'tit Maître. The story focuses on the plight of one colored woman, but her difficulties do not involve the confusion about the racially appropriate sexual deportment either. Jacqueline forms merely one noticeable physical bond with a white male – Chéri, the now ten-year-old son of P'tit Maître. The physicality is emphasized as the reason of Jacqueline's preference of Chéri over his sisters – "[...] none of them had stroke her black hand quite as Chéri did, nor rested their heads against her knee so confidingly, nor fallen asleep in her arms as he used to do" (176). At the present time, Chéri does not seek the physical contact established between him and Jacqueline when

¹⁶¹ While the Creoles observe the general notion of the dichotomy, the women are used to behave in a more frank manner.

¹⁶² Kate Chopin, *Southern Literary Studies: Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969): 175. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

¹⁶³ La Folle is a French nickname which stands for a madwoman – the heroine's real name, which will be used in the analysis, is Jacqueline.

he was younger, presumably because he is turning from a boy into a man – “he hardly did such things now, since he had become the proud possessor of a gun, and had had his black curls cut off” (176). Nevertheless, he does not protest when Jacqueline attempts to maintain the contact by “patt[ing] his round red cheek, wip[ing] his soiled hands on her apron, and smooth[ing] his hair” (176) on the day of his fateful visit to her cabin near the woods. After Chéri gets hurt and Jacqueline picks the boy up to rescue him, the scene mirrors the description of his usual physical approach to Jacqueline – he is lifted once again “in her powerful arms, [...] with his head upon the woman’s shoulder” (177). This bond, however, does not signify any implicit sexual meaning, and as such cannot be taken into consideration regarding Elfenbein’s line of thought. Regardless, the fact that Chopin did not incorporate the confusion regarding a woman’s sexuality in this particular story should not lead to the conclusion of her being a prejudiced author. To assume such a stance, the characters would have to be portrayed as content with their stereotypically assigned sexual roles. In this case, the story is simply not concerned with sexual relationships. Therefore, this type of analysis is not suitable for realization.

Since sexuality is not the focus of the story, the white characters don't exhibit any signs of a combined racist and sexist attitude. In spite of the inapplicability of Elfenbein's second point, the one regarding the separation of women should be considered, even though it does not contribute directly to the argument about the racial divisions of sexuality. The unfounded interpretation of Jacqueline's behavior as mentally unstable is shared unanimously by "every one on the plantation" (175), white and colored people alike, as they call her La Folle – without enquiring after the nature of her troubles, they assume she is crazy. Apart from the fact that Jacqueline is thus removed on a psychological level from the other inhabitants of the estate, she is also abandoned physically, as the other servants move away behind the line that she is not able to cross – "She dwelt alone in her solitary cabin, for the rest of the quarters had long since been removed beyond her sight and knowledge" (175). The narrative suggests that none of the servants comes to visit her – the only one frequenting the cabin is Chéri. Jacqueline is eventually deprived of the only other friendly faces available, as "the cattle [are] sent to pasture down by the river" (176). She is "sorry when they [are] gone, for she love[s] these dumb companions well [...]" (176). Later, when she runs carrying Chéri to the imaginary line, she stands at the banks of the bayou and shouts for help. However, "no voice respond[s]. [...] She call[s] for each and every one upon the place, and still no

answer [comes]. [...] [W]hether her voice remained unheard or *unheeded*, no reply came to her frenzied cries" (177, my emphasis). When she decides to step over the bayou and arrives at the new cabins of the African-American employees, she is regarded as a scary spectacle by the other servants. "Most of them shuddered with superstitious dread of what [the spectacle] might portend" (178), instead of helping Jacqueline with the safe delivery of Chéri to the main house. After she hands Chéri over to P'tit Maître, she faints. Yet, rather than to be cared for in the house of her employers as a token of appreciation for saving their son, she is again physically removed back to her cabin to heal. It appears that the owners of the plantation still adhere to the notion of Jacqueline's madness and presume that not restoring her to the cabin that she refused to leave for the majority of her life would cause further distress. Finally, Tante Lizette, a colored woman sent to Jacqueline's hut to nurse her back to health, does not seem to be emotionally invested in Jacqueline's plight. Once she sees her awake and responsive, "old Lizette without compunction [steals] softly away, to creep back through the moonlit fields to her own cabin in the new quarters" (179), beyond the bayou. These instances of the indifference of the colored sisters of Jacqueline who are supposed to support her, enquire after her and aid her in the clarification and subsequent elimination of the obstacles she faces, serve as a confirmation of Chopin's critical stance towards the power of stereotypes¹⁶⁴, which hinder the women's efforts of sympathy that are essential for the improvement of the women's situation, regardless of their racial and class background.

Due to the similarities between "Beyond the Bayou" and "Tante Cat'rinette," the latter story remains unsuitable for the present analysis as well. Even though the white female character is named – Miss Kitty – and provided with a role that is more important than those of her counterparts in "Beyond the Bayou," the story is likewise focused on an African-American woman's dilemma. Miss Kitty's significance stems from the fact that she performs the same function as does Chéri – the one of the beloved charge. Neither she, nor the other two women – Cat'rinette and a little black girl, Lolo – express the doubts regarding their sexuality, as the story does not address this issue. The relevance of the relationships between Jacqueline and Chéri, and Cat'rinette and Miss Kitty will be addressed in the next subchapter, which deals with the interpretation of the stereotypical images of African-Americans presented in the stories.

¹⁶⁴ The way in which Jacqueline's madness may be regarded as a stereotype will be explained in the second subchapter.

By contrast, romantic, and consequently also sexual relationships occur in the other two stories, “*Désirée’s Baby*” and “*La Belle Zoraïde*.” In “*Désirée’s Baby*,” the Creole standards are introduced in the form of the Valmondé family ideals, to which the heroine, *Désirée*, corresponds – “the girl grew to be beautiful and gentle, *affectionate* and *sincere*, – the ideal of Valmondé” (240, my emphasis). The story revolves around *Désirée’s* “obscure origin” (241) and the accusation, later revealed to be false, of her being a woman of color. Her husband, Armand Aubigny, and the community in which they live don’t seem to question the possibility of *Désirée* belonging to “the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery” (245). At first, Armand doesn’t care about *Désirée’s* unknown heritage – “He was reminded that she was nameless. What did it matter about a name when he could give her one of the oldest and proudest in Louisiana?” (241). In spite of that, when he realizes that their baby is of a darker shade, he is firmly convinced that *Désirée* was born as the racial other and suddenly “the old love-light seemed to have gone out [out of his eyes]” (242). Similarly, “far-off neighbors who could hardly account for their coming” (242) make “unexpected visits” (242), which implies that the community unanimously believed the rumor to be true. *Désirée’s* conformity to the candid, passionate attributes of the Creole norms of femininity might have played a role in the rapidity of their decision-making process. This premise is reinforced by the reaction of the only other character that responds to this putative revelation – *Désirée’s* adoptive mother, Madame Valmondé. When the despondent *Désirée* writes a letter to her mother, informing her that “they tell [her she] is not white” (243), Madame does not repudiate *Désirée* as her husband did. She still calls *Désirée* “[her] own” (243), and reassures her of her motherly love that did not cease to exist. Madame Valmondé, as a white, Creole, upper-class woman, might inwardly question the ambiguous society conventions and pity *Désirée’s* situation, resulting partly from *Désirée’s* careful observation of these norms.

