Natural Imagery within Kate Chopin's Fiction

Amy Carrington - Senior Honors Thesis

American Literature

May 22, 1996

I would like to thank Leslie Wheeler for all of her guidance and advice concerning this thesis work and James Warren for his invaluable suggestions.

Table of Contents

> I had been in the woods, in the fields, groping around; looking for something big, satisfying, convincing, and finding nothing but -- myself; a something neither big nor satisfying but wholly convincing. [I emerged] from the vast solitude in which I had been making my own acquaintance.
>
> - from Kate Chopin's journal (Toth 205)

Like the romantic transcendentalists of the nineteenth century, Kate Chopin searched the soul and produced literature based upon her own spiritual awakening. She continually yearned for something "big, satisfying, [and] convincing," but she found her own self as the only convincing and substantial subject. Chopin understood that knowledge of the natural self and distinguishing the "me" from the "not-me" remained the truly valuable and satisfying products of literature. Chopin, like Emerson, made her own acquaintance with the inner self and searched for a union with the Supreme Being. Most importantly, her moments of self-discovery occurred in the natural environment as she "groped around" in woods and fields. Chopin believed that one must be surrounded by the forest, woods, and fields in order to find objects and moments of genuine substance.

Although Chopin was lauded as a quaint local color writer of the late nineteenth century, she in fact explored far more complicated ideas and emotions. Chopin admired and utilized the natural realism inherent in local color stories, but she longed to make readers see the illusions of conventional society. She relied upon this realism to disclose the hypocrisy in organized religion, subvert

traditional female roles, and expose the forbidden ecstasy of sexual love. As Barbara Ewell explains, "local color had become for Chopin a strategic move, an acceptable way to engage the issues with which her fiction had been increasingly concerned: the exploration of women's sexuality and consciousness in confining social structures" (Ewell, "Making Places," 166). Chopin's narratives addressed these emotional conflicts, revealing the patterns of self-discovery and the desire for personal freedom in many of her characters.

Because Chopin relied heavily upon local color realism to relate her stories, she incorporated natural imagery and emphasized the regional setting as a way to develop her themes. Specifically, Chopin borrowed from writers such as Maupassant, Emerson, and Whitman to depict "real" scenes. According to Ewell, "Maupassant's 'direct and simple' tales provided Chopin with not just a realistic model for writing but one that gave her permission to trust her own vision -- to look out on life through her own being and with her own eyes" (Ewell, "Making Places," 167). Furthermore, Chopin favored the spirituality of Emerson's natural visions and Whitman's sensual settings. Chopin's stories, such as "A Morning Walk," describe spiritual epiphanies that echo Emerson's "transparent eyeball" passage in *Nature*. Other narratives, such as "An Egyptian Cigarette" and *The Awakening*, imitate Whitman's celebration of the sensual sea in "Song of Myself" and "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." Chopin utilized the romantic ideals of her literary predecessors and applied them to the regional realism popular during her lifetime. Through her natural imagery, Chopin illustrated the need for

independence from restrictive religions, limited traditions, and conventional social roles.

Since many of Chopin's stories and novels depict self-discovery and natural freedom, her background and personal development explain both her use of natural imagery and her tendency to criticize restricted social traditions. Kate Chopin was born Katherine O'Flaherty in St. Louis, Missouri, on February 8, 1850. The youngest child of Thomas and Eliza O'Flaherty, Chopin enjoyed a comfortable childhood with her older brothers, George and Tom. However, disaster struck their household in 1855 when Thomas O'Flaherty was killed in a train accident. The trauma of this train wreck and her father's death gave Chopin material for her later narratives, including "The Story of an Hour" in which Mrs. Mallard's husband supposedly dies in a train wreck. In addition, Chopin's first experience with death left her to be raised by her mother and grandmother throughout her childhood. Surrounded by these resilient women who survived the death of their respective husbands, Chopin learned, at an early age, to respect feminine strength and wisdom.

Chopin attended the Sacred Heart Academy where she learned traditional Catholic principles and followed them with strict obedience. The girls of the Sacred Heart Academy attended mass every day, were forbidden to speak during certain hours, and maintained strict dress and behavioral codes. According to Emily Toth, the girls were forced to associate in groups of three or more in order to prevent elitist cliques or separate groups (46). Intimate

friendships were forbidden by the academy because they supposedly promoted secular joys and worldly concerns. Although Chopin formed a few close friendships with other girls, her main outlet from the restricted lifestyle was her journal. Within the safe boundaries of her own private diary, Chopin recorded her responses, thoughts, and impressions to the world around her. Consequently, Chopin's maturation and development were carefully recorded throughout the course of her life.

As she grew older, Chopin wrote about her frustrations with upper class society, pretentious parties, and social requirements. She grew tired of her role as a prominent southern belle, and complained, "I am invited to a ball and I go.--I dance with people I despise; amuse myself with men whose only talent lies in their feet; gain the disapprobation of people I honor and respect . . . I am diametrically opposed to parties and balls" (Toth 91). Chopin's only break from the monotony of wealthy society was her journal. She confided, "You are the only one, my book, with whom I take the liberty of talking about myself" (Toth 91). As a result, Chopin became accustomed to writing as an exploration of her self, and she utilized this skill throughout the rest of her literary career.

Surprisingly, Chopin welcomed her courtship and marriage to the young and wealthy Oscar Chopin in the spring of 1870. She admitted in her journal, "Tomorrow I will be married. It seems to me so strange that I am not excited -- I feel as quiet and calm as if I had one or two years of maiden meditation still before me" (Toth 99). Although Chopin did not appear apprehensive upon her coming

marriage, she clearly understood her loss of freedom because she acknowledged her own lost "maiden meditation." Despite her condemnation and disapproval of marriage in her later stories, Chopin enjoyed her own marital union and family. Oscar Chopin's family lived in the Creole society of Louisiana, and Chopin quickly became a part of his social group. Kate and Oscar started their family in New Orleans and spent summers in Grand Isle, the summer setting for most of *The Awakening*. Together, they had six children, including five boys and one girl. Later in her life, Chopin reminisced about her experiences in childbirth, material which she used in *The Awakening*. She enjoyed the chaos and excitement of the city, but she also celebrated the natural beauty of the Grand Isle beaches. According to Chopin's biographer, Emily Toth, "Kate must have been gathering material: watching, thinking, pondering her place in the universe" (145).

The Chopin's moved in 1879 to the country town of Cloutierville in order to save expenses. Kate Chopin experienced wild forests and limitless nature for the first time, and she grew quite fond of her long horseback rides. However, she always maintained her preference for fashionable city clothes and bright colors, even to the surprise of her country neighbors. She explored the dark and fragrant country nights, confessing that "I could not help thinking that it must be good to prowl sometimes; to get close to the black night and lose oneself in its silence and mystery" (Toth 156). As Chopin discovered nature and wandered in her environment, Oscar grew ill with yellow fever in 1882. By the end of that year, Kate

Chopin was a widow with six children, financial debts, and Oscar's town store. Taking over the business accounts of the household, Chopin assumed the masculine role as executor of the estate. She ran the store during the day and slowly paid off Oscar's remaining debts. Biographers speculate that Chopin experienced her first passionate love affairs during this time, as well. In essence, Kate Chopin experienced the first delights of freedom after her husband's death, and she enjoyed her liberation immensely. Drawing from her experiences, freedoms, and passions, Chopin started writing fictional stories for the intention of publication. By 1889, Kate Chopin began publishing her first short stories in small magazines.

Although *The Awakening* remains Chopin's most famous work, her brief narratives offer glimpses of her developing styles and themes. Specifically, Chopin's short stories deal with natural scenes and spiritual epiphanies that focus on the "real" and the genuine. Unlike*The Awakening*, Chopin's smaller tales introduce various examples of her stylistic devices and broad ideas, giving a complete view of Chopin's messages and intentions. Even though critics often associate Chopin with feminism and women's liberation, her brief sketches often focus on alternative protagonists, including men, animal creatures, and children. Essentially, this thesis concentrates on Chopin's short stories to illustrate her use of natural imagery and her characteristic criticism of social conventions.

Chapter One addresses the function of natural setting in religious epiphanies and spiritual awakenings. Specifically, in her brief sketch "The Night Came Slowly," Chopin utilizes one of her

favorite images, the night, to convey nature's overwhelming power. By emphasizing nature's sublime beauty, she depicts nature as a more direct and authentic path to God than traditional religion. Furthermore, in "A Morning Walk" Chopin narrates the spiritual and sensual awakening of a repressed and controlled scientist, Archibald. Although much of the story's action takes place within a church, Archibald's emotional sensation and arousal occur in the natural environment. Chopin illustrates nature, not religion, as the overpowering force which drives Archibald's sensual awakening. Lastly, in "Lilacs" Chopin contrasts the worldly existence of Adrienne Farival with the controlled and restricted lifestyle of devout nuns. She depicts the church as an interruption to the friendship of Adrienne and the nuns, ultimately causing their permanent separation. Chopin addresses organized religion as a destructive force in these natural relationships and condemns the church for its unforgiving attitude.

Chopin's natural imagery continues to influence and guide her other narratives, especially ones dealing with unrestrained sexuality. Chapter Two emphasizes the symbolic setting in Chopin's love stories and depicts the naturalness of the sexual act. In "A Vocation and a Voice," Chopin reveals the mental and physical frustrations of a young adolescent boy who escapes with traveling gypsies to the freedom of the countryside. In addition, he experiences sexual love for the first time, and his reactions to his surroundings change permanently. Chopin illustrates nature as the appropriate setting for sexuality, but she also indicates that sexual awareness brings pain

and suffering in addition to joy. However, some of Chopin's love stories depict the sexual act as purely natural, joyful, and exultant. In "The Storm," Chopin depicts the adulterous affair between Calixta and Alcee' as beautiful by incorporating floral imagery and natural scenes. Furthermore, Chopin compares their physical love to a thundering storm which mimics their unleashed passion. The emphasis on setting and environment ultimately indicates the inherent beauty and joy experienced in sexual love. The last story in Chapter Two focuses upon the sexual awakening of a young girl who encounters the joy and shame of her first kiss. In "A Shameful Affair," Chopin tells the story of Mildred Orme, a wealthy and intelligent young woman who realizes her own sexual nature after kissing a hired field hand. Although Chopin names the tale "A *Shameful* Affair" [italics mine], she clearly celebrates the beauty and enjoyment of stimulated sensuality. Most importantly, by placing the passionate scenes within the ripe and limitless grain fields, Chopin illustrates natural passions as an inherent part of all humans.

Although Chopin realizes the significance of unrestricted sexuality, she also focuses on narratives which utilize the natural setting as an expression of freedom and individuality. Chapter Three discusses Chopin's protagonists who escape confinement to find personal liberation. Because Chopin employs many distinct characters and protagonists in these stories, she emphasizes the universal need for freedom in all individuals. In one of her earliest sketches, "Emancipation: A Life Fable," Chopin tells the story of a beast who escapes courageously from his restricted cage. Although

the animal experiences pain, suffering, fear, and injury in the outside world, he chooses to explore the free and natural environment rather than remain within his safe enclosure. Other narratives concerning personal freedom discuss the restrictions within social structures and traditional marriages. In "Loka," Chopin depicts the life of a young Native American girl who lives in a conventional Louisiana household. Although she remains safe, clothed, and warm within this home, Loka yearns to escape and return to her wild, vagabond lifestyle. Chopin depicts the forest and natural wildlife as reminders of Loka's liberated past. Through natural imagery, Chopin illustrates the conflict between personal freedom and traditional society. Furthermore, in "The Story of an Hour," Chopin continues to explain the restricted life of a female, but she focuses specifically on marriage as the enclosing "cage." Chopin depicts the personal freedom that Mrs. Mallard experiences when she learns of her husband's death in a train wreck. After her grief subsides, Mrs. Mallard rejoices in her newfound freedom from wifely duties. She observes the new spring life around her and feels rejuvenated. Chopin parallels Mrs. Mallard's liberation and rebirth with the natural growth and vibrancy of her surroundings.

