

Marital Infidelity in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*

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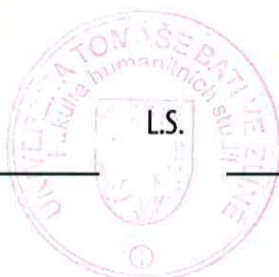
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje, jakým způsobem je manželská nevěra v dílech Kate Chopinové *Probuzení* (1899) a Willy Catherová *Ztracená* (1923) v rozporu s rolemi ženy v 19. století v Americe. První část práce se zabývá historickým a kulturním pozadím 19. století, přičemž definuje role ženy. Druhá část práce je věnována autorům a analýze románů, která porovnává ženské protagonisty se společenskými ideály, které jsou představeny v pozadí.

Klíčová slova: Kate Chopin, *Probuzení*, Willa Cather, *Ztracená*, role ženy v americké společnosti v 19. století, manželská nevěra

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis analyses how the marital infidelity in the novels *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin and *A Lost Lady* (1923) by Willa Cather contradicts women's roles in 19th century American society. The first part of the thesis focuses on the historical and cultural background of the 19th century while defining the role of a woman. The second part of the thesis is devoted to the authors and the novel's analysis, comparing the female protagonist to the societal ideals presented in the background.

Keywords: Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, Willa Cather, *The Lost Lady*, the role of woman in the American society in the 19th century, marital infidelity

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

The 19th century in America was remarked by the rapid change, industrialization, and urbanization. Since the production moved from farms to factories and cities, society separated the world into the public and private spheres. And since the world was rough for a weak and delicate creature, as the woman was viewed, she moved from fields and farm to home, the domestic sphere, where their primary roles were defined as a mother and wife.

This thesis explores how the marital infidelity of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* (1899) and Marian Forrester in *A Lost Lady* (1923) challenges woman's roles and ideals while seeking independence and autonomy.

To analyze the two novels, the thesis firstly defines a woman's role in the American society of the 19th century. There are two ideals of womanhood presented. The "True Woman" defines womanhood as placing women in the domestic sphere, primarily to find fulfillment as a wife and a mother. Then, the "New Woman" challenges these ideas by demanding greater freedom and independence. The analysis shows how marital infidelity contradicts the ideal role of a woman in 19th-century American society.

**I. THEORETICAL
AND
HISTORICAL-
CULTURAL
BACKGROUND**

1 VICTORIAN AMERICA

Named in honor of Queen Victoria of Great Britain, the Victorian era refers to the 19th- and early 20th-century decades of rapid change, growing industrialization, tragedy, and triumph. Although historians refer to the Victorian era as a period between 1837 and 1901, Victorianism's culture and customs remain in America until the outbreak of the First World War.

Between the 1820s and 1860s, the growth of the industry and independent businesses helped create a new middle class in America. The middle class was represented by families whose husbands worked as lawyers, teachers, physicians, factory managers, and other professions. In the preindustrial society, the family had to produce on its own what was needed to survive. While nineteenth-century middle-class men could have a job in services, their wives stayed at home with the children. The middle-class family represented “the backbone of society.” The idea that the man alone should support the family has emerged, because it was believed that the public sphere was a “rough world” and that only man could do what it takes to succeed. Furthermore, since women were viewed as “weak and delicate creatures,” they were meant to take charge of the private sphere and stay at home¹. With that being said, women lost the power they had in preindustrial society, as they made significant contributions to family productivity since most of the work took place within the home. They even produced cash income by selling cheese and eggs and spinning and weaving.²

1.1 The Victorian Woman

During the early 1800s, young women were often limited to the basic knowledge needed to run the household, and only the fortunate ones learned to read and write. With the beginning of the Victorian period, increasing wealth of the upper class and growing middle class, the household chores were increasingly performed by a domestic servant. By the end of the Victorian era, more attention was brought to female intellect and accomplishment, which referred to the ability to speak French, sing, and master an a music instrument. In his manual *Sphere and Duties of Woman* (1848), George Burnap stressed the importance of domestic chores:

¹ Lavender, “Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood,” 1.

² Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 15.