As Dagmar Pegues observed, “Chopin suggests [...] that *La Blanche* is [...] an object of sexual desire for Armand Aubigny.”¹⁶⁵ This sexual relationship between Armand and the mulatto servant is also worthy of exploring. On the surface it might seem that *La Blanche* serves as a stereotypical portrayal of a lustful colored woman. She is unarguably intimately involved with Armand. Firstly, when *Désirée* recounts the behavior of her baby to her visiting mother, she recalls that “Armand heard [his cries] as

¹⁶⁵ Pegues 9.

far away as La Blanche's cabin" (241). Secondly, Chopin implies that Armand is the father of La Blanche's children. The percentage of African blood in La Blanche's veins has not been verbally specified by Chopin on purpose – she may either be a mulatta of a quadroon. Her skin color, reflected also in her nickname,¹⁶⁶ is compared to Désirée's by Armand, who remarks that Désirée's hand is "as white as La Blanche's" (243). In her analysis of the story, Pegues treats Désirée as a depiction of the tragic mulatta stereotype. However, Pegues considers La Blanche to be a quadroon.¹⁶⁷ La Blanche's son, the eventual cause of Désirée epiphany, is a quadroon.¹⁶⁸ Since Armand is for the majority of the story believed to be white, an intercourse between a white, Armand, and a mulatta, La Blanche, would produce a quadroon child. Yet at the end of the story, the reader finds out that Armand is a mulatto. If La Blanche is in fact a quadroon, and not a mulatta, the children of Armand and La Blanche would happen to be quadroons as well.¹⁶⁹ The sexual relationship between these two characters is thus undoubtedly established. Unfortunately, the reader is not acquainted with La Blanche's sentiments regarding the liaison. It may be inferred that La Blanche is content with Armand's visits as she does not raise any direct or indirect objections. As a consequence, one may assume that Chopin employed La Blanche as a stereotypical picture of the voluptuous black woman. La Blanche, however, is completely deprived of the opportunity to present herself in the text. She is mentioned only thrice by the other characters and does not figure in a single scene, unlike the other colored characters such as the "yellow nurse woman" (241), Zandrine. Chopin makes use of the character of La Blanche to create a foil to Désirée and to produce another critical aspect¹⁷⁰ to the story that primarily deals with injustice and inequity. Even though this reasoning does not follow Elfenbein's line of thought as it does not relate to the confusion regarding the proper sexual behavior, Chopin ultimately criticizes the passion/purity dichotomy through the figure of La Blanche, appointing Armand as the white character that expresses racial and sexual prejudice and behaves exploitatively towards women of color.

¹⁶⁶ The white one.

¹⁶⁷ Pegues 9.

¹⁶⁸ "One of La Blanche's little quadroon boys [...]" (242)

¹⁶⁹ The child would not be fully quadroon ($\frac{1}{4}$ African blood) – it would have about $\frac{3}{8}$ of African blood, which is exactly between a quadroon ($\frac{2}{8} = \frac{1}{4}$) and a mulatto ($\frac{4}{8} = \frac{1}{2}$). There are no denominations other than a quadroon describing people with a lighter skin than what a mulatto has. Therefore, simply due to the appearance of the child, it would be deemed a quadroon if lighter than a usual mulatto child.

¹⁷⁰ Chopin criticizes the abusive sexual exploitation of the women of color by white men who take advantage of their position. These men draw on the passion/purity dichotomy and capitalize on it at the expense of the colored women.

"La Belle Zoraïde" features a mulatta heroine Zoraïde, who is brought up alongside her white mistress, Madame Delarivière. Zoraïde's uncertainty stems not from the ambivalence of the passion/purity dichotomy and the struggle to come to terms with her own sexuality, but from her mistress' ambiguous notion of whom Zoraïde should marry. This facet of the story makes Chopin seem critical of the whites' anxiety regarding dark skin; Madame is "speechless with rage" (305) when she finds out that her ward, a mulatta with a "soft, smooth skin [that is] the color of café-au-lait" (304) wants to marry "that negro" (305), a plantation laborer Mézor, whose body is "like a column of ebony" (304), instead of the personal servant of Madame's acquaintance Doctor Langlé, M'sieur Ambroise, a "little mulatto with [...] shining whiskers like a white man's" (304). Zoraïde justifiably does not understand the importance of not being associated with anyone of a darker skin than is hers, and the simultaneous outrage of the thought of marrying a white man. However, Chopin portrays both Zoraïde and Mézor in the stereotypical way as uncontrollably passionate. The black nurse that narrates the story of Zoraïde to her white charge, Madame Delisle, tells her: "You know how the negroes are, [...] there is no mistress, no master, no king nor priest who can hinder them from loving when they will. And these two found ways and means" (305). Rather than presenting the love between Zoraïde and Mézor as a profound, affectionate bond, Chopin has decided to limit their relationship nearly completely to sexual encounters, with Zoraïde eventually confessing to Madame that she "[has] sinned" (305). Despite being forbidden to meet Mézor, Zoraïde is not able to abstain from the affair and seems to follow her natural propensity for sexual desire. Even though Zoraïde does not attempt to establish a sexual relation with a white man, which would further support the stereotypical portrayal of erotic women of color seducing their white owners or employers, she does remark that "Doctor Langlé gives [her] his slave to marry, but he would not give [her] his son" (305). Zoraïde then not only does not question the degree of her passionate self and its appropriateness, but she also obliquely expresses her potential interest in a white man.

Madame Delarivière further perpetuates the notion of the stereotype by identifying Zoraïde with other people of color after Zoraïde asks her about her whiteness while discussing her desired marriage with Mézor – "You deserve to have the lash laid upon you like any other slave; you have proven yourself no better than the worst" (305). Still, the shortsightedness of Madame Delarivière's character regarding

the sexual stereotype is called to question as the reader becomes aware that she is shocked upon hearing about Zoraïde's transgression and it becomes apparent that Madame did not expect Zoraïde to succumb to the passion generally associated with women of color – "This time [...] she could utter only confused reproaches" (306) – and is disappointed when she finds out that Zoraïde has acted according to convention, allowing Chopin to criticize the stereotype as arbitrary by presenting the development of her reactions.