However, Chopin's natural imagery does not always convey bright and joyful emotions. Frequently, Chopin's stories introduce hopeless and remorseful characters, surrounded by an equally depressing environment. Chapter Four discusses Chopin's treatment of suicide by drowning, especially in "Her Letters," "An Egyptian Cigarette," and *The Awakening*. All of these stories describe morose

characters who seek freedom, release from life's pain and suffering, and answers to troubling questions. In "Her Letters," the husband drowns himself to join his wife in the "immeasurable rest" and to determine the truth about her infidelity. Rather than live with the secret content of her letters, the man prefers to escape the pain of his obsession through death. Likewise, in "An Egyptian Cigarette," the characters choose to escape their environments through various methods. The female protagonist escapes by smoking a hallucinogenic cigarette, and the woman in the dream yearns to relieve her pain through death. Left by her lover, the dream-woman crawls toward the inviting river in hopes of ending her agony. Chopin depicts the water as the refuge, the solution, and the escape for her troubled characters. Even in her most famous work, *The Awakening*, Chopin describes the water and the sea as expansive, limitless, sensual, and caressing. For Edna, who desires relief from marriage and motherhood, the ocean represents freedom, liberated sexuality, and the promise of individuality.

Throughout all of Kate Chopin's narratives, sketches, and novels, natural imagery serves as an expression of unconscious, emotional, and unadulterated feeling. Chopin utilizes the environment to illustrate her characters' joys, sorrows, pains, and desires and to represent the unaffected, genuine, and pure aspects of this world. Therefore, she ultimately favors natural spirituality over organized religion, promotes free sexuality over restricted social expectations, and celebrates the freedom of the individual.

Chapter 1: Spiritual Epiphanies within the Natural Setting

Kate Chopin often focuses upon religious themes in her short stories because religion itself played a large role in her life. As a young girl, Chopin attended the Sacred Heart Academy where she received strong religious instructions and strict schooling. According to Emily Toth, "The Sacred Heart order . . . stressed rigorous standards. The nuns dedicated themselves to teaching young girls 'of good family' to be pious wives and mothers -- but also to be knowledgeable, clear, and independent thinkers" (45). Although Chopin found religious faith and instruction worthwhile, she viewed its traditions and rules as restrictive. Chopin became frustrated with her education because, as Toth explains, "an English girl's education too often consisted of 'You must not do this' and 'You must not say that'" (82). Instead, Chopin favored natural freedom and preferred an instinctive, truthful approach to spirituality.

As a result, her essays and stories often encourage nature's freedom over strict religion. Specifically, Chopin illustrates nature as the environment in which man can reach God most effectively. According to Chopin, because humanity can reach God through nature, traditional religion is ineffective and unessential. She adamantly argues that spiritual enlightenment comes from natural experiences, not traditional sermons. Like the romantics, such as Emerson and Whitman, Chopin incorporates transcendental ideas by depicting the union of the self with nature. Chopin's narratives possess what Per Seyersted calls a "Whitmanesque pervasive erotic atmosphere, dedicated to nature's undying urge" (Seyersted 167).

Furthermore, Chopin creates these natural images as alternative, even superior, routes to knowing God in "The Night Came Slowly," "A Morning Walk," and "Lilacs."

In "The Night Came Slowly," Chopin utilizes nature imagery by focusing on the night, an image which Per Seyersted considers "a central symbol with her" (Seyersted 70-71). In this essay from her journal, Chopin personifies the night as her advisor and friend. She declares, "I want neither books nor men; they make me suffer. Can one of them talk to me like the night - the Summer night? Like the stars or the caressing wind?" (Chopin 366). Chopin takes refuge from the things in life that make her "suffer" by escaping into the night. Because the night "talks" to her and offers comforting caresses, Chopin, like Whitman, finds solace and peace. Chopin romanticizes the warm summer night as a refuge which surrounds her, an image which echoes Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." Specifically, in Section 21 of "Song of Myself," Whitman yearns for the night to envelope him as he cries

> Press close bare-bosomed night -- press close magnetic nourishing night!
> Night of the south winds -- night of the large few stars!
> Still nodding night -- mad naked summer night.

Both Whitman and Chopin seek the wind and stars of the "magnetic nourishing night" because it draws them to its bare-bosom and offers protective, even maternal, comfort. But the night means more than just comfort; it also suggests possibility and erotic exploration. Whitman incorporates sexual images by focusing on the bare nudity

of the night. Just as he addresses the "mad naked summer night," Chopin explains, "The night is solemn and it means mystery" (Chopin 366). Thus, although Chopin finds peace by escaping into the night, she seeks its "mystery" and caressing darkness as well. She views the night as a time of contemplation, a time for "solemn" thought. Ultimately, she escapes the insufferable things of the world in order to find a separate peace and a place for possibility.

However, Chopin juxtaposes the night's beauty and mystery in "The Night Came Slowly" with the disturbing visit of an unpleasant young preacher. Chopin explains that a "man came to-day with his 'Bible Class.' He is detestable with his red cheeks and bold eyes and coarse manner and speech. What does he know of Christ?" (Chopin 366). Because she vehemently criticizes this evangelist for interrupting her night-dream, Chopin clearly argues against his formal religion and traditional "Bible Class." She berates him with her speech, calling him "detestable," "bold," and "coarse." Because she contrasts the young preacher with the "solemn" and "caressing" night, Chopin clearly favors her natural refuge over formalized religion. She celebrates the erotic aspects of nature and detests the vulgar intrusion of the evangelist. His traditional worship annoys Chopin because his "red cheeks and bold eyes" fail to convince her of his spiritual knowledge. Rather than enlightening, his blustering speech and bold attitude appear presumptuous. Chopin questions, "Shall I ask a young fool who was born yesterday and will die tomorrow to tell me things of Christ? I would rather ask the stars: they have seen him" (Chopin 366). Again, Chopin criticizes the "young fool" for

his bold sermons. However, she offers an alternative spiritual guide -- the stars. Once more, Chopin returns to natural imagery and presents the environment as her refuge and advisor. She views the stars as a more effectual route to Christ because "they have seen him." According to Barbara Ewell, "the sensuousness of nature represents a more authentic access to God and the spirit than any arrogant human scheme" (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 92). Chopin favors nature's direct contact with God over a limited, traditional religion.

Although Chopin continually reveals nature's innate peace and tranquility, she also explains nature as an enlightening vision of beauty. She depicts sublime scenes in which man feels completely at peace yet completely overwhelmed by nature's splendor. Like Emerson and Whitman, Chopin believes that man's union with nature brings spiritual awakening. She assumes that the wilderness initiates spiritual epiphanies similar to Emerson's awakenings in "Nature." For example, in the famous "transparent eyeball" passage, Emerson describes the pure exhiliration that nature brings to man.

> In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed in the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. (Emerson 24)

Emerson casts off "all mean egotism" to become part of God and nature, and his body transcends all physical barriers. Within the wilderness, Emerson discards his mortal flesh, saving his eyes, in order to unify with God. Only in the simplicity of the natural setting can Emerson connect with the Universal Being because he views and experiences the sublime beauty of the forest. Similarly, Chopin relies upon the natural environment to understand and unite with God. She believes Emerson's proclamation: "In the woods, we return to reason and faith." She promotes the natural and instinctive aspects of this world and rejects the traditional ceremonies of organized religion.

Specifically, Chopin implies a transcendental awareness in "A Morning Walk" that echoes Emerson's essay, "Nature." Chopin describes nature's effect on Archibald, a practical scientist concerned only with knowledge and fact. In the narrative, Archibald awakens to the wonders of nature, the beauty of a young girl, and a sermon on Easter morning. Although Chopin does credit traditional sermons for their persuasive qualities and enlightening themes, she clearly favors nature as a spiritual guide. Most significantly, Chopin argues that it is nature's beauty that leads Archibald out of limited, scientific thought.

Initially, Chopin characterizes Archibald as a purely intellectual man, focused on science and analysis. According to Joyce Dyer, Archibald "resembles Hawthorne's Rappucini, who cares infinitely more for science than for mankind" (Dyer, "Epiphanies," 79). Chopin explains that Archibald

> leaned decidedly toward practical science; of sentiment he knew little, except what he gathered from a class of speculative philosophers. . . He liked to observe insect life at close range, and when he gathered flowers it was usually to dismember their delicate, sweet bodies for the purpose of practical and profitable investigation. (Chopin 567)

Since Archibald focuses solely upon "practical" and "profitable" exercises, nature's beauty and wonder completely escape him. Archibald ignores the beauty of the "delicate, sweet" flowers because he values only their structure and function. Dyer concludes that Archibald, "obsessed by his study of the world . . . has failed to respond to it spontaneously" (Dyer, "Epiphanies," 79). Consequently, Archibald appears oblivious to personal sentiment and continues to observe life practically and scientifically.

However, Chopin reveals how one beautiful Easter morning reaches Archibald in a new and unfamiliar way. Although he has experienced many spring mornings, Archibald suddenly responds differently to the sights around him. Chopin explains that the "spring day was saying 'good morning' to him in a new, delicious way, while the blood in his veins beat a response" (Chopin 567). Chopin personifies nature as openly inviting Archibald to enjoy its beauty. Archibald finally recognizes nature's loveliness and "delicious" wonder, and his body responds accordingly. Rather than analyzing the morning scene with his scientific mind, Archibald reacts *naturally* as the "blood in his veins" beats a response. In addition, as

he walks, Archibald encounters a young girl who appears "like a second vision of spring" (Chopin 568). Again, rather than ignoring her presence, he responds to her beauty and sensuality. As Archibald looks into her face, "her soft, curved lips made him think of peaches that he had bitten; of grapes that he had tasted; of a cup's rim from which he had sometimes sipped wine" (Chopin 568). The girl's sensual beauty reminds Archibald of his own sensory experiences. Chopin clearly implies Archibald's own sensual awakening to this beautiful young girl. Consequently, the beauty surrounding Archibald, whether it be in nature or in a woman, awakens his appreciation for aesthetics.

As Chopin continues to describe Archibald's sensual enlightenment, she contrasts nature's influence with a traditional church sermon. Intoxicated by the young girl's beauty, Archibald instinctively follows her to the Easter church service. He appears content to sit aside the lovely young girl and absorb nature's loveliness. Chopin explains that the "sunlight came in, and the shadows of quivering leaves played upon the casement through which he gazed" (Chopin 568). Throughout the scene inside the church, Chopin creates an impressionistic portrait of nature. For example, Chopin describes "shadows," "sunlight," and "quivering leaves" to describe this moving canvas. Whether the scene includes trees, flowers, birds, or sunlight, Archibald enjoys and responds to it all. According to Dyer, "Archibald has a somewhat pagan vision" while sitting in the church, watching the glittering leaves, and listening to the birds sing (Dyer, "Epiphanies," 80), because natural

elements, not the traditional church, spark his spiritual enlightenment.

By contrasting these two influences, Chopin clearly favors nature's intrinsic connection to God over the structured church. Throughout the entire scene, Archibald virtually ignores the prayers and the singing. Only when the minister approaches to deliver his sermon does Archibald become interested in the Easter service. Ewell explains that, " . . . despite Archibald's uncharacteristic entrance into church, Chopin carefully sidesteps any sentimentality toward religion itself. Archibald is not hypocritically reverential at the Easter service" (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 137). Archibald "assumed no reverential attitude, nor did he bow his head with any pretense of devotion" (Chopin 568). Chopin maintains that Archibald's attendance at the religious service does not indicate a sudden religious awakening. Rather, the surrounding nature pulls him there. Chopin strengthens this theme through her characterization of the minister. In the scene, the preacher

> stayed a long moment with his slow, earnest glance sweeping the congregation, then he uttered solemnly and impressively: 'I am the Resurrection and the Life' . . . This was his text. It fell upon ears that had heard it before. (Chopin 369)

The "solemn" and "impressive" minister appears more arrogant than devout. In addition, the familiar sermon seems trite rather than enlightening. The preacher repeats his messages, offering his overused verse to an audience which has "heard it before" Chopin

presents this traditional religious service as ineffectual when compared with nature's overpowering beauty. Consequently, by juxtaposing nature's innate beauty with the church's limited traditions, Chopin presents nature as a more authentic route to spirituality.

Chopin concludes her narrative by focusing on Archibald's harmonious relationship to nature, echoing Emerson's ideas and essays. As Archibald listens to the sermon, he experiences a vision similar to a transcendental awakening. Hearing the minister's words, Archibald sees "the poet's vision, of life that is within and the life that is without, pulsing in unison, breathing the harmony of an undivided existence" (Chopin 569). Chopin's description of Archibald's vision clearly resembles Emerson's exclamation in "Nature," which claims that "the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other" (Emerson 23). Chopin depicts this union between the self and nature as instinctive, "pulsing" and "breathing" in unison. The vision combines the life within and the life without, excluding the minister's "impressive" sermon. Therefore, Chopin depicts the harmonious relationship as "undivided" by an intrusive outsider. Chopin explains that Archibald "entered into himself and he preached unto himself a sermon in his own heart, as he gazed from the window through which the song came and where the leafy shadows quivered" (Chopin 569). Once more, Chopin details these impressionistic images, including the quivering leaves and shadows. But she also stresses the importance of spiritual self-instruction. According to Ewell,

"Chopin insists with other romantics like Emerson and Whitman, the sermons of the heart are the most instructive," (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 138). Although this narrative (originally titled "An Easter Morning Conversion") addresses Archibald's religious "conversion" and awakened spirituality, its content focuses upon Archibald's harmonious union with nature.