I place the education to domestic duties first, as essential and indispensable. No woman is educated and is not equal to the successful management of a family. Although it does not require so much talent to rule a household as it does to govern a state, still it requires talents of the same kind.³

These became, after all, insufficient when the reality of the industrializing society hit. By the late 1840s, it became common for female students to seek interest in logic, mathematics, geography, history, and ancient languages. Also, letter writing and calligraphy were popular. Mathematics was fundamental in the South, where young women would keep records on the plantation.⁴

Growing up, girls were expected to dedicate their time to the practice of sewing, needlepoint, and knitting. Moreover, she took on other responsibilities within the domestic sphere of the household. To support and encourage the young girl on her road to “moral righteousness,” advice manuals, which guided a woman in every phase of her life, became popular. Several books for female readers, along with *What a Young Girl Ought to Know*, *What a Young Woman Ought to Know*, *What a Young Wife Ought to Know*, and *What a Woman of 45 Ought to Know*, were written during the late 1800s by Mrs. Mary Wood-Allen, M.D., and Mrs. Emma F.A. Drake, M.D. With the increasing popularity of these manuals and the fact that reading was a sign of cultivation, many authors wrote and published an average of 50 etiquette books per decade during the last 30 years of the 19th century. Such manuals focus on directing the young girls to make good and fitting wives and ideal mothers, leading them through the art of conversation, self-control, and perseverance. In short, as Ellen M. Plante put it, “she would be well suited to fulfill her predetermined role and ultimately act as a moral guardian of society and its future generations.”⁵ Among other books and magazines that helped women navigate through life, *The Young Lady’s Friend*, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, and *Letters to Young Ladies* could be mentioned.

“To man, the world and all there is in it is valuable, so beautiful, is worth living for, only because it is enriched by the presence of woman,” appeared in *Sphere and Duties of Woman* (1848).⁶ A new ideal of womanhood, called “the cult of domesticity” or “the True Womanhood,” arose from new attitudes about work, family, and home and provided a

³ Burnap, *Sphere and Duties of Woman*, 130.

⁴ Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, 7.

⁵ Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, 2-4.

⁶ Burnap, *Sphere and Duties of Woman*, 52.

different view on women's duty and role in society.⁷ "Woman, in the cult of True Womanhood presented by the women's magazines, gift annuals, and religious literature of the nineteenth century, was the hostage in the home."⁸

1.1.1 The True Woman

In a landmark 1966 essay by Barbara Welter, this new "Cult of True Womanhood" was divided into four cardinal virtues "any good and proper young woman should cultivate"⁹ and by which "[she] would judge herself and be judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society" – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. No matter the fame, achievement, or wealth, a woman had no value without the four virtues. With them, she was promised to be happy and powerful.¹⁰

Piety or religion was believed to be the core virtue of giving a woman strength and salvation for a restless mind. "Religion belonged to a woman by divine right, a gift of God and nature."¹¹ She would be another, better "Eve working with God to bring the world out of sin through her suffering, through her pure, and passionless love."¹² Religion was valued because it did not take a woman away from her "domestic sphere." As some social activities or movements could take her attention away, "church would not make her less domestic or submissive, less a True Woman."¹³ As Lavender mentions in her notes, "irreligion in females was considered the most revolting human characteristic."¹⁴

If there be one curse more bitter than another to man, it is to be the offspring of an irreligious home; of a home where the voice of praise and prayer ascends not to God, and where the ties of human affection are not purified and elevated by the refining influence of religious feeling

appeared in *The Lady's Token* (1848).¹⁵ "Women were warned not to let their literary or intellectual pursuit take them away from God."¹⁶ Sarah Josepha Hale mentioned noted Transcendentalist author and women's rights advocate Margaret Fuller, the author of *Woman*

⁷ Lavender, "Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood," 1.

⁸ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 151.

⁹ Lavender, "Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood," 2.

¹⁰ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 152.

¹¹ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 152.

¹² Lavender, "Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood," 1.

¹³ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 152.

¹⁴ Lavender, "Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood," 2.

¹⁵ Pinckney, *The Lady's Token*, 75.