Last of all, the lack of empathy between female characters in "La Belle Zoraïde" is conveyed via the notion of maternity, similarly to the situation analyzed by Elfenbein in *The Awakening*. Madame Delarivière together with the black nurse are unable to empathize with Zoraïde. Madame decides to remove "[the baby] from its mother's side, to be sent away to [her] plantation" (306), and when Zoraïde enquires after the whereabouts of the baby, "Madame who was there and the nurse who was there both told her in turn, 'To piti à toi, li mouri' ('Your little one is dead')" (306). As to the nurse, the motivation for such a behavior – besides the necessity to obey the wishes of her employer – remains unclear. The lack of compassion on the part of Madame may be explained by her inability to understand the concept of motherhood, as she herself is not a mother. The theory is supported by the sympathetic remarks uttered at the end by the recipient of the story, Manna-Loulou's charge, Madame Delisle, whose words of compassion are directed at the baby instead of Zoraïde – "Ah, the poor little one, Man Loulou, the poor little one! Better had she died!" (307). It would prove difficult for Madame Delisle to relate to Zoraïde on the grounds of her inexperience with the role of a mother. Her focus on the child may be explained by Madame's own childlike behavior – since she herself represents a child in the narrative, it is easier for her to identify with the child rather than with the mother.

3.2 Justified Inconsistencies: Stereotypes in Chopin's Short Stories

Elizabeth Ammons disputes Elfenbein's positive results – even though she acknowledges the influence of African-American culture on Chopin, manifested in the form that the novel assumes, she believes that the representation of people of color in the novel is derogatory. She deals firstly with the oppressive contents, claiming that the women of color serve as auxiliaries, facilitating Edna's awakening by managing the household, the kitchen, the children, and the sexuality of white men, and consequently

leaving Edna with enough leisure time to be able to contemplate her inferior position as a white woman in a white man's world. Afterwards, she analyzes the stereotypical portrayals of people of color. Finally, Ammons presents her interpretation of the novel's form and suggests that the form's African influence is discernible from its cyclicity, as opposed to the traditional Western linearity. Due to its similar subject matter, the analysis of Joyce Dyer's study will also be considered in this subchapter. Dyer's work deals with the significance of the African-American characters' presence in the novel and directly disputes Ammons' conclusion that these appearances are unimportant, interpreting their absent-mindedness and restlessness as concealed anger and dissatisfaction of the African-American community as a whole. Dyer also addresses the issue of stereotypes, suggesting that they are understood incorrectly. She claims that they were included deliberately by Chopin in order to be criticized – they do not refer to her unconscious prejudice and inability to produce a text without involving those.

The lack of prominent white characters in "Beyond the Bayou" makes the examination of Ammons' first point nearly impossible. The only white woman that would benefit from Jacqueline's services is Chéri's mother. Jacqueline serves as a substitute of Chéri's mother as she "love[s] him as if he [were] her own" (176). However, his mother's advantage of Jacqueline's care is not addressed in the story, and as such remains unimportant for the present analysis. Likewise, Cat'rinette in "Tante Cat'rinette" may aid Miss Kitty in a similar way, yet she is no longer a servant of the family, as she has been given freedom by the late Mr. Vieumaite. She neither offers sexual services for Kitty's husband, Monsieur Raymond, nor does she enact the role of the sex-educator to any other white male character such as Lawyer Paxton. In spite of that, the possibility of Cat'rinette assuming the subordinate role and empowering Miss Kitty is not completely unimaginable as Cat'rinette comes back to serve the family at the end of the story. However, since her husband is depicted as a kind, sympathetic, and compassionate man, the possibility of Miss Kitty being in need of emancipation is improbable. "Désirée's Baby" features one character that is sexually exploited by her white master – La Blanche. At first it might seem that she fits the role of the insignificant woman of color "mak[ing] [the white woman's] liberation possible."¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, the core turn of events in the story puts the white woman herself in the position of a woman of color, and she no longer has the opportunity to desire a feminist, upper-class, white sexual awakening. No

¹⁷¹ Ammons 74.

white woman in "La Belle Zoraïde" is in need of liberation either – Madame Delarivière is quite powerful in her own right, and furthermore, she is not married. Even though her engagement to Doctor Langlé is in progress, it is her who rules him, rather than the other way around – "Doctor Langlé, who was a widower, had long wanted to marry Madame Delarivière, and he would willingly have walked on all fours at noon through the Place d'Armes if she wanted him to" (306). Neither the white woman from the frame story, Madame Delisle, needs to seek freedom – the story does not reveal any love interest of hers, as she behaves rather like a child. Moreover, the central colored female character, Zoraïde, does not act like a person in a subordinate position and is prevented from functioning as a sexual provider or educator for the white male characters, because she is forbidden to form intimate relationships with white men.

The most interesting point to be evaluated is the notion of stereotypical representation of colored people. Jacqueline's unwarranted label of a madwoman conforms most likely to the Sapphire stereotype, utilized as a starting point to later evolve into the image of another pervasive stereotype, the black Mammy, noticeable also in "Tante Cat'rinette." At the beginning of the story, Jacqueline is assigned a French nickname "La Folle," which stands for a madwoman. The name is accepted by everyone and is quite unnecessary, as the people on the plantation only endowed her with it because they did not understand her fear and their role in creating and preserving that fear, and consequently, they failed to recognize that suffering from fear is not on par with becoming insane. Chopin informs the reader the Jacqueline's fear of crossing the self-created imaginary line after the distressing experience of witnessing violence behind it is "the form of her *only* mania" (175, my emphasis). This statement shows the reader that Chopin already questions the degree of the nickname's appropriateness, and it serves as an early indication of the misunderstanding of the plantation-dwellers – apart from being afraid, Jacqueline does not show any other signs of being insane. Moreover, when explaining the source of Jacqueline's unconventional behavior, Chopin herself describes her as having been "frightened" (175). The relation between the Sapphire stereotype and the concept of madness is clarified in Melissa V. Harris-Perry's study *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. Harris-Perry analyzes the "angry black woman" stereotype and identifies it as the continuation of the

older Sapphire stereotype discussed here.¹⁷² In the chapter devoted to this stereotype, Harris-Perry writes about psychiatric misdiagnosing of the women of color, especially those with African-American origins, as opposed to white American women who show the same symptoms. While the white women are diagnosed with sadness and depression, the diagnoses of the women of color usually cover various forms of anxiety disorders, including agoraphobia. The Dictionary of Psychiatry nicknames agoraphobia the "housebound syndrome,"¹⁷³ and Medical News Today describe it as a fear of certain places that might appear dangerous to the sufferer, resulting in the sufferer's psychological inability to leave home altogether.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, according to the 21st century medical terms, Jacqueline likely suffers from agoraphobia. The website of National Health Service of the United Kingdom cites as one of the possible causes of agoraphobia a "traumatic childhood experience"¹⁷⁵ – Jacqueline's fear of entering the space behind the line was triggered by such an experience, when P'tit Maître entered her family's cabin "black with powder and crimson with blood" (175) after Jacqueline was hearing "skirmishing and sharpshooting all day in the woods" (175). Harris-Perry continues that the diagnostic differences represent the "social construction of black womanhood that disallows sadness."¹⁷⁶

Another scholar concerned with the African-American stereotypes is Carolyn West. Regarding the Sapphire stereotype, she writes that "traditional standards of womanhood were not applied to Black women. They were characterized as strong, masculinized workhorses who labored with Black men in the fields or as aggressive women who drove their children and partners away with their overbearing natures."¹⁷⁷ Jacqueline is introduced as a woman who "had more physical strength than most men and made her patch of cotton and corn and tobacco like the best of them" (175), further reinforcing the notion of the self-sufficient, insane, Sapphire-like woman of color.