Because Chopin favors nature as a superior route to spirituality when compared with traditional religion, she criticizes organized faith for its restrictive rules and instructions. In "Lilacs," Chopin describes the relationship between Adrienne, an experienced musician, and the reservedly virtuous nuns. Because Adrienne's annual visits to the convent always coincide with the lilac blooms, Chopin immediately focuses on the relationship between nature and religion. In addition, she contrasts Adrienne's secular world with the nuns' rigid views. Adrienne, a worldly woman with an energetic personality, differs greatly from the severely moral nuns. Ultimately, due to their overwhelming differences, the sisterhood between Adrienne and the nuns fails; Chopin criticizes the nuns' rigid and unbending virtue because they expel Adrienne from their secured isolation.

Initially, Chopin carefully characterizes both the Mother Superior and Adrienne to explain their differences. By utilizing nature imagery, Chopin depicts Adrienne's warm naturalness and the Mother Superior's forced rigidity. For instance, Chopin explains that the Mother Superior "was dignity in person; large, uncompromising, unbending. She kissed Adrienne without warmth, and discussed

conventional themes learnedly and prosaically . . ." (Chopin 356). Because she characterizes the Mother Superior as "uncompromising," and "without warmth," Chopin creates an extremely cold and rigid image. Despite the warm and inviting environment of the springtime lilac blossoms, the Mother Superior remains structured and cold in her "conventional" religion. She appears noticeably detached from the joyous atmosphere and from Adrienne's natural cheer. In contrast, Adrienne seems to blend with the spring environment, absorbing its warmth and responding to its joy. As she approaches the convent, Adrienne appears "all in brown; like one of the birds that come with the spring . . . Her figure was rounded and graceful, and she walked with a happy, buoyant step" (Chopin 355). Unlike the cold unbending Mother Superior, Adrienne appears invitingly warm, "happy," and "graceful." In addition, Adrienne seems to float along the ground with her naturally "buoyant" step. She responds to nature because her joyful attitude and natural beauty reflect the springtime. Because these two descriptions of Adrienne and the Mother Superior offer completely opposing images, Chopin immediately creates a division between Adrienne's secular world and the nuns' religious environment.

Furthermore, Chopin illustrates Adrienne's inherent sexuality, especially later, within her lavish Parisian apartment. Chopin depicts Adrienne "clad in a charming neglige', . . . reclining indolently in the depths of a luxurious armchair" (Chopin 361). Adrienne appears saturated with the sensual pleasures in life because she clothes herself in rich, scandalous gowns and reclines "indolently" in her

"luxurious armchair." Clearly, Adrienne lives in an entirely different world when away from the convent and the Mother Superior. Rather than rigid rules and traditions, Adrienne's lifestyle remains carefree and indulgent. Chopin portrays Adrienne's unreserved, sensual nature through her environment: "Thrown carelessly over the backs of chairs were puzzling and astonishing looking garments" (Chopin 361). Adrienne flaunts her own sexuality through her "astonishing" clothing and "careless" attitude. Even though she participated in the strictest rituals of folding clothing while in the convent, Adrienne now flings her garments with thoughtlessness and haste. Adrienne appears to absorb the sensual atmosphere of her own luxurious apartment, just as she reflects natural beauty and happiness while surrounded by nature. Most importantly, Adrienne seems to be a type of chamelion, one which changes personality and attitude based upon the setting.

Chopin continues to develop the contrast between Adrienne and the nuns by depicting Adrienne's relationship with Sister Agathe. Although these two women maintain a close friendship, their separate lifestyles create a large division in their relationship. Chopin emphasizes their differences by depicting their actions and reactions to the environment. These distinct responses to nature reveal Adrienne's innate freedom and Sister Agathe's restricted lifestyle. For example, as Adrienne and Sister Agathe walk through the forest, they respond quite differently to their environment.

> The two women arose and walked again, hand in hand this time, over the tufted grass down the gentle decline

> where it sloped toward the broad, flat meadow, and the limpid stream that flowed cool and fresh down the woods. Sister Agathe walked with her composed, nunlike tread; Adrienne with a balancing motion, a bounding step, as though the earth responded to her light footfall with some subtle impulse all its own. (Chopin 359)

Because Chopin describes Adrienne and Sister Agathe holding hands, she clearly joins them and acknowledges their strong friendship. However, they react and move differently within this natural setting. While Sister Agathe moves in "her composed, nunlike tread," Adrienne glides "with a balancing motion, a bounding step." Chopin contrasts Sister Agathe's cautious and careful manner with Adrienne's bold, bounding step. In addition, Chopin explains Adrienne's relationship to the earth through her movements and actions. Again, Chopin incorporates transcendental themes by depicting the union of the inner self with nature. As Adrienne moves through her environment, the earth "responds" to her with "a subtle impulse all its own." Adrienne reacts to nature's beautiful freedom just as nature responds to her "bounding" step. Consequently, Adrienne appears instinctively natural, while Sister Agathe remains composedly distant.

By contrasting Adrienne's innate warmth with Sister Agathe's religiously reserved demeanor, Chopin indicates that the traditional church divides these two women and interrupts their union. These women enjoy their friendship and look forward to their reunions. But even though Adrienne leaves her own busy world to visit the

convent, Sister Agathe cannot relinquish Catholicism's codes, and the traditional church eventually separates these two women and hinders their friendship. For instance, as Adrienne and Sister Agathe walk through the woods together, the "gurgle of the running water beneath them; the lowing of the cattle approaching in the distance, were the only sounds that broke upon the stillness, until the clear tones of the angelus bell pealed out from the convent tower" (Chopin 359). Chopin depicts these two women surrounded by nature's beauty and soothing sounds. As they walk "hand in hand," the "gurgle of running water" and "lowing of cattle" do not disturb the stillness. However, the "clear tones" of the convent bell disrupt the peacefully still environment. The convent bells remind Adrienne and Sister Agathe of their religious duties by interrupting their nature walk. In addition, the church bells physically divide the two women walking "hand in hand" by prompting them to prayer. As a result, Adrienne and Sister Agathe appear joined by nature but separated by the conventional church.

Because Adrienne's secular world remains distant from the nuns' strict religion, the Mother Superior ultimately terminates Adrienne's relationship with the church. The following spring, Adrienne returns to the convent when the lilac blooms. However, the Mother Superior refuses her entry and banishes Adrienne permanently. In her moment of confusion and amazement, Adrienne's "lilacs fell from her arms to the stone portico on which she was standing" (Chopin 365). According to Ewell, "discarding these harbingers of spring and renewal marks the end of innocence;

but for the sisters, too, it signals the shutting out of human warmth and sensuous affection" (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 92). Because the Mother Superior must maintain her precious purity, she excludes Adrienne from the preserved convent. Adrienne, with her worldly experiences and irresponsible nature, poses a threat to the strictly conservative church. Ewell explains that "Adrienne's irresponsibility will not again sully their closely guarded innocence, but neither will her reckless spirit liberate them from the rigid morality they defend at such a high cost" (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 92). Consequently, Adrienne resignedly leaves the convent and returns to her extravagant Parisian apartment. As Adrienne descends the church steps, "she turned to look back at the imposing facade of the convent, hoping to see a familiar face . . . But she saw only the polished windows looking down at her like so many cold and glittering and reproachful eyes" (Chopin 365). Chopin depicts the convent as an "imposing facade," indicating both its false nature and intimidating presence. Chopin, distrustful of the traditional church, openly criticizes its false morality. Since she describes its "polished windows" as "cold" and "reproachful," Chopin suggests that the outward appearance does not correspond to the inner meaning. Although the convent appears appropriately pristine and virtuous, it rejects Adrienne coldly and unforgivingly. Ultimately, the church, because of its strict traditions and virtues, isolates Adrienne by terminating her alliance with the sisters.

Throughout "Lilacs," "A Morning Walk," and "The Night Came Slowly," Chopin consistently attacks conventional religion for its false

pretenses, preserved tradition, and arrogant instruction. Whether "conventional religion" represents an arrogant preacher, a boring sermon, or a strict convent, Chopin criticizes it all. In addition, she repeatedly depicts nature as an alternative and superior road to spirituality. According to Mary Papke, "Chopin's moral is clear: one must live in the world and be of it; one must discover a self in body and in mind even though that quest be painful and, at first, disillusioning" (35). Therefore, no convent, priest, or arrogant young preacher can instruct Chopin on religion or faith. Chopin preaches her own inward sermons, using nature as her guide.

Chapter 2: The Nature of Human Sexuality

Because Chopin considers sexuality a natural part of all humans, she often links sexuality and nature in her short stories. Chopin experiments with unconventional descriptions of sensual scenes, but she finds an "acceptable" method through her nature imagery. According to Joyce Dyer, "Chopin may have discovered that by using symbolic settings she could explore 'unacceptable' impulses in a form 'acceptable' both to publishers and to herself" (Dyer 451). Furthermore, because she believes that nature and man can unite, she explains that man's basic sexuality brings him closer to his natural instincts. Dyer explains that Chopin "saw nature as practically sentient -- or, at least, closely related to the mind and soul of man" (Dyer, "Symbolic," 452). Therefore, Chopin, like the transcendentalists, values man's innate sexuality because it brings him closer to nature. Borrowing from authors such as Whitman and Emerson, Chopin often juxtaposes sensual scenes and erotic experiments with the open environment and depicts certain characters as naturally sexual beings. Specifically, in "A Vocation and a Voice," "The Storm," and "A Shameful Affair," Chopin utilizes natural imagery to figure the sexual awakening of her characters.

In "A Vocation and a Voice," Chopin juxtaposes Brother Ludovic, a sexual innocent, with Suzima, an experienced woman who embodies fertility and sensuality. Because the young boy feels isolated and alone in the large city, he gladly joins Suzima and Gutro in their travels through the countryside. Although he experiences a transcendental spirituality while communing with nature, the boy

still suffers from the restlessness of approaching adolescence. It is not until he accidentally encounters Suzima bathing that the boy experiences a series of revelations concerning his own sexuality and his natural surroundings. The boy's understanding of his environment gains clarity and wisdom because, through sexual intercourse, he approaches absolute union with his instinctive nature. Consequently, Chopin explains how physical union awakens the intuitive, animal nature in man.

Initially, Chopin depicts Brother Ludovic as a young, naive boy searching for himself and for adventure in the world. Because Chopin does not mention the boy's personal relatives or family, he appears quite isolated in the large city. Although he works for the Donnelly family as a servant, he remains a foreign member of the household. As a result, he never feels accepted or connected to that society. In search of his own personal relationships, Brother Ludovic yearns to exist in the freedom of the outdoors. Chopin explains that the boy has "a vague sense of being unessential, and which permitted him . . . to abandon himself completely to the novelty and charm of his surroundings" (Chopin 521). The natural freedom of the environment soothes the boy and eases his isolation. While in his natural environment, the boy

> had lapsed into a blessed state of tranquility and contemplation which seemed native to him. The sordid and puerile impulses of an existence which was not living had retired into a semi-oblivion in which he seemed to have no share. He belonged under God's sky

in the free and open air. (Chopin 522)

In order to escape a restrictive lifestyle, a lifestyle "which was not living," the boy retreats into nature's beauty. He finally feels complete because he attains a union with nature which was not possible in society. Rather than existing as an "unessential" alien in the city, Brother Ludovic actually belongs "under God's sky." He strives to relinquish his ties to society and remain permanently in the countryside by freeing himself from conventional restrictions. Thus, Brother Ludovic spontaneously leaves his organized life with the Donnellys for the adventurous life of traveling in the countryside.

The boy inadvertently meets Suzima and Gutro, a pair of traveling Gypsies, and he chooses to join them in their travels. He agrees to help Suzima and Gutro with their daily chores, and, in return, he receives a place to stay, food to eat, and as much time in the outdoors as he desires. Chopin explains that the "sight of the country was beautiful to him and his whole being expanded in the space and splendor of it" (Chopin 527). The boy experiences an existential peacefulness while communing with nature, an experience which makes him feel complete and whole. Because his "whole being expanded" in the overwhelming beauty of nature, the boy seems to immerse himself in nature and transcends simple physical barriers. But the boy finds not only peace and rest while in the countryside; he also encounters contemplative moods which allow discoveries of his inner self. Brother Ludovic, still a young man, steadily approaches the age of manhood and the beginning of adolescence. Thus, his self-revelation leads to a realization of his own sexuality.