¹⁶ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 153.

in the Nineteenth Century (1845), as an example of a woman who “abandoned the only safe guide in her search for truth.” According to Hale, Mrs. Fuller was proof “that the greater the intellectual force, the greater and more fatal the errors into which women fall who wader from the Rock of Salvation, Christ the Saviour....”¹⁷

Purity was as crucial to a young woman as piety. Without sexual purity, a woman was “unnatural and unfeminine,” a member of some lower order, or a “fallen angel.”¹⁸ A woman’s greatest treasure, her virginity, must be guarded until her marriage night, which was presented as “the greatest night in a woman’s life” in popular literature, hence why it should be guarded and she should remain pure and chaste despite any male attempt to assault her.¹⁹ After the marriage night, the wife was utterly dependent on her husband.²⁰ If a woman under any circumstances lost her purity, she was predestinated to become a premature prostitute left in silence and dying alone.

On the other hand, female purity was viewed as a weapon, the only power coming through her sexual virtue, used to control men’s sexual desires and needs. In this context, Catherine J. Lavender gives an example of a quote from a famous lady’s magazine: “the man bears rules over his wife’s person and conduct. She bears rule over his inclinations: he governs by law; she by persuasion ... The empire of women is the empire of softness, her commands are caresses, her menaces are tears.”²¹

During the early nineteenth century, the purity fetish permeated American culture. It touched the everyday language and even decorating. Americans started referring to legs as limbs, even when talking about the legs of a chair. Women started covering the limbs of tables and pianos so no one would be reminded of their legs. Proper women also separated books of male authors from the books written by women unless the authors were married to each other.²²

The most feminine virtue of all was submissiveness. Even though men were supposed to be religious or moral, excuses were made for them when they went astray. Nevertheless, men never were supposed to be submissive. A man was “woman’s superior by God’s appointment,” so the wife was supposed to submit to him. Women were warned they would

¹⁷ Hale, *Woman’s Record*, 666.

¹⁸ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 154.

¹⁹ Lavender, “Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood,” 2.

²⁰ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 155.

²¹ Lavender, “Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood,” 2.

²² Lavender, “Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood,” 2.

interfere with the order of the Universe if they tampered with this quality.²³ *The Young Lady's Book* (1830) summarizes the importance of passive obedient virtue to its readers as “in whatever situation of life a woman is placed, from her cradle to her grave, a spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of mind, are required from her [...]”²⁴ In *The Sphere and Duties of Woman* (1848), George Burnap wrote:

She needs a protector. [...] She is in a measure dependent. She asks for wisdom, constancy, firmness, and perseverance, and she is willing to repay it all by surrendering the full treasure of her affection. Women despise in men everything like themselves except a tender heart. It is enough that she is effeminate and weak; she does not want another like herself.²⁵

Also, in *The Lady's Token* (1848) is the importance of submissiveness and passivity stressed in “The Direction for Ladies”: “a wife should never employ any other arms than gentleness. When a woman has accustomed herself to say I will, she deserves to lose her empire.”²⁶ George Burnap refers to a woman's life as “a series of suppressed emotions.”²⁷

Submissiveness and passivity were also projected in the clothing women were supposed to wear, or as Burnap calls it, “the senseless tyranny of fashion in dress”²⁸ since the garments were composed of tight corsets pinching “her inner organs together.”²⁹ The smaller the waist, the better, followed by “full-skirted dresses with enormous puff sleeves,” limiting their mobility. Women were warned throughout the century about the dangers of tight lacings, such as ribs overlapping or breathing restrictions. However, they were influenced by the concept of beauty presented in then-popular magazines depicting “angellike creatures with expressions of childlike innocence and tiny features.”³⁰

The last virtue was domesticity. A woman's place was in the home. As the work left home and the family lost its function as an economic unit, which means that the production was no longer part of the household and family was more focused on the socialization of children. The Cult of Domesticity developed whereby “women remained in the home, as a kind of cultural hostage.”³¹ The world of outside employment was defined as male, and therefore

²³ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 158-159.

²⁴ *The Young Lady's Book*, 28.

²⁵ Burnap, *Sphere and Duties of Woman*, 47.

²⁶ Pinckney, *The Lady's Token*, 119.

²⁷ Burnap, *Sphere and Duties of Woman*, 172.

²⁸ Burnap, *Sphere and Duties of Woman*, 163.

²⁹ Lavender, “Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood,” 3.

³⁰ Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, 126.