¹⁷² Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011): 74.

¹⁷³ Harold Thakurdas and Lyn Thakurdas, eds., *Dictionary of Psychiatry* (Lancaster: MTP Press Limited, 1979): 33.

¹⁷⁴ James McIntosh, "What Is Agoraphobia?," *Medical News Today.com*, MediLexicon International Ltd, 5 Aug 2015 <<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/162169.php>> 24 July 2016.

¹⁷⁵ "Causes of Agoraphobia," *National Health Service.uk*, Gov.uk, <<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Agoraphobia/Pages/Causes.aspx>> 24 July 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Harris-Perry 78.

¹⁷⁷ Carolyn West, "Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, and their Homegirls: Developing an 'Oppositional Gaze' Toward the Images of Black Women," *Lectures on the Psychology of Women*, J. Chrisler, C. Golden, P. Rozee, eds. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008) 295.

The Sapphire stereotype gradually transforms into the Mammy stereotype. Harris-Perry describes the Mammy as "a symbol of black women as competent, strong, and sassy, yet [...] beloved among white people because she uses all of her skills and talents to serve white domestic interests. Mammy makes sure that white children are well-fed [...]. Her devotion and attention are for others, not for herself or her family."¹⁷⁸ Jacqueline transforms into a Mammy through her devotion to Chéri. It is her love for him that makes her overcome her "madness." Firstly, he becomes a "precious burden" (177), important enough to be carried over the line despite the horrors that Jacqueline associates with it. Secondly, in a mirrored situation to the one that brought Jacqueline's phobia about, the sight of blood on Chéri after she delivers him to the owner's house causes Jacqueline to faint – "Then the world that had looked red to La Folle suddenly turned black, – like that day she had seen powder and blood" (178) – and later recovers to full health, crosses the formerly dreaded line without difficulties, and savors the beautiful world around her.

As mentioned in the introductory section to this chapter, the female protagonist of "Tante Cat'rinette" is also introduced as the image of the Sapphire stereotype. Already in the first paragraph, Cat'rinette is depicted as a stereotypical querulous black woman, complaining about the white city officials and their decision to demolish her house – "It happened just as every one had predicted. Tante Cat'rinette was beside herself with rage and indignation [...]" (337). Similarly to Jacqueline, Cat'rinette is likened to a man, holding "her smoking pipe between her yellow teeth" (338) on two occasions. As Emily Toth recounts in her study of Chopin, even though during Chopin's life in New Orleans "ladies rarely went about unescorted and, of course, no lady smoked at all,"¹⁷⁹ Chopin herself was used to taking "long, solitary strolls around New Orleans, smoking her Cuban cigarettes."¹⁸⁰ Therefore it is possible that Chopin's representation of Cat'rinette performing men's activities such as smoking might not be a negative one. However, Cat'rinette comes off as quite aggressive and violent when she threatens to kill anyone who would try to come and take possession of the house – "I got my axe grine fine. Fus' man w'at touch Cat'rinette fo' tu'n her out dat house, he git 'is head bus' like I bus' a gode" (338). In keeping with Carolyn West's characterization of Sapphires as "[driving]

¹⁷⁸ Harris-Perry, 214-5.

¹⁷⁹ Toth 160.

¹⁸⁰ Toth 160.

their children and partners away with their overbearing natures,"¹⁸¹ Cat'rinette "made the little one sit down" (339, my emphasis) when the black schoolgirl Lolo came to visit her.

Even though Cat'rinette's attachment to the Vieumaite family – an aspect of the Mammy stereotype – is established from the very beginning as she values the house more for the fact that it was a gift from Vieumaite rather than for the house itself, the emphasis put on the bond is being gradually increased as Cat'rinette loses the attributes that make her the Sapphire. Her devotion to the family forms the climax of the story, just as it does in "Beyond the Bayou" – Cat'rinette vacates the home only because she fears for the health and life of her former ward, Miss Kitty, and the fear for the white family overtakes the fear that Cat'rinette feels for herself and her own well-being. Her adoration of the family is even compared to a religion – "Tante Cat'rinette's religion was peculiarly her own; she turned to heaven with her grievances, it is true, but she felt that there was no one in Paradise with whom she was quite so well acquainted as with Vieumaite" (339). Ultimately, Cat'rinette decides to give up the house and give the remaining money to Miss Kitty and her husband. She also offers them to return to the family as their servant. This decision has been formed on the basis of a spiritual experience, "a heavenly revelation" (343) of Vieumaite's will, and it represents the final selfless act of a woman whose sole interest used to be her own unfavorable situation.

The stereotype found in "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde" is the tragic mulatta stereotype, analyzed by Dagmar Pegues. Pegues' analysis of these two stories will be presented in the next subchapter. The only other stereotype occurring in "La Belle Zoraïde" is the Mammy stereotype. Nevertheless, as it only occurs in the frame story, where it is represented by the black nurse Manna-Loulou and her devotion to the young Madame Delisle, the relationship is not given enough space in the story and as such it is irrelevant for this study.

Since Ammons took into consideration the number of chapters of *The Awakening* that resembles the duration of a pregnancy, the form of the stories cannot be analyzed in the same manner. However, a certain cyclicity may be identified in all of them. The narrative of "Beyond the Bayou" begins in medias res, as the actual story starts with the traumatizing event in Jacqueline's childhood. This event is mirrored by Jacqueline's fainting after she brings Chéri to the main house, which is caused by the parallel

¹⁸¹ West 295.

between this situation and Jacqueline's memory of the trauma – "Then the world that had looked red to La Folle suddenly turned black,– like that day she had seen powder and blood" (178). As the first shock cast Jacqueline into the state of mental disorder, the second shock restores her mind back to health. In "Tante Cat'rinette," the money of the Vieumaite family change owners to finally return back to its original ones. The house that was given to Cat'rinette by her former master along with her freedom is sold to the authorities and the money is restored to the hands of Vieumaite's daughter together with Cat'rinette's services. The cycle present in "Désirée's Baby" involves the conjecture regarding the supposed African-American origin of its protagonists – while at the beginning of the story the reader assumes that it is the lineage of Désirée that is "tainted" with the blood of the slave-caste, the ending reveals Armand to be the mulatto of the story. "La Belle Zoraïde" is formed as a cycle by default as cyclicity is an inherent characteristic of a frame narrative.