According to Ewell, "nature itself . . . precipitates the boy's recognition" (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 129). The seductive arrival of spring strongly affects the boy, and he appears restlessly eager for something to change. Although the boy seems unaware of his coming adolescence, he anxiously anticipates change itself. And, ultimately, it is Suzima who facilitates the boy's sexual awakening.

Chopin depicts Suzima as a mysterious fortune teller who merely pretends to predict future events. She transforms her name, Susan, into an alien-sounding title in order to legitimize her vocation. In addition, Suzima admits to changing her voice and actions in order to appear more exotic. Suzima explains, "But I don't talk like this here when I'm telling fortunes reg'lar. I talk a kind of Egyptian accent" (Chopin 524). Suzima creates her own image by changing her name and by altering her voice. In this alter ego, Suzima represents the mystical unknown and tempting sexuality. According to Ryu, Suzima, "the dark mysterious maid of the Orient . . . represents passion, lust, and the destructive power of sexual attraction" (Ryu 142). In addition to the strange nature of Suzima's vocation, Chopin depicts her as radiantly natural, full of life and energy. Suzima appears "robust and young -- twenty or thereabouts -- and comely in a certain rude, vigorous fashion" (Chopin 523). Suzima appears refreshingly natural, youthful, and strong. However, she does not embody the conventional and refined woman of the nineteenth century. Instead, she appears rather "rude," "vigorous," and "robust." Her healthy and strong figure defies convention and promotes her image as a fascinating and sexual woman.

Despite her false outer image as a fortune teller, Suzima appears surprisingly frank and natural. She swears openly, speaks her mind frequently, and behaves with unrestrained candor. Brother Ludovic experiences her free nature and behavior, noticing that she "had a more emphatic way of expressing herself than good manners or morals demanded" (Chopin 523). Suzima defies "good manners or morals" because she lives according to her own rules. She honors no other code or religion. Because she lives according to her own rules, she appears instinctively free from all social conventions. This freedom, as well as her healthy and robust figure, reflect her vital individuality and expressiveness. According to Chopin, "Suzima must have felt glad as they went; for often-times, as she walked beside the slow-moving wagon through the still woods, she lifted her voice and sang" (Chopin 527). Chopin illustrates Suzima's lifestyle as easy and natural because it follows no patterns. She expresses her emotions freely, singing when happy and contented. She celebrates the pleasurable aspects of life through singing, playing the guitar, or simply enjoying the summer breezes. Therefore, because Suzima remains inextricably linked to natural freedom and pleasure, she facilitates the boy's awakened sexuality and ascent into manhood.

Although Brother Ludovic has found peace and solace in the open countryside, the productive springtime fills him with a feeling of restlessness. Because natural fecundity surrounds the boy, he responds instinctively yet confusedly by sensing his own reproductive potential. In this bewildered state, the boy

inadvertently observes Suzima bathing by the river. Chopin explains that the boy

> saw her as one sees an object in a flash from a dark sky -- sharply, vividly. Her image, against the background of tender green, ate into his brain and into his flesh with the fixedness and intensity of white-hot iron. (Chopin 539)

This one "flash" of an image virtually brands the young boy because it changes his thoughts permanently. Just as a bright flash blinds the eyes or a brand scars the flesh, Suzima's naked sexuality permanently alters and wounds the young boy's innocence. In addition, amid the lush and verdant wilderness, Suzima's figure appears startlingly vivid. However, it seems appropriate that the boy's natural sexual awakening occurs within the wild forest. The boy, for the first time, becomes aware of his own instinctive sexual desire because he finally observes Suzima as a sensual being. What was once confusion and restlessness now is clear and open sexual awareness. Consequently, he and Suzima fulfill their sexual needs through physical union, changing permanently how the boy views his surroundings.

Brother Ludovic's awakened sexuality enhances his awareness of nature because it unifies him more closely with his instinctive side. As a sexual innocent, the boy experiences an existential tranquility in communion with nature. However, after fulfilling his sexual desires, the boy transcends the barrier between self and surroundings by uniting with nature more deeply and completely.

> That which he had known before he now comprehended,

> and with comprehension sympathy awoke. He seemed to have been brought in touch with the universe of men and all things that live. He cared more than ever for the creeping and crawling things, for the beautiful voiceless life that met him at every turn. (Chopin 541)

Through his physical union with Suzima, the boy now "comprehends" things which he once only vaguely suspected. Brother Ludovic responds to his own natural sexuality by awakening to his environment with excitement and compassion. Most of all, the boy reacts to Suzima with increased enthusiasm and passion. He sees Suzima as "the embodiment of desire and the fulfillment of life" (Chopin 541).

After his sexual encounter with Suzima, Brother Ludovic cannot return to his original state. Because the boy has become aware of his own sexuality, he experiences instinctive urges and violent passion in every facet of his life. On one occasion, the boy acts with violent aggression when defending Suzima against Gutro's drunken assaults. Frightened by his own violence, Brother Ludovic leaves the traveling gypsies in search of morality and religion. He finds safety and moral virtues within a monastery which protects him from the temptations of sexuality. Carefully guarded from his own passionate character, Brother Ludovic

> often felt that he had been born anew, the day whereupon he had entered the gate of this holy refuge. That hideous, evil spectre of himself lurking outside, ready at any moment to claim him should he venture

within its reach, was, for a long time, a menace to him. (Chopin 543)

Brother Ludovic remains safe within his "holy refuge" because he can isolate and distance himself from the outer world. Chopin explains that his true fear is his own sexuality because it represents that "evil spectre of himself." By confining himself within the strict rules and physical boundaries of the monastery, he escapes exposure to the sensual aspects of life. Brother Ludovic actually builds a large stone wall to physically separate himself from the rest of the world although, eventually, he cannot resist his urge for freedom.

Because Brother Ludovic possesses passion and desire, he remains unavoidably tied to Suzima. He constantly dreams about her while in the monastery, but he quickly forgets these images by burying himself in prayer. Brother Ludovic occupies his time building a wall around his refuge, and he almost completely blocks out any memory of Suzima. However, one day, while working on the stone wall, Brother Ludovic hears her singing voice passing by the monastery. Chopin explains that, upon hearing her voice, "He was conscious of nothing in the world but the voice that was calling him and the cry of his own being that responded. Brother Ludovic bounded down from the wall and followed the voice of the woman" (Chopin 546). Despite his calm happiness and secluded peace within the monastery, Brother Ludovic cannot resist the call of his own sensuality. Suzima's voice reminds him of his natural instincts and freedom. Chopin believes that Brother Ludovic remains governed by

the "cry of his own being." Thus, he has no other choice but to follow Suzima, always obeying his own nature and sexuality.

Chopin remains intentionally ambiguous about this ending because she does not condemn or applaud Brother Ludovic for leaving the monastery. Instead, she presents the beneficial aspects of both natural freedom and restricted religious solitude. The boy experiences both the exultant joy of beautiful wilderness and the quiet solitude of devout religious faith. However, because she ends with the boy's inevitable escape into the woods, she implies the grand power of instinct over man. Ultimately, she depicts man as weak and fragile when faced with his own innate sexuality.

While Chopin's story, "A Vocation and a Voice," insists on the transcendent importance of sexual instinct, her short story entitled "The Storm" focuses solely upon the sensual nature of physical union. Because Chopin never attempted to publish this story, it remains her most daring description of sexual intercourse. The narrative centers around a tempestuous rainstorm in which Alcee Laballiere and Calixta reunite after a lengthy separation. Because they were once lovers, they share a secret intimacy despite their respective spouses and families. They join in physical union while the thundering storm parallels their passion. In addition, Chopin compares Calixta to an opening flower, receptive to Alcee's advances. By comparing this physical union with surrounding nature, Chopin explains that their passion subsides as the storm ends. However, Alcee and Calixta experience no guilt or remorse after their adulterous affair. Instead, they resume their normal lives and return to their respective

families. Chopin celebrates the naturalness of this sexual act by comparing their guiltlessly passionate affair with the violent storm.

Since Chopin initially equates the lovers' passion with a violent thunderstorm, she expresses the basic naturalness of the sexual act. Calixta, conveniently left at home by her husband and child, offers Alcee temporary shelter from the heavy rain. Because these former lovers have not been alone together since their respective marriages, this reunion awakens their old passion and initiates a lustful encounter. For Alcee, the "contact of her warm, palpitating body when he had unthinkingly drawn her into his arms, had aroused all the old-time infatuation and desire for her flesh" (Chopin 594). By describing Calixta's "warm, palpitating body" and Alcee's "unthinking" action, Chopin conveys the instinctive responsiveness of these two lovers. They do not contemplate their actions or assess the situation. Instead, Alcee and Calixta simply react to each other as completely sexual beings. In essence, they respond naturally because they obey their basic animal instincts. Chopin explains that "they did not heed the crashing torrents, and the roar of the elements made her laugh as she lay in his arms" (Chopin 594-5). As the violent storm unleashes its flood, so do Alcee and Calixta release their passion in this physical union. The storm which at first frightens Calixta now "makes her laugh;" essentially, she no longer fears the dangerous storm because she recognizes her own violent passion. Calixta and Alcee realize their own animalistic behavior and obey their natural instincts. Similarly, the storm parallels their

passion with its thundering sounds and torrential floods. According to Ryu, their

> self-knowledge leads to a sense of participation in the vital pattern of nature. The idea is implicit in the analogous relationship between the storm, a symbol of natural energy, and the lovers: it intensifies as their desire grows, roars accompaniment to their lovemaking, and passes when their passion subsides. (144)

The storm, which represents "natural energy," lends its vitality to these lovers. They respond to its intensity by releasing their own lustful desires.

Chopin further depicts the lovers' natural passion by comparing Calixta to a beautiful white lily. Because Calixta receives Alcee's lustful advances, her actions mimic those of an opening flower. For instance, Chopin first describes Calixta's "firm, elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright . . . [as] a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world" (Chopin 595). According to Chopin, this sexual pleasure is Calixta's "birthright," an experience available to all sensual beings. In addition, Calixta, like an opening flower, receives Alcee's sexual advances to perpetuate the "undying life of the world." Just as the sun unfolds the petals of a white lily with its rays, Alcee uncovers Calixta's latent sexuality. According to Christopher Baker, the "floral imagery extends into Calixta's name, which suggests *calyx*, the botanical term for the outer protective covering" surrounding the

flower (225). Calixta's name further emphasizes her receptivity by producing floral images of opening and closing. Baker continues by saying that just as "a floral calyx unfolds its protective sepals to present the flower, Calixta has opened to receive sexual and emotional fulfillment" (225). By utilizing this floral image, Chopin details the instinctively sexual act and describes Calixta as a naturally fertile woman. Chopin even creates images of growth and reproduction by describing Calixta's lips as "red and moist as pomegranate seed" (Chopin 594). The pomegranate, the fruit that sealed Persephone's bond to Hades and the underworld, is associated with sexuality; thus, Chopin indicates Calixta's reproductive ability by comparing her lips to a fruitful seed.

As the storm subsides and their passion dissipates, Calixta and Alcee end their brief encounter with no guilt or remorse. Chopin describes the drizzling rain as it "beat softly upon the shingles, inviting them to drowsiness and sleep. But they dared not yield" (Chopin 595). Although the steamy and drowsy afternoon tempts the lovers to sleep, they realize that their affair cannot last. Both Alcee and Calixta acknowledge their responsibilities and commitments, namely, their respective spouses and children. However, these passionate lovers do not feel guilty for their adultery. Chopin explains that, as Alcee rode away, "he turned and smiled at her with a beaming face; and she lifted her pretty chin in the air and laughed aloud" (Chopin 595). Even though Calixta and Alcee recognize their commitments to marriage, they do not accept guilt for this infidelity. Instead they enjoy their moments together and desire only pure

pleasure. Their moral indifference implies that this natural sexuality remains beyond social restrictions, such as marriage.

Because "The Storm" addresses human sexuality openly and shamelessly, "A Shameful Affair" appears quite reserved in comparison. Still, it acknowledges a sensual awakening through a secret first kiss. In the narrative, Mildred Orme embodies the quintessential reserved young lady of the nineteenth century. Most of the time, she remains quietly sitting with her books, contemplating serious topics and theories. However, she experiences completely foreign emotions in her physical attraction to a field hand named Fred Evelyn. Furthermore, Chopin depicts Mildred's moments of sensual awakening amid beautiful countrysides and natural scenes. By emphasizing images of fertility and abundance, Chopin further explains Mildred's acknowledgement of her own sexuality. As a result, Chopin details Mildred's natural growth into an experienced and sensual young woman.