³¹ Lavender, “Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood,” 3.

the world of the home became defined as female. “From her home, woman performed her great task of bringing men back to God.” A woman was supposed to make the home a pleasant place, so that “brothers, husbands, and sons would not go elsewhere in search of a good time.” One of the essential roles of a woman at home was, besides being a mother and a comforter, the role of a nurse. Even though she was believed to be the weaker sex with more delicate health, the nineteenth-century housewife soon acquired much experience nursing her children and husband back to health. Her “higher qualities of patience, mercy, and gentleness” proved helpful while caring for the sick. According to Barbara Welter, nursing sick males increased a woman’s influence and made her feel “useful and accomplished.”³²

1.1.2 Marriage

As Barbara Welter mentions in her work: “marriage was the proper state for the exercise of the domestic virtues.”³³ George Burnap shared his view on marriage in *Sphere and Duties of Woman* (1848):

[Marriage is a] sphere for which [woman] was originally intended, and which she is so exactly fitted to adorn and bless, as the wife, the mistress of a home, the solace, the aid, and the counsellor of that ONE, for whose sake alone the world is of any consequence to her.³⁴

Marriage was a way to improve a woman’s character by offering her higher aims and an honorable position in society. However, it was advised to stay better single than marry an unsuitable suitor and live in suffering and despair. A suitable suitor would be an intelligent, thoughtful, and economic young man, in addition to being a good son and devoted brother. Regarding the courting, young girls in the North were allowed to socialize starting at the age of 16 by attending dances, balls, theater performances, or picnics where they had the opportunity to mingle with the opposite sex. In contrast, the social circles were smaller in the South, and marriage between cousins was not unusual.³⁵ Besides keeping company with a gentleman of a good character, which was important, it was hoped that the young people would become involved with someone within the same religion and socially equal. If otherwise, the husband was supposed to be superior to the wife, so she did not have to honor

³² Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 162-164.

³³ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 169.

³⁴ Burnap, *Sphere and Duties of Woman*, 64.

³⁵ Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, 13-15.

someone she was societally compelled to look down upon.³⁶ Even though her role as a wife was idealistically described in the literature of the 19th century as “a pinnacle of her existence,” cherishing her home and nurturing her husband, this did not always meet with the reality of the dreary household work and responsibilities that were expected from her.³⁷

1.1.3 Motherhood

Motherhood, which anchored the stereotypical middle-class woman to the home, was celebrated throughout the 19th century as the highest achievement for her. Despite the reality of pregnancy and childbirth being associated with danger and infant mortality, women believed that “pregnancy and childbirth would make them stronger and prevent physical problems later in life.”³⁸ America depended on her women to bring up a whole generation of Christians since the father’s job was to make money and take care of the family financially.³⁹ Joys and sorrows relating to one’s children would influence the rest of her life, and the character of her children would determine whether she had succeeded as a mother. Ideally, her upbringing and moral nature would help frame the children’s character to make the family proud – usually including the extended family of her and her husband.⁴⁰ The “Ideal Mother” was expected to be an “efficient caretaker in relation to children and home” while taking care of the family finances, preparing food, and serving as a nurse and emotional supporter.⁴¹

It would be expected to refer to the Victorian family as patriarchal, but as Daniel Scott Smith in his study (1973) suggests, it is more suitable to think of it as a matriarchal. Men may be more powerful within the family, but it was as husbands, not as fathers.⁴² Mothers and mothers’ love were often subjects of 19th-century songs, poetry, and fiction. In an essay called “A Mother’s Love,” written by an anonymous writer published in the issue of *Godey’s Ladies Book* in January 1867, the author compared the mother to martyrdom, suggesting that mothers were perceived as celestial or angelic beings. Many other authors praised their mothers in their writings and the mother’s ability to raise children of a moral character.⁴³

³⁶ Hill, *Hill’s Manual of Social and Business Form*, 158-159.

³⁷ Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, 27.

³⁸ Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, 69.

³⁹ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 171.

⁴⁰ Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, 70.

⁴¹ Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 199

⁴² Smith, “Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America,” 47-48.

⁴³ Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, 70.