The only remaining objective to be discussed is Dyer's notion of the absent-minded, restless woman of color, serving as the embodiment of the African-Americans' repressed anger. Due to their considerable prominence in the story at the expense of the white characters, neither Jacqueline nor Tante Lizette is presented as a dissatisfied servant to her white masters. Tante Cat'rinette does not contain her anger – she is "beside herself with rage and indignation" (337). Since she is a free woman, she does not have to hide her sentiments regarding the injustices committed by the white authorities. Because Cat'rinette's experiences with the white population were presumably not entirely pleasant, she grows "distrustful, suspicious, [and] ever on the alert to scent a plot in the most innocent endeavor to induce her to leave the house" (338). This behavior resembles the restlessness that Dyer refers to in her study. This restlessness together with the absent-mindedness is further highlighted in the scene where Cat'rinette ruminates on the alleged illness of Miss Kitty after the free mulatto Eusèbe visits Cat'rinette to tell her that Miss Kitty "been axen' fo' [Cat'rinette] all t'rough de night" (339) – "Somehow Tante Cat'rinette could not get that refrain out of her head. [...] The words kept ringing in her ears, as she came and went about her daily tasks. [...] All the day the woman muttered and mumbled to herself in her Creole patois [...]" (339). Even though Cat'rinette's restlessness and absent-mindedness does not stem from the dissatisfaction regarding her servant position, Chopin still implies that the whites cause such behavior and the consequent anger and frustration of the African-American people.

Désirée Aubigny grows restless after the people around her begin to quietly question her white origin – at first she simply experiences something “menacing her peace, [...] a disquieting suggestion” (242). Later, she is “listlessly” (242) drawing her fingers through her hair with her eyes “fixed absently and sadly upon the baby” (242). However, the character from “Désirée’s Baby” that most resembles the discontented quadron of *The Awakening* is the nurse, Zandrine. When Madame Valmondé examines Désirée’s son, Zandrine is indifferent, with her face “turned to gaze across the fields” (241), and when Désirée comes to take her son after her last discussion with Armand, Zandrine is restlessly “pacing the sombre gallery” (244), presumably eager to get rid of the burden of the baby and go about her business.

3.3 Dagmar Pegues and the Tragic Mulatta Stereotype

In this chapter, the theory of Dagmar Pegues regarding the Tragic Mulatta Stereotype and its manifestation in “Désirée’s Baby” and “La Belle Zoraïde” will be presented. I have decided that the two other stories, “Beyond the Bayou,” and “Tante Cat’rinette,” are not suitable to be analyzed in this way as the narratives lack the tragic mulatta figure. Characters in “Beyond the Bayou” are not of racially mixed origin – Jacqueline and Tante Lizette are fully African-American, and the other people are white. Neither of the whites is endowed with the qualities that Pegues attributes to the white tragic mulatta figure in *The Awakening*, Edna. Similar situation takes place in “Tante Cat’rinette” – Cat’rinette and Lolo are of African-American origin, and even though Miss Kitty’s situation is tragic to a certain extent, it does not correspond to the stereotype as she is not being approached with fear or desire, which are the attributes that Pegues associates with it. Miss Kitty’s condition is challenged due to external factors, such as becoming impoverished. Since Pegues already deals with these two stories in the study introduced in chapter two, her findings are going to be summarized here and included in the final evaluation of the stories in the concluding subchapter.

Pegues identified a lot of instances of multiracial characters being associated with desire in the first of the stories, “Désirée’s Baby,” and she analyzes three of them in these terms – Désirée, La Blanche, and Armand Aubigny. She starts with Désirée, the female protagonist of the story, whose unclear origin leads to the assumption of her father and husband that some of her ancestors were African-American. Pegues views Désirée as an

“object of desire”¹⁸² – she cites Ellen Peel, who noticed that Désirée’s name itself stands for “the wished-for one, the desired one.”¹⁸³ Pegues further adds that Désirée is the recipient of not only Armand’s passionate, conjugal desire, professed by him despite Désirée’s mysterious origin, but also of a “strong [parental] love,”¹⁸⁴ as the Valmondés’ joy stemming from Désirée’s appearance in their lives resulted in them endowing her with such a significant name. Similarly to Désirée, to whom she is compared in the story, La Blanche is desired sexually by Armand.¹⁸⁵ Pegues refers to Peel’s study again, mentioning that Désirée and La Blanche and their respective sons “have parallel ties to Armand because of the possible sexual connections between slave and master.”¹⁸⁶ Pegues then terms La Blanche “a living example of miscegenation, a personification of the one-drop rule and its resulting phenomenon of ‘invisible blackness,’”¹⁸⁷ as the lightness of her skin is compared by Armand to Désirée, who is revealed to not be of African-American origin at the end of the story. Finally, Pegues considers Armand to be desired both by Désirée and La Blanche. Even though Pegues admits that the assumption of La Blanche desiring Armand is somewhat far-fetched, I would opt for complete omission of such an argument. La Blanche is not granted enough space in the narrative, as she is merely being mentioned by the other characters, who moreover only acknowledge her existence instead of evaluating her actions. Therefore, the uninformed speculation about La Blanche’s choices is entirely out of order, and also highly inappropriate given the democratic objective of intersectional studies that focus on uncovering and uprooting oppressive standards/principles, especially considering the fact that La Blanche is most likely a victim of rape, and the embedded mini-story of La Blanche appears to reflect Chopin’s critique of the exploitation of women of color by their white masters.

Armand and Désirée both use violence that results from fear when dealing with racial otherness. At times, Armand mistreats the slaves on his plantation, regardless of his own (hitherto unknown) association with them. Pegues observes that his temporarily benevolent management of the plantation changes back to aggressive

¹⁸² Pegues 9.

¹⁸³ Ellen Peel, cited in Pegues 9.

¹⁸⁴ Pegues 9.

¹⁸⁵ As it was pointed out in previous subchapters, Armand is found on at least one occasion as present near La Blanche’s dwelling, and the similarity between Désirée’s and La Blanche’s children is emphasized.

¹⁸⁶ Ellen Peel, cited in Pegues 9.

¹⁸⁷ Pegues 9-10.

manipulation after he finds out that his son's appearance resembles that of the slaves. She claims that due to Armand's African-American origin, this display of violence is "neither [...] necessary nor [...] deliberate"¹⁸⁸ and according to her, it represents an "outlet for [his] own frustration."¹⁸⁹ Correspondingly, the violent behavior of Désirée is aimed at herself as well, due to her internalization of the "oppression to black identity."¹⁹⁰ Similarly to the situation of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, it is implied that Désirée drowns herself and the baby as she attempts to destroy the detested, darker part of their selves that she has been taught to despise.