Initially, Chopin characterizes Mildred as reservedly intellectual, concerned only with serious theories and philosophies. Chopin explains that "Mildred Orme, seated in the snuggest corner of the big front porch of the Kraummer farmhouse, was as content as a girl need hope to be" (Chopin 131). Mildred remains in her "snuggest corner," safely removed from any danger or excitement. In addition, Mildred mistakenly believes herself to be content in her quiet and subdued existence. Mildred, "who had come to seek in this retired spot the repose that would enable her to follow exalted lines of thought," secludes herself from other associations (Chopin 133).

Chopin characterizes Mildred as somewhat of an intellectual snob, one who assumes herself superior to all those around her. She finds only theories and philosophies worthy of her attention and has a heightened awareness of social class. However, at the young age of twenty, Mildred does not possess omniscient knowledge. Specifically, she does not fully understand her own biology or her own sensual nature. Mildred, according to Joyce Dyer, "knows far less about herself than she thinks she does" (Dyer, "Symbolic," 447). Because she remains isolated with her philosophy books, Mildred does not comprehend natural sensuality. As a result, she remains unprepared for her own sexual maturation. Chopin finally explains, "It was summertime; she was idle; she was piqued, and that was the beginning of the shameful affair" (Chopin 132).

Because Chopin centers the action of this narrative within and near the farm's abundant wheat fields, she emphasizes images of fertility and growth that parallel Mildred's own transformation. Specifically, Chopin depicts the "swelling acres where the undulating wheat gleamed in the sun like a golden sea" (Chopin 131). The landscape appears ripe, and the "swelling acres" overflow with abundant grain. These pregnant images illustrate the earth's reproductive ability and lend a sexual tone to the setting. Furthermore, the "golden sea" of "undulating wheat" creates an image reminiscent of the sensual sea in *The Awakening* . Just as Edna immerses herself in the ocean to discover her own sexuality, so does Mildred experience sexual awakening within the "golden sea" of the wheat fields. In this natural imagery, Chopin utilizes what Dyer calls

"the extensive and elaborate use of symbolic setting to describe the unconscious" (Dyer, "Symbolic," 447). By detailing these lush natural scenes, Chopin indicates Mildred's own reproductive ability.

As the narrative continues, Chopin combines the images of "undulating wheat" with Mildred's own fascination with Fred Evelyn, the farmhand. As Mildred walks through the farm in search of Fred, she passes through the golden field and absorbs its beauty.

> It was not so very hot after all, the next day, when Mildred walked down the long narrow footpath that led through the bending wheat to the river. High above her waist reached the yellow grain. Mildred's brown eyes filled with a reflected golden light as they caught the glint of it, as she heard the trill that it answered to the gentle breeze. (Chopin 133)

Chopin's use of color creates images of harvest and ripeness. The "yellow grain," Mildred's "brown eyes," and the "golden light" contribute to form a picture of abundance and fertility in this agricultural setting. In addition, Mildred absorbs the "golden light" of the field and reflects the same ripeness in her eyes. Chopin explains that Mildred's "cheeks were ripe with color that the sun had coaxed there; so were her lips" (Chopin 133). As Mildred absorbs the warmth and beauty of her environment, she reflects the same fertility and readiness. In this scene, she appears more sensual because her cheeks and lips finally reflect their ripeness. According to Dyer, "Chopin's juxtaposition of the images with Mildred's own first sensations of desire suggests that the reproductive urge drives

all life" (Dyer, "Symbolic," 448). Essentially, Chopin compares Mildred to her naturally productive environment to suggest her coming sexual awakening.

Although Mildred vaguely suspects the coming change, she still seems unprepared for her own biological transformation. As she wanders through the golden fields, she happens upon Fred Evelyn fishing by the river. Although she finds this field hand below her intellectual level, she stays to watch. Finally, bored by the quiet waiting, Mildred "want[s] to change it at last" (Chopin 133). After asking Fred to let her try, Mildred immediately has a fish on her line. Fred grasps her hand to help and "start[s] violently at finding himself so close to a bronze-brown tangle that almost swept his chin . . . to a pair of young, dark eyes that gleamed for an instant unconscious things into his own" (Chopin 134). Looking into Fred's eyes, Mildred expresses the inexpressible -- her own desire. Still reflecting the abundant fertility of the golden fields, Mildred's eyes "gleamed" those "unconscious things" into Fred's own eyes. They immediately embrace and kiss, leaving Mildred stunned and silent. As Fred runs away in shame and embarrassment, Mildred suffers in her own mortification. However, she finally begins to understand her own sexuality because, according to Dyer, "she had wanted that kiss more than anything in her life. And she knew it" (Dyer, "Symbolic," 451).

Because Mildred's awakened sexuality originates amid the abundant wheat fields, it seems appropriate that she and Fred meet there one last time. Chopin explains, "In the gathering twilight she walked again through the wheat that was heavy and fragrant with

dew. The path was very long and very narrow. When she was midway she saw the Offender coming toward her. What could she do?" (Chopin 135). Because Mildred cannot escape this confrontation, she meets this "Offender" with forced pride and dignity. Mildred has discovered, by this point, that Fred is not an ordinary farm hand; he is a friend of the family and a member of her own social class. Consequently, this confrontation brings increased embarassment and humiliation to Mildred. As Fred tries to apologize for his offense, she abruptly stops him and forbids further mention of the secret kiss. When asked for forgiveness, Mildred simply replies, "some day -- perhaps; when I shall have forgiven myself" (Chopin 136). Mildred's shame lies not in the kiss, itself; rather, in the enjoyment of that kiss. Mildred finds that kiss "the most delicious thing she had known in her twenty years of life" (Chopin 134-5). Ultimately, this realization of her own natural passion and sensuality causes Mildred the most shame.

Throughout "A Vocation and a Voice," "The Storm," and "A Shameful Affair," Chopin consistently utilizes nature imagery to express the instinctively sexual responses of all human beings. Specifically, she focuses upon awakened passion whether in a young boy, a young woman, or between forbidden lovers. She depicts nature as a responsive entity that corresponds and interacts with the characters' "unconscious" thoughts. Most importantly, Chopin explains physical union as an instinctively natural act, an act that brings men and women closer to their environment. To define Kate

Chopin's theory on sexuality most clearly, Barbara Ewell explains that

> Chopin insists that the denial of sexuality, of human participation in forces on which the whole creation depends, leads to paralysis and inauthenticity. Her fictional characters -- male and female -- are repeatedly challenged to recognize in their awakening sensuality a connection with nature that they can ignore only at their peril. (Ewell, "Making Places," 168)

Chapter 3: Freedom vs. Captivity in the Natural Setting

Although some literary critics assume that Kate Chopin's fiction focuses solely upon the confined and restricted female, in many cases her stories are far more concerned with imprisonment than with gender. All of her characters appear struggling to escape physical, sexual, or societal restraints. Whether they are young children, middle-aged wives, or animals, Chopin's heroes and heroines consistently appear in caged environments. In addition, because Chopin's narratives emphasize freedom and natural instinct, she utilizes nature imagery to portray her protagonists' escapes. By eluding the confinements of religion, society, or marriage, Chopin's characters find a unique sense of completeness. However, they do not approach peaceful solitude or perfect happiness; instead, her characters daringly escape safe restraints in order to explore, to learn, and to discover their own original souls. Chopin consistently portrays her characters in search of dangerous freedom in order to "live in the world and be of it" (Papke 35). Specifically, in "Emancipation: A Life Fable," "Loka," and "The Story of an Hour," Chopin emphasizes the bitter struggle for freedom and the dangerous release from constraints.

"Emancipation: A Life Fable" remains one of the earliest examples of Chopin's short fiction because it originally appeared as a journal entry from around 1870. Because Chopin carefully preserved it throughout her lifetime, the narrative now offers an interesting look at her early development of characteristic themes. Although the story remains just a brief sketch, its subject and theme reveal

Chopin's early ruminations about freedom and daring courage. The tale focuses upon an imaginary animal who exists entirely within the confines of a cage. One day, purely by accident, the cage door miraculously opens. According to Mary Papke, this "animal born and bred in a cage moves from satisfied, solipsistic existence to isolation in and partial consciousness of a larger world" (34). Ultimately, the animal must decide whether to stay within safe walls or to escape daringly into an unknown world. Chopin creates an entertaining sketch or "fable," one which offers symbolic instruction on how to live a courageous life. Most importantly, Chopin glorifies sensuality through the animal's perceptions of an open, natural world.

Initially, Chopin depicts an animal who is born into a cage and who continues to grow within its walls. She explains, "he saw above and about him confining walls, and before him were bars of iron through which came air and light from without; this animal was born in a cage" (Chopin 37). However, because this creature has never known anything different from these restraining walls, he does not yearn to escape or break out of the confinement. According to Papke, this "male animal while entrapped is nurtured by 'an invisible protecting hand' and believes himself to be the center of the universe" (34). All of his needs are met, including food, warmth, water, and shelter. Essentially, the animal appears content. According to Chopin, "here he found it good, licking his handsome flanks, to bask in the sun beam that he thought existed but to lighten his home" (Chopin 37). However, despite the creature's pleasant lifestyle and easy existence, an accidental alteration in the

environment causes changes in the animal which cause him to leave the safety of the cage.

One seemingly normal day, the creature awakens to find the door to the cage completely open. Rather than race immediately out into the world, the animal crouches in his safe cage and fears the unknown outer world. Gradually and cautiously, he explores the edges of his confines "to see the canopy of the sky grow broader, and the world waxing wider" (Chopin 37). Chopin describes the sky as broad and the world as "waxing wider" to indicate the overwhelming size of the animal's new environment. Naturally, he seems fearful of the expansive unknown; but eventually, he builds up his courage and strength, and he quickly bounds outward into irresistible freedom and space.

> On he rushes, in his mad flight, heedless that he is wounding and tearing his sleek sides -- seeing, smelling, touching of all things; even stopping to put his lips to the noxious pool, thinking it may be sweet. (Chopin 37)

According to Chopin, outward freedom does not guarantee safety or comfort. Instead, exploration and limitless space offers chances for danger, injury, or accident. The animal inadvertantly wounds and tears his body in his "mad flight" because he is compelled to explore the unknown. He no longer enjoys the safety provided by the cage. Papke explains that the animal "is no longer kept and cosseted but must now seek his sustenance and discover his own substance" (35). The animal makes three consecutive choices: to leave the cage, to explore the world, and not to return. This freedom to choose,

although dangerous, far outweighs the dull safety provided by the cage. The experience of "seeing, smelling, [and] touching of all things" appears most important to the animal's growth and development. Consequently, Chopin concludes that the creature continues "to live, seeking, finding, joying, and suffering. The door remains forever empty!" (Chopin 38).

Although this story appears extremely simple and immature when compared to Chopin's later works, it provides a groundwork for the themes and metaphors used constantly throughout her literary career. Papke argues that "even though it can be read as naive wish-fulfillment, the animal and animalistic fable of 'Emancipation' cannot be denied its importance to Chopin's development" (34). Most importantly, Chopin concentrates on her thematic purpose: to explore the need for freedom and the inevitable alienation that coincides with this escape. Chopin focuses upon this animal as an allegorical representative, one which strives for freedom as all humans must. In addition, she realizes the pain, suffering, and isolation that accompanies this escape and rebellion. Although her metaphors remain simple, Chopin's imagery and symbolic expression form the basis for her future works. By utilizing an animal as her protagonist, Chopin emphasizes the natural, animalistic tendencies evident in all humans. Just as the animal must escape and explore, so must all creatures rebel against boundaries and break out of their confinements.