Toward the late 1800s, there was an overall decrease in the birthrate in the United States, from an average of 7 children per family to 3 children per family by 1910. By the late 19th century, periodic sexual abstinence, protective sheaths, and special douches were helping to control and lower the birthrate. Also, coitus interruptus, a practice involving the control of male sexuality, was not unusual. That may suggest that women were strengthening their position within the family rather than within the society.⁴⁴

1.1.4 Sexism and Ideology

Women were believed to be different from men, both physically and mentally, based on observations such as women being generally physically shorter, men having better stamina, or women menstruating, making them “physically incapacitated.” Overall, women were believed to be more delicate and weaker than men thanks to the “unpredictable nature of the female reproductive system.” It was also assumed that women have smaller, more primitive brains than men, connecting this to intelligence.⁴⁵ When it comes to sexuality, until the late 19th-century, sexual feelings were often believed to be absent in women, and sexual passion was feared since it was linked to insanity. Fearful of their sexual impulses, women carried that energy into a psychosomatic illness that caused hysteria.⁴⁶

In the nineteenth century, hysteria was defined as a female disease arising from “emotionally charged behavior that seems excessive and out of control” caused by uterus movement.⁴⁷ The symptoms of hysteria could vary from nervousness, depression, crying, and chronic to the most characteristic and dramatic symptom, the hysterical “fit,” similar to an epileptic seizure. Many nineteenth-century doctors believed that hysteria is rooted in a woman’s nature and tied to her reproductive cycle. It was believed that hysteria starts with puberty and ends with menopause. Hysteria was also tied to female sexuality, and doctors believed that masturbation or excess sexual intercourse, even within marriage, could lead to hysteria and insanity. Later, the symptoms defining hysteria could include every ill human since they went from a loss of taste, smell, hearing, and vision to headache, nausea, and pain in the spine or neck. Moreover, they were no longer only physical as sudden mood changes or overly dramatic could also be defined as hysterical. Mainly, the hysterical woman could not meet society's expectations when it came to fulfilling the proper role of a wife or mother, as

⁴⁴ Smith, “Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America,” 40-57

⁴⁵ Lavender, “Notes on The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood,” 3.

⁴⁶ Smith-Rosenberg, “The Hysterical Woman,” 653.

⁴⁷ Cherry, “What is Hysteria?”

many of them were forced to take their bed because of their “pain or general weakness” and remain there for years.⁴⁸

1.2 The New Woman

The New Woman ideal emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century, representing a contemporary and modern understanding of femininity demanding greater freedom and independence. Also identified as a Gibson Girl, a suffragist, a bicyclist, a flapper, or a Hollywood vamp, the New Woman referred to both real women as well as to “an abstract idea or visual archetype” challenging gender norms and structures through “work, education, entertainment, and politics.”⁴⁹ Rejecting the Cult of True Womanhood in ways their mothers could not, the New Woman was a “single, highly educated, economically autonomous” woman who “threatened men in ways her mother never could.”⁵⁰ The phrase came to attention thanks to writers Sarah Grand and Ouida after their publications in the *North American Review*.⁵¹ Later, the term was popularized by American writer Henry James, who used it “to refer to an American woman of affluence and sensitivity.”⁵² The New Woman was very often positioned as a contrary to the Victorian ideals and “the True Woman,” yet the New Woman “did not express a unified message regarding women’s changing roles.” More likely, she represented “a spectrum of visual expressions and behaviors” rather than a single image. Therefore, every woman could shape her understanding of the New Woman based on the interest she wanted to promote.⁵³

The avatar of the New Woman called Gibson Girl, after her creator, the artist Charles Dana Gibson, that very often appeared in the magazines at that time, was portrayed wearing “a high-collared white shirtwaist blouse, tucked into a plain dark skirt” that stopped at the ankle. That created an “all-purpose outfit” convenient enough to wear when riding a bicycle and going hiking or camping.⁵⁴ Since it was not possible to ride its sidesaddle, the bicycle became a symbol for the emerging feminists and woman’s rights advocates, offering women the

⁴⁸ Smith-Rosenberg, “The Hysterical Woman,” 659-669.

⁴⁹ Rabinovitch-Fox, “New Women in Early 20th-Century America.”

⁵⁰ Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 245.

⁵¹ Rabinovitch-Fox, “New Women in Early 20th-Century America.”

⁵² Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 176.