In "La Belle Zoraïde," the characters being desired are Zoraïde and her lover Mézor, who both carry the epithet "the beautiful," evoking physical desirability: "la belle" and "le beau" respectively. Apart from their names, the way in which their bodies are portrayed is also associated with sexuality; the narrator praises Zoraïde's eyes, skin, and figure, and Mézor is characterized in terms of phallic symbols such as a "cypress tree" (304) or a "column of ebony" (304). Pegues approves of Chopin's execution of Mézor's portrayal as she managed to refrain from "references to bestiality or savagery."¹⁹¹ As opposed to Désirée and Edna, Zoraïde is unable to internalize the oppressive beliefs of the white majority and her choice regarding her future husband is affected by it – unlike Madame Delarivière, who would have selected someone as white as possible, Zoraïde chooses Mézor, a man significantly darker than her, for she does not suffer from prejudice against people of color. Pegues acknowledges Emily Toth's assertion that Chopin "refus[ed] to portray Zoraïde as a happy slave" and instead highlighted the notion of free will. Pegues opposes Toth to a certain degree and writes that the claim is "complicated by Zoraïde's response to her mistress's manipulation and the violent refusal of her own daughter and her misplaced motherly love."¹⁹²

Finally, Pegues declares that even though Chopin was able to avoid the portrayal of black men through images of savagery and bestiality, the depiction of the tragic mulatta is still problematic, as their "potential ability to pass as white"¹⁹³ violates the colonizer's ambiguous notion regarding the proper behavior of the colonized. This notion is quite absurd, as the colonizer requires of the colonized a pronounced, yet

¹⁸⁸ Pegues 12.

¹⁸⁹ Pegues 12.

¹⁹⁰ Pegues 13.

¹⁹¹ Pegues 14.

¹⁹² Pegues 16.

¹⁹³ Pegues 17.

limited assimilation to the colonizer's "values and characteristics."¹⁹⁴ By suffering from "invisible blackness,"¹⁹⁵ the tragic mulattas of Chopin's short stories transgress the expectations regarding the limitation of the assimilation and pose "a threat to the local hierarchy."¹⁹⁶

3.4 Conclusion: Chopin's Attitude Towards the Issues of Race and Class

The aim of this chapter was to determine whether the methods employed by the scholars when analyzing Chopin's novel *The Awakening* are also applicable to Chopin's short stories with similar outcomes. Anna Elfenbein focused on the passion/purity dichotomy to show that Chopin was a progressive, democratic author, who criticized the injustice associated with it. "Beyond the Bayou" and "Tante Cat'rinette" do not involve any sexual relations and as such were not suitable for the type of analysis that Elfenbein presents. However, evidence for the point regarding the separation of women and their inability to empathize with each other was found in "Beyond the Bayou," where the other African-American women on the plantation succumb to the influence of the stereotypes invented by their white masters and think of Jacqueline as a madwoman. In this manner, Chopin presented the stereotypes as preventing women of various racial and class backgrounds from forming a united front to fight for their rights in the patriarchal society. A direct critique of the ambiguous Creole norms prescribing proper female behavior appears in "Désirée's Baby," as the Creole codes that Désirée embraced might have contributed to the quickness with which the other people came to believe the rumor regarding her African-American origin. Moreover, Armand Aubigny is presented as a typically oppressive rapist as he gives in to the stereotype as well and engages in sexual intercourse with the female servant La Blanche. In "La Belle Zoraïde," Chopin is critical of the white anxiety regarding the darker skin-tones by showing the confusion of the heroine, Zoraïde, yet she portrays Zoraïde and her lover Mézor as stereotypically sexual. Notwithstanding the fact that this is the only instance of Chopin inexcusably endorsing a stereotype, Dagmar Pegues later used it in her study regarding the tragic mulatta stereotype where she further explains Chopin's use of such a depiction.

¹⁹⁴ Pegues 18.

¹⁹⁵ Pegues 17.

¹⁹⁶ Pegues 18.

Elizabeth Ammons and Joyce Dyer both address Chopin's use of stereotypes. While Ammons understands these as detrimental to Chopin's work as they contribute to the widespread negative portrayal of African-American people in American literary works, Dyer believes that Chopin's specific application of those stereotypes draws attention to their harmful, oppressive nature. Additionally, Ammons recognizes the African-American influence on Chopin in the cyclical form of her work, and Dyer notices the seemingly unimportant absent-mindedness and restlessness of the African-American servants and understands it as a reference to the suppressed anger of the African-American community. Ammons' finding regarding the cyclicity present in Chopin's works was confirmed as all of the four analyzed stories likewise evinced signs of it. Similarly, in "Tante Cat'rinette," "Désirée's Baby," and "La Belle Zoraïde," manifestations of the African-American's anger and dissatisfaction were discovered – Cat'rinette and Zoraïde explicitly defy the white supremacy, and Zandrine represents the type of detached servant found in *The Awakening*. The heroines of "Beyond the Bayou" and "Tante Cat'rinette" are both initially portrayed as strong, manly, negatively perceived Sapphires to be later transformed into benevolent, more positively considered Mammies. My interpretation of the stereotypes supports rather the claim of Dyer than the argument of Ammons – I contend that these were not applied unconsciously by Chopin, but used deliberately to demonstrate their detriment. The Sapphire image is not endorsed by the narrator, but rather by the local society of the Bellissime plantation and the town of Cat'rinette's residence. "Every one on the plantation called [Jacqueline] La Folle [...]" (175, my emphasis), even though her quite well-founded apprehension was "the form of her *only* mania" (175, my emphasis), and "every one had predicted" (337, my emphasis) that Cat'rinette would be "beside herself with rage and indignation" (337). Since Chopin converts the negative portrayal into a positive one, it is possible that she wanted to emphasize the importance of representing people of color in a positive rather than a negative context. The only remaining issue is Chopin's inability to identify the Mammy image as a stereotype, and thus condoning this portrayal of the African-American women as appropriate.

Finally, Dagmar Pegues considers the depiction of the tragic mulatta stereotype in "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde" as problematizing Chopin's seemingly liberal approach towards the racial injustices. The tragic mulattas represent a menace to the

white inhabitants of Louisiana due to their physical similarity and potential interchangeability with the whites.

4 Conclusion

At the beginning of the work, intersectionality was defined as a specific kind of oppression formed by individual oppressive experiences deriving from the sufferer's inferior position in more than one social category. In the 21st century, the number of such categories is steadily increasing – to the categories of gender, race, and class were also added ones of sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, among others. Due to the nature of the analyzed works, penned at the turn of the 20th century by an American author Kate Chopin, it was decided that the thesis will only focus on race, gender, and class. In retrospect, it might seem that the category of class was not addressed sufficiently; however, it must be taken into consideration that in the late 19th century Louisiana, which is the setting of the majority of Chopin's works, African-American and other people racially differentiated from the white Creole majority were already defined by default as a lower class community.