Chopin's story entitled "Loka" depicts this early theme by depicting the rebellion of a young Native American girl against the strict lifestyle of a conventional Louisiana household. Chopin reinforces Loka's inner wildness by identifying her as "a half-breed Indian girl," and, therefore, according to stereotype, "primitive" or closely connected to the natural world. Loka abruptly leaves her apparently carefree and unstructured life in the woods because she dislikes the lying and cheating included in that lifestyle. Instead, she chooses to beg for food or work small jobs to stay alive. Viewing her wild and dangerous lifestyle, the Band of the United Endeavor decides to place her in the Padues' charitable Christian home where she can learn their customs, perform the duties required of her, and, most of all, escape what it perceives to be a dirty, abusive life with the Indians. Although Loka completes her tasks dutifully and submissively, she maintains an attitude of indifference. Because she no longer exists in what Chopin depicts as the wild landscape and manners of the Indians, Loka becomes subdued and tamed. The strict rules and requirements of the Padues' home restrain her free spirit and adventurous attitude. However, Chopin explains that Loka's sight of the woods from their house awakens her love for freedom and her desire for a natural environment. According to Joyce Dyer, "nature reminds a homesick, half breed Indian girl of 'the joy of its freedom' (215) as well as the potential dangers of primitive, instinctive behavior" (Dyer, "Epiphanies," 75). Loka's animalistic urges and natural actions, which have been restricted in the Padues' home, resurface within the freedom of the woods.

Initially, Chopin describes Loka as a ragged, unkempt, and clumsy girl, one who embodies the rugged outdoors. According to Chopin, "Loka was not beautiful, as she stood in her red calico rags before the scrutinizing band. Her coarse, black, unkempt hair framed a broad, swarthy face without a redeeming feature, except eyes that were not bad; slow in their movements, but frank eyes enough" (Chopin 212). Although Chopin describes Loka with the typical prejudice of many nineteenth century people, she emphasizes her natural honesty and strength as her most important characteristics. Loka does not correspond to the nineteenth-century ideal of a woman because she does not appear pale, refined, or frail. Instead, she seems "unkempt," "broad, swarthy," and "clumsy." Only her "frank eyes" appeal to nineteenth century standards of beauty. Essentially, Loka's "frank" and natural honesty remains her best quality. Because Loka comes from the uncultivated Bayou Choctaw, her own personality reflects her natural origins. Loka, like the woods, can only appear as she is; she possesses no false pretensions and creates no false images.

However, Loka's free spirit and natural honesty conflict with the demanding constraints of the Padues' home. Because she lives with and works for the Padues, she must also adhere to their rules and beliefs. These expectations and demands force a burden upon Loka to which she is not accustomed; namely, a foreign set of behaviors and a false sense of propriety. For example, Chopin explains that "her feet were like leaden weights, encased in the strong brogans with which the band had equipped her" (Chopin 213).

In order to help Loka, the Band of the United Endeavor issues her shoes and clothing while she lives at the Padues'. But instead of helping Loka, they simply hinder her. Unaccustomed to conventional clothing and restrictive footwear, Loka appears burdened by her new uniform. The "strong brogans," which are like "leaden weights," restrain Loka from her normal movements and make her even more clumsy. In addition, Loka's chores and responsibilities limit her personal freedom. Chopin explains that Loka "carried to her work a stolid indifference that was exasperating" (Chopin 213). Bored by the monotonous routine of daily tasks, Loka requires constant prodding to complete her chores. Although she does not completely defy Madame Padue, Loka's "stolid indifference" infuriates the lady nonetheless. According to Dyer, "no matter how insistent and demanding Madame Padue becomes, no matter how much work she gives the girl, Loka remains unconcerned about her household tasks" (Dyer, "Epiphanies," 75). Essentially, the restricted and orderly lifestyle bores Loka because she yearns for her former "vagabond life" (215). As a result, Loka's view of the woods behind the Padues' home reminds her of her wild past, prompting her to desire freedom once again.

One afternoon, the Padue family ventures to town for shopping, leaving Loka at home with their youngest child, Bibine. Free from her responsibilities and chores, Loka gazes outdoors to the stretch of forest lining the Padue property.

> Loka's gaze, that had been slowly traveling along the edge of the horizon, finally fastened upon the woods, and

> stayed there. Into her eyes came the absent look of one whose thought is projected into the future or the past, leaving the present blank. She was seeing a vision. (Chopin 215)

Entranced by the natural forest and wild scene before her, Loka views images of her past life with sentimental fondness. Mentally escaping her chores and monotonous life, Loka remembers the violence of her past, and then, wistfully, its pleasures. Chopin explains, "She was seeing old Marot, the squaw who drank whiskey and plaited baskets and beat her. There was something, after all, in being beaten, if only to scream out and fight back" (Chopin 215). The violence and brutality of Loka's past becomes romanticized in her memory. Rather than recall the bruises and cuts from her battles, Loka remembers only the vigorous fighting and the vital freedom that came with it. According to Dyer, "The vision of old Marot reminds Loka of a time when her behavior was less controlled and civilized, when her reactions were spontaneous and natural" (Dyer, "Epiphanies," 76). She desires the exhilaration of retaliating against a foe, and she despises the controlled submission required by the Padue household. Chopin depicts Loka as a savage at heart, one who "could not feel then that the sin and pain of that life were anything beside the joy of its freedom" (Chopin 215). Consequently, Loka, prompted by her natural surroundings, prepares to leave her controlled life with the Padues for her adventurous past.

However, Loka's responsibility for little Bibine prevents her from abandoning the child, and, as a result, keeps her with the Padue

family. Loka, throwing off her restraining brogans, prepares to escape her confinement. But she hears the cooing and gurgling of adorable Bibine, whom she loves dearly. Rather than relinquish all ties to her new life, Loka realizes that she cannot simply leave the little child alone. Dyer explains that "moral convention requires even Loka to return to the Padues" (Dyer, "Epiphanies," 76). Instead, she decides to take Bibine on a walk in the woods, to reconnect with nature and temporarily fulfill her need for freedom. While explaining her absence later to Madame Padue, Loka says, "I want to run 'way bad, an' take to de wood; an' go yonda back to Bayou Choctaw to steal an' lie again. It's only Bibine w'at hole me back. I could n' lef' 'im. I could n' do dat. An' we jis' go take lit' 'broad in de wood, das all, him an' me" (Chopin 217). Her instinctive urges for freedom remind Loka of her past and her ties to the natural environment. But Loka remains unavoidably linked to the young child, and she ultimately remains with the family. Although Chopin presents the conflict between natural freedom and restrictive social responsibility, she concludes with Loka's responsible return to the Padues' home.

"Loka" deals with the restrictiveness of Western society as a whole; "The Story of an Hour" harrows in on marriage within that society as another form of confinement. Mrs. Mallard, Chopin's protagonist and heroine, does not realize, at first, the limited lifestyle which she endures. News of her husband's death initially brings Mrs. Mallard grief and pain, but subsequently the loss awakens her to

new visions of life. Once her tears dry and the pain subsides, Mrs. Mallard actually celebrates her unexpected freedom from marriage. In her biography of Chopin, Emily Toth most eloquently explains her treatment of widowhood:

> Chopin's widows are more apt to find themselves in 'early spring . . . a languor in the air; an odor of jasmine in every passing breeze' or amid 'soft air . . . laden with a hundred subtle sounds and scents of springtime.' Chopin's widowhood stories emphasize hope, not bereavment; spring, not winter; possibility, not loss. (163)

Chopin connects Mrs. Mallard's awakening with detailed description of setting, focusing on the rejuvenated spring day. By utilizing the natural imagery of the spring day, Chopin conveys the bright hope and possibility that Mrs. Mallard now embraces. However, Mrs. Mallard's joy does not last because her free and full existence is cut short by her husband's unexpected return. Consequently, Chopin concludes the narrative of the liberated Mrs. Mallard with irony; specifically, with the painful realization that she will remain married and constrained, after all.

Initially, Chopin describes Mrs. Mallard as a frail and timid woman, plagued by a weak heart and dominated by her marriage. Even her title, Mrs. Mallard, conveys her lack of identity outside of her marriage. Chopin explains in the first lines of the narrative, "Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her

husband's death" (Chopin 352). Because her friends and family understand her health problems and weaknesses, they specifically treat her carefully and gently, almost as if she were a child. Chopin explains that it "was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing" (Chopin 352). However, Mrs. Mallard is neither weak nor fragile when dealing with her emotions. Even her physical appearance conveys an inner strength. Chopin describes Mrs. Mallard as "young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength" (Chopin 353). Despite her physical weaknesses, Mrs. Mallard appears strong and young in this portrait. Because the lines of her calm face reveal "repression" of her inner emotions, she appears surprisingly strong and composed. Chopin depicts Mrs. Mallard as a physically weak woman who is carefully handled by her family and friends, yet she possesses an inner strength which facilitates her awakening to freedom.

Upon the news of her husband's death, Mrs. Mallard immediately grieves and cries; but she quickly recovers and calmly assesses the new life before her. Contemplating her widowhood, Louise Mallard overlooks the open square below her home and views the lively spring scene with happiness. According to Chopin,

> She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air . . . The notes of a distant song which someone was singing reached her

> faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves. (Chopin 352)

Rather than grieve and mourn her husband's death, Mrs. Mallard celebrates the "delicious" scene. The trees, rain, and sparrows combine to form an image of rebirth and beauty that affect Mrs. Mallard. Sensing a change in her surroundings and in herself, she also seems "all aquiver" with rejuvenated life. She anxiously awaits the coming revelation and emergence into individual existence. Mrs. Mallard realizes that

> There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature. (Chopin 353)

Because Louise Mallard has depended upon her husband for guidance and instruction, she has not lived her own life, made her own decisions, or planned her own future. Her life has remained within the narrow confines of her marriage. Therefore, the absence of her husband allows Louise to embrace life triumphantly, without "bending" herself to the will of another. Ultimately, the setting strengthens Chopin's theme of rejuvenation and rebirth by awakening Mrs. Mallard to her bright future and open freedom.

However, Mrs. Mallard's ecstatic freedom does not last because she cannot survive the shock of her husband's unexpected return. According to Barbara Ewell, Mrs. Mallard's "habit of repression has so weakened Louise that her glimpse of freedom -- her birthright -- does not empower her, but leaves her unable to cope with the

everyday reality to which she is abruptly restored" (Ewell 90). Louise Mallard views her possible freedom as a vision, an illusion. She seems unable to make this vision a reality, or leave the house for the spring outdoors, because she cannot reconcile her restrictive marriage with the free existence for which she yearns. Because her husband's return coincides with her heart failure, Mrs. Mallard's heart condition may indicate Chopin's metaphor for other kinds of heart problems, such as heartache or lost love. Upon her husband's arrival, Louise Mallard collapses and dies from heart failure which the doctors assume comes from "the joy that kills" (Chopin 354). Chopin's intended irony in this last line conveys the misunderstanding which accompanies Mrs. Mallard's search for freedom and individuality. Chopin explains how the natural environment facilitates her awakened existence but also reminds Louise of her physical limitations, especially her heart. The reality of Mrs. Mallard's restrictive marriage ultimately overwhelms her, forcing her back into weakness and frailty.

Although "The Story of an Hour," "Loka," and "Emancipation" focus upon entirely different subjects and characters, they all concentrate on Chopin's central theme of freedom. She consistently portray rebellion, escape, and individuality as necessary parts of humanity. By utilizing natural imagery, Chopin illustrates the basic primitive needs required by every human; namely, sensory experience and joyful freedom. Her characters reach an "awakening" to the world around them and, consequently, an "awakening" to their own inner souls.

Chapter 4: The Figure of the Sea in Chopin's Suicidal Scenes

Constantly throughout Kate Chopin's fiction, images of nature emerge as explanations of unconscious or unspoken emotions. Because these images usually convey freedom or unrestrained sexuality, Chopin's settings appear open, inviting, exultant, and beautiful. However, Chopin also addresses feelings of despair in her fiction, feelings which end ultimately in suicide. In addition, Chopin's suicidal protagonists usually choose to die by drowning. Consequently, the water and the natural surroundings of the suicides convey an inner torment and a deep yearning for escape. To these characters, suicide by drowning offers what Mary Jane Lupton explains as "the promise of freedom -- from husbands, children, lovers, responsibility, and confrontation" (95). Chopin's characters seek not only freedom but also peace and rest. Although Chopin's images of drowning and the seductive sea are best explored in *The Awakening*, the same images function significantly in her earlier short stories, including "Her Letters" and "An Egyptian Cigarette."