⁵³ Rabinovitch-Fox, “New Women in Early 20th-Century America.”

⁵⁴ Matthews, *The Rise of The New Woman*, 14.

opportunity of exercise and mobility.⁵⁵ The shirtwaist was revolutionary in clothing production as it was “one of the first articles of women’s dress to be mass-produced.”⁵⁶

1.2.1 Marriage, Motherhood, and Career

Women’s lives were changing at the end of the 19th century, most visibly so for daughters of the middle and upper classes as the female education was expanding and the secondary school system was growing. By 1900 most of the universities, except those in Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana, admitted women on the same terms as men. The number of women undergraduates was growing, as seen at the University of Chicago, where the 40% of women undergraduates in 1910 increased to almost 50% in 1920. Such numbers show that women expanded their horizons outside of the domestic circle. “White, native-born women joined white foreign-born and black women in the labor force for the first time [...]. These women were increasingly found in the previously male domains of business and the professions.”⁵⁷ After graduating from college, women lost interest in returning to the domestic sphere and marriage. Throughout the 1870s and 1920s, when only 10 percent of American females decided not to marry, 40 to 60 percent of these women were college graduates and chose instead to experiment with an “alternative lifestyle” and “single-sex familial institutions.”⁵⁸

Believing in an independent life and career, the New Women faced the decision of whether to marry or not. Apart from their mothers, they did have the option of choice. Many decided to stay in long-lasting partnerships with other women who may or may not have had a sexual component to pursue their careers more efficiently. While certainly not all New Women were ready to leave behind the idea of heterosexual marriage and motherhood, a marriage filled with real intimacy and companionship would now be a choice for many women rather than an economic necessity.⁵⁹

In her essay “*My ‘Partner’ in Law and Life*”: *Marriage in the Lives of Women Lawyers in Late 19th- and Early 20th- Century America* (1989), Virginia G. Drachman studied how women juggled their marriage lives with the practice of law, and from the small sample (approximately 200 lawyers) she surveyed from the Equity Club, club for women practising law, she figured that to keep practicing the law during the second half of the 19th century,

⁵⁵ Rabinovitch-Fox, “New Women in Early 20th-Century America.”

⁵⁶ Matthews, *The Rise of The New Woman*, 14.

⁵⁷ Lavender, “Notes on New Womanhood,” 1.

⁵⁸ Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 253-255.

⁵⁹ Matthews, *The Rise of The New Woman*, 98.

women lawyers chose to stay single. Alternatively, it was more convenient for them to marry a lawyer and work with him if they got married. By 1920, the new generation of women rejected the idea of a “singular definition of womanhood,” and the Equity Club welcomed more than 1500 members. According to a survey done in 1920 in an all-women organization, The Bureau of Vocational Information, Drachman pointed out that even with the growing number of women working in the law field, almost 50% of asked believed that women, when married, should give up her career and stay at home. While the other half revised the idea of the Victorian view believing that, if married, a woman should sacrifice her career only when young children occur. Therefore, they would gravitate toward the role of a mother rather than a role of a wife.⁶⁰

Since the women tended to marry older men with advanced careers to “have it all,” they would eventually give up their own careers to follow their partner’s career path. Moreover, after becoming mothers, it became challenging to attain the same level of power and prestige as their husbands.⁶¹ On the other hand, husbands were emerging as the “new men” who supported their wife’s careers by financing their graduate studies or engaging in the “business of rearing their children.”⁶²

1.2.2 Suffragettes and Feminists

Even before the Civil War, a few women began to rebel against the assumption of the “domestic sphere” and that women must stay at home because “nature had destined them to spend their lives as the behind-the-scenes support staff.” By 1848 an organized “Woman’s Rights” movement came to live “demanding full citizenship right, including the right to vote, along with economic opportunities and access to all areas of modern life on an equality with men.”⁶³

In her interview with Nellie Bly in 1896, Susan B. Anthony describes how she met Elizabeth Cady Stanton and joined her when advocating the rights of divorce for women. “But a wife had no right to her wages, her children, or what property she had brought into the partnership. Everything belonged to the husband.” In 1860 they “got the Legislature to pass the law,” but in 1866 was banned. When asked if she ever loses hope, she replied:” Never! I know God

⁶⁰ Drachman, “My “Partner” in Law and Life,” 221-50.