The method of intersectional analysis was selected as it represents the latest tendencies in the study of Kate Chopin's works. Chopin's contemporaries took interest solely in her short stories and considered them to be remarkable representatives of the genre of local color, then very popular. The latter half of the 20th century saw the rise of feminist enthusiasm regarding Chopin's novel *The Awakening* and its rediscovery by the feminists. After the introduction of intersectional approaches in the 1980's, the novel underwent a redefinition along those tenets, the short stories were brought to the fore, and the feminist scholars started to take into account the categories of race and class as well as the previously preferred gender in their evaluations of Chopin's works in general. Because the majority of the critics focus on the novel, the premise of this thesis was to inspect and comment upon their research and consequently attempt to apply their principles to a selection of Chopin's short stories to learn whether these assumptions are relevant in the study of her short fiction, and to ascertain whether Chopin's works evince signs of a reactionary (though at that time perfectly common) or a progressive stance on the issues of gender, race, and class oppression.

The five considered analyses of *The Awakening* were selected on the grounds of their availability, and also due to their interrelation – the works of Anna Elfenbein are mentioned by Dyer, Birnbaum and Pegues; Joyce Dyer's study is a direct reaction to the work of Elizabeth Ammons, whose research is mentioned also by Michele Birnbaum; and

Birnbaum herself heavily influenced Dagmar Pegues' analysis by her examination of the colonial self.

Anna Elfenbein's affirmative study regarding the stereotypical dichotomy between the passionate women of color and the innately virtuous white women was corroborated and developed via a few points that further confirm the obsolescence and inaccuracy of the societal norms, as suggested by Chopin. Among these were the presentation of the theme of misunderstanding that runs through the whole novel, as well as the uncertainty concerning the norms voiced by the prominent male characters and the novel's female protagonist, Edna.

By contrast, Elizabeth Ammons recognizes only the cyclical form of Chopin's novel, influenced by African culture, as worthy of commendation. She states that the content is furnished with stereotypical images of women of color and the whole premise of Edna Pontellier's suicide rests on the insufficiently acknowledged presence of the black women and the taken-for-granted work they perform. The notion of the colored women being presented as unimportant was disputed and it was suggested that Chopin actually portrays the simultaneous awakening of the women of color along with Edna's – during the novel the colored characters assume names instead of appellations representing the degree of their African origin, they are allowed to perform more important actions and Chopin also grants them the opportunity to express their unmediated thoughts via the free indirect speech.

Joyce Dyers' theory corresponds with mine as she openly opposes Ammons and emphasizes the significance of the black characters' existence and designates it as inherent to the notion of South and freedom. The presence of colored people reminds white women of their own lack of freedom and the attitude of the women of color in the novel resembles that of Edna, who is already in the process of discovering the limits of her independence. Even though Dyers agrees with Ammons that *The Awakening* features instances of racist language and stereotypes, she remarks that they are supposed to draw attention to their own undesirability, as the stereotypical notions are conveyed via the white characters rather than via the narrator. The explication of Dyer's work was supplemented by contrasting Léonce Pontellier with the other white male characters in order to present his non-oppressive, tolerant manners with the aim to further support the assumption that Chopin wrote the novel with anti-racist intentions.

Michele Birnbaum's extensive critical analysis concerning Edna's appropriation of the sexual freedom of the other and the interpretation of her suicide as a resolution of the irrepressible urge to curb the anxiety-inducing alien presence has been put forth without additional commentary. The study has been included due to the importance of the author and the work itself for the sake of this thesis' comprehensiveness. Dagmar Pegues also presumes that Edna's identity consists partly of the appropriated otherness and identifies Edna as a figure of the tragic mulatta. According to Pegues, the stereotyped figures of the tragic mulattas are approached with two contradictory feelings of fear and desire and as such are rendered threatening by Chopin, thus preventing Pegues from acknowledging Chopin as fully "resist[ing] [...] the nineteenth-century racist discourse."¹⁹⁷ Due to the insufficient textual evidence to support Pegues' extended application of the stereotype to Edna Pontellier,¹⁹⁸ I have attempted to find instances of Edna inducing fear or desire in other characters. Although the number of examples regarding the fear of Edna was limited, I was able to associate Edna with the women of color on the grounds of her gradual transformation of her external features.

The first three studies presented together with my additions to the arguments indicate that Chopin's stance on the racial and class politics of her era was quite enlightened – Elfenbein's and Dyer's arguments were supported and Ammons' was refuted in favor of Chopin. Pegues' claims were validated as well, and because her findings question the notion of Chopin's awareness only partially, the only remaining study that fully denounces Chopin for her lack of empathy with the minorities is Michele Birnbaum's.

Elfenbein's theory is applicable also to some of the short stories and her findings are confirmed – the Creole norms are criticized in "Désirée's Baby," "La Belle Zoraïde," and "Beyond the Bayou." Due to the ambiguity associated with the Creole image of perfect femininity, Désirée is more likely to be perceived and denounced as a woman of color, and La Blanche is sexually exploited by her white master, Armand Aubigny. Zoraïde is portrayed as an uncontrollably sexual being in order to demonstrate Madame Delarivière's disappointment over Zoraïde's conscious compliance to the prevalent beliefs of passionate women of color. In "Beyond the Bayou" as well as in "La Belle Zoraïde," the lack of compassion shown to the heroines by the other female characters

¹⁹⁷ Pegues 17.

¹⁹⁸ Apart from the mulatta figures from the short stories "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde."

implies that Chopin disapproved of the prejudicial standards due to the consequential split that they cause between women who should rather be united to collectively fight for their rights.

Ammons' acknowledgement regarding the African influence on Chopin in the form of the cyclicity in her narratives is proven as valid – all of the four stories include some sort of a cycle. The anger that, according to Dyer, the African-Americans are entitled to is shown in "Tante Cat'rinette" and "Désirée's Baby" – Cat'rinette openly expresses her dissatisfaction with the practices of some of the white characters, and Zandrine represents the typical dissatisfied servant who suppresses her frustration. Albeit the stereotypes are confirmed as present, the way they are utilized supports Dyer's suggestion that they are not internalized by Chopin. Both Jacqueline and Cat'rinette undergo a transition from the figure of a Sapphire to the image of a Mammy. The more negative concept of a Sapphire is only adopted by the white characters and subtly criticized by Chopin. Even though Chopin might have intended to portray the women of color in a positive light in order to improve their situation and eliminate the predominantly negative preconceptions associated with them, the fact that Chopin is not able to recognize the Mammy stereotype as equally harmful as the one of the Sapphire downgrades the hitherto favorable outcomes regarding the impartiality of her work.