Initially, Chopin describes a wife's secret affair in "Her Letters" by illustrating the pain that concealment brings. The female protagonist remains unnamed thoughout the narrative and, consequently, seems distant and mysterious. However, despite this distance, the reader learns more about her than her husband or her friends ever know. This dramatic irony creates what Barbara Ewell describes as the "contrast between an intimate perspective on the woman and the misperceptions of her character by her husband and closest friends" (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 106). Although the woman

remains unnamed and distantly mysterious, Chopin explains the despair within her heart through symbolic setting. While the woman reads her own love letters, "The rain was falling steadily from a leaden sky in which there was no gleam, no rift, no promise" (Chopin 398). Since the environment appears heavy and "leaden" with rain, nature mimics the woman's own weighted emotion. The day appears gray and lifeless because it lacks "gleam" or "promise." Likewise, the wife preserves no hope in her situation. Because she has once experienced sensuous joy within an adulterous affair, her bleak and unfulfilled marriage leaves her hopeless. She has kept her letters in remembrance of the affair, but her own approaching death forces her to destroy them. Although she believes these letters "had sustained her" and "kept her spirit from perishing utterly," she now realizes that "the days had come when the premonition of danger could no longer remain unheeded" (Chopin 398). Rather than injure her husband by revealing her infidelity, the woman chooses to destroy the evidence of her unfaithful act. Essentially, Chopin's heroine remains full of anguish, misunderstood by her own family, and tragically hopeless in her plight.

But when this wife is faced with the reality of destroying these letters she cannot complete the task. Terrified by the thought of living without them, the woman burns a few and then feverishly searches through the remainder to ascertain their safety. Picking out her favorite letter, she kisses and crumples it in her hands to make sure that it physically exists.

She crushed it between her palms when she found it.

> She kissed it again and again. With her sharp white teeth she tore the far corner from the letter, where the name was written; she bit the torn scrap and tasted it between her lips and upon her tongue like some god-given morsel. (Chopin 399)

Reduced to her animal instincts, the woman bites with "her sharp white teeth" into the sacred letters. She responds physically to these letters because she remembers her own physical response to her lover. The woman remembers that "[t]his man had changed the water in her veins to wine, whose taste had brought delirium to both of them" (Chopin 399). Chopin combines the sacramental images of tasting and drinking in this scene; the woman savors the "god-given morsel" and recalls her own blood turning to wine. Consequently, remembering the affair and keeping the letters is a ritual or ceremony to this woman. Therefore, she cannot destroy these papers, and she must find some way to keep them in secrecy beyond her own death. Finally, the wife turns to the very person she fears will discover her infidelity: her husband. In this last decisive action, she compiles her letters and seals them with the written command, "I leave this package to the care of my husband. With perfect faith in his loyalty and his love, I ask him to destroy it unopened" (Chopin 400). Relying on her husband's honesty and trustworthiness, the woman leaves this last task to him because she cannot bear to destroy them herself.

After her inevitable death, the husband eventually finds this parcel of letters tucked away in her desk, and he receives them with

confusion and suspicion. Again, the setting reflects the mood: "The day was much like that day a year ago when the leaves were falling and rain pouring steadily from a leaden sky which held no gleam, no promise" (Chopin 400). Chopin repeats many words from the original scene, including "leaden," "gleam," and "promise." Just as the wife experienced pain and despair, so does the husband now suffer from her loss and the nature of her request. Chopin describes him as loyal and honest, with eyes "as faithful as a dog's and as loving" (Chopin 400). Despite this man's loyalty, he still questions her request and doubts his own wife's fidelity. Rather than dutifully destroy the letters immediately, the man rhetorically asks himself, "What secret save one could a woman choose to have die with her?" (Chopin 401). Since this man has discovered the letters, he finally comprehends how little he knew his wife during their marriage. The discovery of these papers creates an overt division between the man and woman and a battle within the man himself between curiosity and duty. Ultimately, the man dutifully destroys the letters unopened by throwing them in the river, but he continually suffers from his own anger, frustration, and suspicion.

Overcome by his own desire to know the mystery, the man attempts to discover her secret by searching her desk, investigating her books and interrogating his male friends and her female friends. Without answers or solutions, the man still struggles with his own suspicion, and he loses all appreciation for his own life. Desperate to unearth her secret and retrieve her letters from the river, the husband returns to the water in search of an answer. According to

Chopin, "Only the river knew. It babbled, and he listened to it, and it told him nothing, but it promised all. He could hear it promising him with caressing voice, peace, and sweet repose. He could hear the sweep, the song of the water inviting him" (Chopin 405). Chopin personifies the river as a seductress and describes its teasing manner, its coy promises, delicious invitations, and "caressing voice." Although the river tells the man nothing, it does promise him the possibility of an answer to his wife's secret. Chopin depicts the water as an escape of "peace and sweet repose," but it also suggests a hidden depth of knowledge which the husband hopes to access.

The man finally decides that death, and the possible chance of finding his wife in the afterlife, is more attractive than a life of uncertainty: "A moment more and he had gone to seek her, and to join her and her secret thought in the immeasurable rest" (Chopin 405). Ironically, these destroyed letters accomplish exactly what the wife feared. Even washed away by the river, these letters drive her husband to self-destruction and madness. The husband, consumed by this mystery, prefers to search the possibility of the unknown rather than to remain permanently frustrated on earth. Although his goal is "to join her and her secret thought," he never completes his journey. Instead, the narrative ends with the man still searching for her, the secret, and "immeasurable rest." Ultimately, Chopin suggests that he may never find the rest which he so ardently seeks. Indeed, the water which teasingly invites this man to search for a clue to his wife's character forever alienates him from her.

Chopin's use of water in "Her Letters" as the final means of self-destruction sets the stage for future narratives involving suicide. Although "Her Letters" involves the infidelity and division within a seemingly traditional marriage, "An Egyptian Cigarette" details an entirely different relationship and the despair that it brings. In this story, Chopin depicts a wild and exotic dream within a conventional tale. The unnamed female protagonist quietly slips away from a dinner party to enjoy a cigarette. However, the Egyptian cigarette, given as a gift, offers strange and mysterious possibilities. Rather than a leisurely smoke, this woman experiences disturbing hallucinations and frightening visions. She finds, through her vision, the deepest despair and, consequently, decides to destroy the remaining five cigarettes. However, the haunting dream involving betrayed love and desperate suicide remains with her. True to her style, Chopin depicts utter despair through symbolic setting and concludes the dream with a suicide by drowning that parallels *The Awakening* in multiple ways. "An Egyptian Cigarette" was written just two months before she started *The Awakening* : part of the story's significance lies in its rehearsal of the novel's images and themes.

The story begins within a normal and conventional dinner party, but the scene quickly changes from the ordinary to the mysterious. The female protagonist, called simply "Madam" in the narrative, receives a gift of cigarettes from her friend, the Architect. According to Chopin, "The Architect, who was something of a traveler, was showing us various curios which he had gathered

during a visit to the Orient" (Chopin 570). The introduction of the worldly architect offers possible surprise and mystery. By naming him simply "the Architect," Chopin keeps his character distanced and removed from the audience. In addition, his name indicates that he builds, constructs, and forms objects. Specifically, he builds the mystery within the tale, and he constructs the dream for the woman. According to Ewell, "he quietly orchestrates the narrator's singular experience, requiring her withdrawal into private meditative space" (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 138). This worldly friend enables the woman to leave the rest of the party and withdraw into her own contemplative solitude. The woman immediately encounters strange and foreign territory as she leaves the party and enters the "exclusively Oriental" smoking den (Chopin 571). Relieved from the "incessant chatter of the women" (Chopin 571), the woman gladly retreats into isolation. Therefore, a leisurely smoke serves as an escape from the tedious social gathering, but it also offers mysterious Oriental sights, smells, sounds, and places.

As the woman inhales her cigarette, she experiences wild visions of foreign places and people. "Madam" sees a desperate woman left by her lover-god, Bardja, and she observes the desolate environment that surrounds the woman, as well. In the dream, the deserted woman cries, "Thus far I followed him; with flying feet; with stumbling feet; with hands and knees, crawling; and outstretched arms, and here I have fallen in the sand" (Chopin 571). Chopin's disjointed language indicates the clouded and delirious thoughts of the speaker. The woman literally begs and pleads "with

hands and knees, crawling." In addition, she envisions herself flying and stumbling, using any means to reach her lover. But her lover deserts her, leaving her hopeless and without strength in the wide desert. The delirious speaker continues by exclaiming, "He will never come back. He turned upon his camel as he rode away. He turned and looked at me crouching here and laughed, showing his gleaming white teeth" (Chopin 571). The lover has not only deserted this woman, he has also laughed at her pain. His image appears evil and sadistic because he enjoys her sadness, his smile baring his animal "gleaming white teeth." Bardja's cruelty increases her pain about their separation. Abandoned in the dry desert, the woman feels beaten, bruised, burned by the sun, and defeated by her lover. She cries, "The sand has blistered my cheek; it has blistered all my body, and the sun is crushing me with hot torture" (Chopin 571). Because she appears "blistered" and "crushed" by the sun's "hot torture," the woman seems oppressed by her emotional and physical pain. The environment tortures the woman, just as her lover has. The never-ending desert offers no rest or peace for the rejected woman, and the natural elements surrounding the woman reflect her hopelessness and defeated mentality. The woman notices, "I hear the wings of a bird flapping above my head, flying low, in circles" (Chopin 572). The bird mimics the woman's delirious and aimless movement with its "flapping" wings and its movement "in circles." Neither the bird nor the woman has any direction.

Desperate in her attempts to escape the suffering, the jilted woman searches for a cool escape from the blistering sun and from

her emotional pain. The woman exclaims, "I laughed at the oracles and scoffed at the stars when they told that after the rapture of life I would open my arms inviting death, and the waters would envelop me" (Chopin 571). The woman experiences the "rapture of life" within her passionate affair, but the mystical oracles foretell her painful future. In order to escape the pain, the woman invites death, receiving it with open arms. Chopin depicts this woman waiting for death as one waits for a lover. She wants the water to penetrate her body and end her pain. The woman cries, "The river is near at hand. I hear it -- I see it -- Oh! The sand! Oh! The shine! How cool! how cold!" (Chopin 572). Fulfilling all her sensory perceptions, the woman experiences relief from the sun and from her suffering. Although she feels the brief panic and strangling terror before death, she ultimately receives death openly. The woman welcomes "the sweet rapture of rest" where the "moon shines and the breeze is soft" (Chopin 572). She views death as a peaceful sleep, a cool and calming dream, and an escape from the scorching sun. The water invites her and tempts her, just as it did the bereaved husband in "Her Letters." But the dying woman sees death as an idyllic garden reminiscent of Eden, with soft breezes and bright moons. Rather than unanswered questions and guilty secrets, the deserted woman finds bliss, beauty, peace, and rest.

Emerging from this horrific dream, "Madam" appears disturbed and unsettled because she has "tasted the depths of human despair" (Chopin 572). Chopin plays upon the "depth" imagery to indicate the drowning death, but she also emphasizes the very pit of the woman's

sorrow. Although the dreamer decides to destroy the remaining cigarettes, she remains shaken by the hallucination. Chopin illustrates, as she does in *The Awakening*, the plight of a betrayed person who refuses to succumb to pain and suffering. In addition, Chopin utilizes essentially the same technique in each of these narratives. According to Ewell, the story's "lyrical prose of the dream vision, moreover, anticipates the subtle incantations of *The Awakening* with its rhythmic repetitions, its brief, sometimes broken, deceptively simple phrasing, and its symbolic details" (Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 140). Parallels between the radiating sun, the low-circling bird, and the ultimate death by drowning link these two stories. Most importantly, these women feel abandoned by their society and alone in their individuality. They cannot live within the boundaries of their present lives; therefore, they end their lives in search of that "immeasurable rest."

Chopin's most famous work, *The Awakening*, involves the same feeling of abandonment and despair, but on a much more realistic and intimate level. Chopin details the life of Edna Pontellier, an outsider to Louisiana Creole culture who remains unhappy due to her restricted sexuality, her limited role as a wife, and her obligation as a mother. As Chopin demonstrates

> Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle . . . They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privelege to efface

> themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. (Chopin 888)

Edna neither idolizes nor worships any other person in her life and, therefore, cannot "efface" herself as an individual. Perhaps the only thing that Edna does esteem as worthy is her own self and individuality. Consequently, Edna remains tormented by her restricted freedom and unsatisfying marriage, and she yearns for sexual and spiritual liberation. Edna finds this freedom in the sea and its sensual embrace, and she responds to the seductive ocean. Edna, like the husband and the rejected lover of the previous stories, swims out in search of rest and peace from the torments of life.