Finally, the application of Pegues' principles (previously presented in relation to *The Awakening*) on the stories "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde" was described. Due to the fact that the analysis of the stories may be found in the same study as the one of *The Awakening*, the concluding statements remain the same – Chopin impairs her writings by the portrayal of the tragic mulattas who represent a threat to the white society.

The conclusions reached at the end of the second chapter hold true for the most part of the third chapter's examinations as well. The only instances implying that Chopin addresses certain issues in a reactionary manner are the unrevised continuation of Pegues' argument and Chopin's prolific use of the Mammy stereotype that she does not complement with any type of critique and instead presents it as an ideal state to which a woman of color should aspire.

Some complications that may make the act of drawing a definitive conclusion difficult should be considered. Firstly, a number of other published intersectional analyses that could significantly contribute to the outcomes of this thesis were not

available. Secondly, if I were to choose a different selection of the short stories, corresponding more closely with the available scholarly studies, the conclusion may have been less ambiguous – for example, a story with a white female heroine and women of color in subordinate positions would resemble the situation taking place in *The Awakening*, which is considered in the academic works.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty associated with Chopin's stance on prejudicial principles and the issue of the oppression of the minorities, the very fact that some parts of Chopin's works still inspire the academic world to re-evaluate them sets Kate Chopin apart from the other writers of the turn to the 20th century and confirms that Chopin was indeed a progressive author, if only to a certain extent. Joyce Dyer has even proposed an explanation to the persisting ambiguity: "A white woman's revolt was more than Chopin's world was ready to read about. Black revolt was out of the question."¹⁹⁹ In other words, to expect from an author whose novel – dealing simply with a slightly increased sexual appetite of a white, upper-class woman – was categorically dismissed to embrace and set forth fully emancipated narratives concerning the women of color and lower class is quite unreasonable and unfounded – much like the stereotypical images that Kate Chopin has generally attempted to eschew.

¹⁹⁹ Dyer 144.

5 Bibliography

5.1 Primary Works

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

Chopin, Kate. *Southern Literary Studies: Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969.

5.2 Secondary Literature – Works Cited

Ammons, Elizabeth. *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bendixen, Alfred, and James Nagel, eds. *A Companion to the American Short Story*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Birnbaum, Michele. *Race, Work, and Desire in American Literature, 1860-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Kate Chopin*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007.

Bubíková, Šárka. *Literatura v Americe, Amerika v literatuře - Proměny amerického literárního kánonu*. Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2007.

Campbell, Donna M. "Regionalism and Local Color Fiction, 1865-1895." *Literary Movements*. Dept. of English, Washington State University, Sept 2015. <<http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/lcolor.html>> 12 May 2016.

"Causes of Agoraphobia." *National Health Service.uk*. Gov.uk. <<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Agoraphobia/Pages/Causes.aspx>> 24 July 2016.

Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs* 38.4 (2013): 785-810. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/426800>>. 20 Oct 2015.

Corse, Sarah M., and Sandra D. Westervelt. "Gender and Literary Valorization: 'The Awakening' of a Canonical Novel." *Sociological Perspectives* 45.2 (2002): 139-161.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Anti-Racist Politics." *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*. Ed. Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011.

Crow, Charles L., ed. *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003.

Dyer, Joyce. "Reading 'The Awakening' with Toni Morrison." *The Southern Literary Journal* 35.1 (2002): 138-154.

Elfenbein, Anna Shannon. "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: An Assault on American Racial and Sexual Mythology." *Southern Studies* 26.4 (1987): 304-313.

Fletcher, Marie. "The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin." *Louisiana History: The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association* 7.2 (1966): 117-132. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4230896>>. 26 Apr 2015.

Foote, Stephanie. *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin's Fantasy of Desire." *The Kenyon Review* 5.3 (1983): 42-66. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4335384>>. 4 May 2015.

Harris-Perry, Melissa V. *Sister Citizen: Shame Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press, 1982.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Center*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Jones, Anne Goodwyn. *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.

Koloski, Bernard, ed. *Awakenings: The Story of the Kate Chopin Revival*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009.

Martin, Wendy, ed. *New Essays on the Awakening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

McCall, Leslie. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30.3 (2005): 1771-1800. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/426800>>. 26 Feb 2016.

McIntosh, James. "What Is Agoraphobia?" *Medical News Today.com*. MediLexicon International Ltd, 5 Aug 2015. <<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/162169.php>> 24 July 2016.

Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back*. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983.

Pegues, Dagmar. "Regional Aesthetics and Colonial Desire in Kate Chopin's Portrayals of the Tragic Mulatta Stereotype." *The Southern Literary Journal* 43.1 (2010): 1-22. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41057652>>. 26 Apr 2015.

Potter, Richard H. "Negroes in the Fiction of Kate Chopin." *Louisiana History: The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association* 12.1 (1971): 41-58. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4231160>>. 26 Apr 2015.

"Reading and Studying Kate Chopin's Short Stories." *Kate Chopin.org*. The Kate Chopin International Society. <<http://www.katechopin.org/short-stories>> 26 Apr 2015.

Showalter, Elaine. *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Sharon Smith. "Black Feminism and Intersectionality." *ISReview.org*. Center for Economic Research and Social Change, Winter 2013-14. <<http://isreview.org/issue/91/black-feminism-and-intersectionality>> 16 Apr 2016.

Thakurdas, Harold, and Lyn Thakurdas, eds. *Dictionary of Psychiatry*. Lancaster: MTP Press Limited, 1979.

Toth, Emily. *Unveiling Kate Chopin*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

West, Carolyn. "Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, and their Homegirls: Developing an 'Oppositional Gaze' Toward the Images of Black Women." *Lectures on the Psychology of Women*. J. Chrisler, C. Golden, P. Rozee, eds. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008.

Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. "Kate Chopin and the Fiction of Limits: 'Désirée's Baby.'" *The Southern Literary Journal* 10.2 (1978): 123-133. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077591>>. 26 Apr 2015.

5.3 Secondary Literature – Works Consulted

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*. July 1991: 1241-1299.

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Random House, 1981.

Gilbert, Teresa. "The Role of Implicatures in Kate Chopin's Louisiana Short Stories." *Journal of the Short Story in English* 40 (2003): 69-84.

Ostman, Heather, ed. *Kate Chopin in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Essays*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

Pegues, Dagmar. "Regional Aesthetics: The Formation of Identities and Stereotypes in the Fiction of Grace King and Kate Chopin." *Brno Studies in English* 35.1 (2009): 147-172.

Scofield, Martin. *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Shaker, Bonnie James. *Coloring Locals: Racial Formation in Kate Chopin's Youth's Companion Stories*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003

Thompson, Becky. "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 28.2 (2002): 336-360. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178747>>. 29 Feb 2016.