Initially, Chopin depicts Edna's earliest ruminations concerning freedom and sensuality through the recollection of a brief childhood experience. Edna remembers feeling the first bliss of liberation, "running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by [her] father" (Chopin 896). As a young girl, Edna escapes her domineering father and his chilling sermons because they frighten and constrict her. Rather than finding comfort in church or in her father's instruction, Edna recalls only the "spirit of gloom" with which he delivered his speeches. Instead, Edna discovers her own spirituality within her natural environment. Edna recalls escaping her father's gloomy sermon and finding

> a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, whcih was higher than her waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming

> when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water. (Chopin 896)

Edna enjoys the unlimited countryside because it has no boundaries, no fences. Edna, like Mildred Orme from "A Shameful Affair," delights in the expansive scenery and the sensual pleasure of "swimming" through the field. Just as Mildred sees the "swelling acres where the undulating wheat gleamed in the sun like a golden sea" (Chopin 131), Edna remembers her childhood freedom in the unlimited meadow. Most importantly, Edna feels liberated by walking through the meadow because it represents independence and escape. However, by referring to herself as "the very little girl," Edna conveys the distinct differences between herself as a child and as an adult. She describes herself as a foreign, unnamed child-figure, emphasizing her distance from the innocence of childhood. Thus, Edna recognizes that these childhood memories of freedom exist in her own mind but not in adult reality.

Because Edna recalls the exultant feeling of "swimming" through the vast meadow, she yearns to experience that freedom again. Restrained by her husband, her children, and the surrounding Creole society, Edna cannot express her feelings or live life as an individual. Instead, she has lost a sense of her own sensuality and vibrancy because she assumes the expected role as "mother" and "wife." Crying to herself at night, Edna experiences "an indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciouness [filling] her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day"

(Chopin 886). Chopin illustrates Edna's difficulty in identifying her need to escape through the "indescribable oppression" and the "vague anguish" which afflicts her. Edna only suspects the "shadow" of unhappiness within her own soul because she is unfamiliar with part of her own consciouness. In addition, Chopin explains her early discovery as "a certain light [which] was beginning to dawn within her, -- the light which, showing the way, forbids it" (Chopin 893). Chopin utilizes extensive light and sun imagery, depicting the "soul's summer day" and the light "beginning to dawn" within Edna. To Chopin, the soul resembles a natural setting which endures seasons, weather, shadowy darkness, and dawning light. Chopin implies Edna's spiritual awakening to the early light, the awareness of oppression which, "showing the way, forbids it."

Because Edna yearns to escape her confinements, she sees the ocean as the route to freedom. The ocean, like the meadow, represents sensuality and liberty, and it invites Edna to forget her commitments. Edna recognizes the invitation of the seductive sea one night when, after hearing a piano recital by Mademoiselle Reisz, she and the other Grand Isle residents decide to bathe in the ocean at midnight. Intoxicated by the music, Edna notices, "The sea was quiet now, and swelled lazily in broad billows that melted into one another and did not break except upon the beach in little foamy crests that coiled back like slow, white serpents" (Chopin 908). Rather than intimidating and violent, the ocean appears smooth and gentle. Edna, who has attempted to swim all summer, does not experience fear when facing the calm and quiet sea. Instead, the sea invites her with

its lazy movements and coiling crests on the shore. In addition, the undulant waves "melt" and blend into one another, defying any set pattern or course. Edna admires the ocean for its defiance of order, and she longs to join the luxurious water.

However, Chopin depicts the unthreatening and unbreaking ocean differently when it meets the beach and forms small crests. Chopin suggests an underlying image of evil through the "slow, white serpents" which call Edna into the water. But the promise of freedom and sensual pleasure overcomes Edna, and she finally swims out gracefully, easily, and naturally.

> She turned her face seaward to gather in an impression of space and solitude, which the vast expanse of water, meeting and melting with the moonlit sky, conveyed to her excited fancy. As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself. (Chopin 908)

Reminiscent of her childhood vision of the wide meadow, the "vast expanse of water" gives Edna an "impression of space and solitude." Chopin illustrates the unlimited horizon as a symbol of Edna's freedom because it allows her to exist as an individual, solitary and isolated. Furthermore, Chopin reiterates the image of the sea "melting" into the sky and defying physical barriers. Likewise, Edna swims out into the ocean to reach "the unlimited in which to lose herself" because she wants to elude social restictions. Edna longs to immerse herself in the sensual sea in order to experience a freedom which is forbidden in her society.

Although Edna returns to shore after her midnight swim, she cannot forget the exultation she felt while enveloped in the ocean. Within her own traditional world, Edna seeks the same sensuality, freedom, and isolation she experienced in the water but realizes the impossibility of her search. Because the conventional Creole society demands that Edna become a "mother-woman," she cannot find the independence she desires. Weakened by her struggle to elude her social obligations, Edna inevitably returns to the seductive ocean. Near the end of the novel, she faces the ocean in search of "a way to elude" (Chopin 999) the antagonistic aspects of her life.

> The water of the gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water. (Chopin 999).

Again, Chopin describes the vast expanse of the sea as an image of release and boundless space. The lights on the water resemble the millions of stars in the boundless sky, making the ocean seem like a vast universe in which to explore. Chopin portrays the sea as an "abyss of solitude" in which Edna can assert her own individuality. The water invites and teases Edna, "whispering, clamoring, [and] murmuring" for her to discover its freedom. Just as the water seduces the mourning husband and the deserted lover in previous

stories, the ocean tempts Edna with its promises. She wants nothing more than to remain alone, free from the demands of her family and society. Exhausted both emotionally and physically, Edna resembles the bird with the broken wing, "reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down." Chopin reproduces this image from "An Egyptian Cigarette" in which the deserted woman observes the "bird flapping above . . . flying low, in circles." Through the bird image, Chopin illustrates the same feeling of desperation in both Edna and the abandoned lover. Edna, like the bird, inevitably moves "down to the water" because she has no other place to turn.

Again, Chopin's imagery involving the sea reflects the influence of romantic writers, especially Walt Whitman. Because Chopin figures the sea as a seductive image which whispers, murmurs, and drives Edna to suicide, her language clearly resembles Whitman's depiction of the sea in his "Sea-Drift" poems. Specifically, Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly-Rocking" describes the ocean as a tempting force which suggests death to the poet. Whitman asks the ocean

> Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
> Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?
> Whereto answering, the sea,
> Delaying not, hurrying not,
> Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,
> Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,

And again death, death, death, death. (163-169)

Whitman's image of the sea focuses upon its whispers, lisping suggestions, and "delicious" messages. He portrays the ocean as calm, unceasing, and unhurried in its repetitive voice. In addition, the water continues whispering through the night and day to complete its mission. Whitman's sea, like Chopin's, repeats the final word "death" in its incessant waves. Although Whitman's poet does not end his life in the ocean, the suggestion of death directly parallels Chopin's focus on the sea.

Furthermore, since the water invites Edna seductively, she responds to the ocean as she would to a lover. She excitedly accepts the water because the "touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (Chopin 1000). As the water seductively calls Edna, it envelopes her within its "soft, close embrace." She enjoys the sensations of its touch and caress as she swims through the water and finds what Helen Emmit calls the "familiar unknown [and] the only lover who remains constant, the sea" (Emmitt 324).

As Edna leaves her conventional life behind, she enters this "familiar unknown," swims far out to sea, and accepts death. Chopin explains, "She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end" (Chopin 1000). Remembering her childhood, Edna seems determined to regain her youthful freedom and escape her adult life. Once more, Chopin depicts the meadow and the sea together, indicating their inherent

freedom and limitless space. Edna searches for this liberty by immersing herself in these media. As she swims, Edna feels the ache in her muscles and the fatigue in her body. She knows that she will not regain the shore again. She has gone too far from land, and her body is too tired to swim back.

As her body loses strength and her swimming slows, Edna remembers her childhood and its confining restictions.

> Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to a sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air. (Chopin 1000)

As Chopin drifts out of consciousness, she also drifts away from her confining life. She eludes her demanding father and her matronly sister. The chains that hold the dog cannot hold Edna any longer. Instead, she returns to her passionate youth and remembers the young cavalry officer whom she once loved. She realizes that even his spurs cannot hurt her anymore. And as Edna slips away she hears the "hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks." She experiences summer smells and sounds from a time when she was free and young. Like, the abandoned woman from "An Egyptian Cigarette," Edna sees death as an idyllic scene, full of beauty and peace. Edna, through death, finally eludes the demands of her adult life and regains her solitude, reasserts her own sexual individuality, and returns to the freedom of her childhood.

Because Edna becomes frustrated with the traditional society surrounding her, she openly rebels against religious authority, social roles, and marital codes. As Chopin demonstrates, Edna "apprehended instinctively the dual life -- that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin 893). Like Archibald in "A Morning Walk," Edna understands the "life that is within and the life that is without" (Chopin 569). Although Edna supposedly adheres to the established rules, she defies the traditions which surround her. Edna runs away from her father's chilling sermons, evades her obligations as a wife, and resists her role as a mother. Furthermore, she asserts her own sexuality by engaging in extramarital affairs and surrounding herself with the sensual sea. Most significantly, Edna struggles to attain the ideals which Chopin applauds in all of her short stories: natural spirituality, unrestricted sexuality, and individual liberty. However, because these beliefs remain impossible in her society, Edna resorts to suicide and escapes the torments of her limited existence.

Since Edna opposes all aspects of restrictive society, she embodies Chopin's philosophy which criticizes confining social traditions. Chopin combines all of her arguments against conservative culture in *The Awakening*, but she also focuses upon personal freedom within the natural setting. By utilizing natural imagery, Chopin portrays the wilderness and the environment as a refuge from limited social rules. As in all of

her narratives, short stories, and novels, Chopin celebrates the natural, instinctive aspects of humanity and yearns for an absolute union with the Supreme Being. Chopin continually searches her own soul for "something big, satisfying, convincing" (Toth 205); her moments of self-discovery remain the truly intuitive, genuine elements of her literature.

Works Cited

Baker, Christopher. "Chopin's 'The Storm.'" *Explicator* Vol. 52 (Summer1994): 225-226.

Brown, Pearl L. "Kate Chopin's Fiction: Order and Disorder in a Stratified Society." *Kate Chopin's Fiction.* pp.119-134. (Consulted)

Candela, Gregory L. "Walt Whitman and Kate Chopin: A Further Connection." *Walt Whitman Review.* Vol. 24. Wayne State University Press, 1978. pp.163-165.

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

Day, Karen. "The Elsewhere of Female Sexuality and Desire in Kate Chopin's 'A Vocation and a Voice.'" *Louisiana Literature* . Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1994). pp. 108-117. (Consulted)

Dyer, Joyce Coyne. "Epiphanies Through Nature in the Stories of Kate Chopin." *University of Dayton Review,* 16:3 (1983-84): 75-81.

Dyer, Joyce Coyne. "Night Images in the Work of Kate Chopin." *American Literary Realism, 1870 - 1910* . Vol. 14, No. 2 (Autumn 1981). pp. 216-230.

Dyer, Joyce Coyne. "Symbolic Setting in Kate Chopin's 'A Shameful Affair.'" *Southern Studies* . Vol. 20, No. 4 (Winter 1981). pp. 447-452.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson.* Ed. Stephen E. Whicher. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957.

Emmit, Helen V. "Drowned in a Willing Sea: Freedom and Drowning in Eliot, Chopin, and Drabble." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. Vol. 12, No. 2 (Fall 1993). pp. 315-332.

Ewell, Barbara C. "Making Places: Kate Chopin and the Art of Fiction." *Louisiana Literature* . Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1994). pp. 157-171.

Ewell, Barbara C. *Kate Chopin* . New York: Ungar Publishing, 1986.

Lupton, Mary Jane. "Women Writers and Death By Drowning." *Amid Visions and Revisions: Poetry and Criticism on Literature and the Arts* . Ed. Burney T. Hollis. Morgan State University Press: Baltimore,Md. 1985.

McMahan, Elizabeth. "Nature's Decoy: Kate Chopin's Presentation of Women and Marriage in Her Short Fiction." *Turn of the Century Women* . Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 1985). pp. 32-35. (Consulted)

Padgett, Jaqueline Olson. "Kate Chopin and the Literature of the Annunciation, With a Reading of Lilacs." *Louisiana Literature* . Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1994). pp. 97-107.

Papke, Mary E. *Verging on the Abyss: the Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton* . New York: Greenwood Press, 1990.

Radcliff-Umstead, Douglass. "Literature of Deliverance: Images of Nature in *The Awakening* ." *Southern Studies* . Vol. 20, No. 4. (Summer 1990) pp. 127-147. (Consulted)

Roscher, Marina L. "The Suicide of Edna Pontellier: An Ambiguous Ending?" *Southern Studies*. Vol. 23, No. 3. (Fall 1984) pp. 289-298. (Consulted)

Ryu, Chung-Eun. "Nature and Sexuality in the Fiction of Kate Chopin." *English Language and Literature* . Vol. 35, No. 1 (1989) 131-147.

Seyersted, Per. *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. Ed. Sculley Bradley. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1973.