⁶¹ Matthews, *The Rise of The New Woman*, 99.

⁶² Matthews, *The Rise of The New Woman*, 101.

⁶³ Matthews, *The Rise of The New Woman*, 6-7.

never made a woman to be bossed by a man.” To answer the question of her greatest ambition, she responded: “The right to vote.”⁶⁴

In 1869, two organizations came to life; the National Woman Suffrage Association created by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her colleague Susan B. Anthony and the American Woman Suffrage Association was created by Lucy Stone and her husband. Even though each association had different plans and strategies, the central role for both was the women’s right to vote. By questioning the “separate spheres” and the Victorian tenet, the idea of women voters became controversial. Thus, to soften it up, the term “the advancement of women” was used to attract those hesitant to attend the “women’s rights” movement. Annual conferences were held in different cities promoting the “financial independence of women.” After the Civil War, women’s possibilities expanded.⁶⁵ The women’s right to vote came later with the Nineteenth Amendment in August 1920.

Coming from the French, the new word “feminism” appeared in 1909. Feminism broad a more radical and more fundamental aspect of the women’s movement than did suffrage. Defined by “liberation,” feminists believed in “full citizenship of women” that asserted “equality in the state, on the job, and their personal relationship.” Some feminists put it: “All feminists are suffragists, but not all suffragists are feminists.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴Bly, “Champion Of Her Sex.”

⁶⁵ Matthews, *The Rise of The New Woman*, 6-8.

⁶⁶ Matthews, *The Rise of The New Woman*, 104.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE TWO NOVELS

2 KATE CHOPIN AND WILLA CATHER

This chapter is dedicated to the biographies of both authors, Kate Chopin and Willa Cather. Born twenty-three years earlier, Kate Chopin started her career as a writer in her late thirties and was known for emphasizing the local color in her stories. On the other hand, Willa Cather started to write and publish her stories during the time she studied at the University of Nebraska. Cather was aware of Chopin, particularly of her novel *The Awakening*, as she reviewed in the *Leader* magazine. Cather was later known for her novel about frontier life. The most useful literature sources were Emily Toth's *Kate Chopin* (1990) and Edward K. Brown's *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (1953) for this chapter.

2.1 Kate Chopin

According to most biographers, Katherine O'Flaherty was born in St. Louis on February 8, 1851. However, as Emily Toth in Kate Chopin's biography pointed out, it is possible that Katherine O'Flaherty was born a year earlier. Katherine was the daughter of an Irish emigrant Thomas O'Flaherty and his wife, Eliza, coming from an old French Creole⁶⁷ family.⁶⁸ The influence of her French heritage and Creole temperament manifested in *The Awakening* as the main protagonist Edna Pontellier marries a Creole and is impressed by "their absence of prudery."⁶⁹ Kate's great-grandmother, Madame Charleville, significantly influenced Kate's upbringing as she began to teach Kate, insisting that she would speak and write French well. Madame Charleville's curriculum also included piano lessons. Music had been a suitable accomplishment for young ladies, and later, Kate Chopin would pay for extra piano lessons at school. Chopin admired playing piano so profoundly that in her first published short story, "Wiser Than a God," a pianist would give up a young man's love for her art. Moreover, in *The Awakening*, Chopin described the excellent piano playing of Mademoiselle Reisz.⁷⁰

Madame Charleville taught Kate through storytelling. Her stories about women "torn between morality and freedom, convention and desire" showed Chopin that the "bragging oratory of men" is not the only way to tell a story and encouraged her to tell her own stories.

⁶⁷ According to Cambridge dictionary, Creole is a white person descendent of the original group of Spanish and French people coming to Caribbean or Louisiana. *Cambridge Dictionary*, s. v. "Creole," accessed April 30, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/creole>.

⁶⁸ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 24-27.

⁶⁹ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 14.

⁷⁰ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 35.

According to Madame Charleville, women with a “trained eye for details and hidden meaning and ironic twists” could be the best storytellers.⁷¹

At the age of seven, Chopin attended the Sacred Heart Academy. In the hands of nuns, the only vision of the future for young women is to be better Catholic mothers and wives. Besides that, they encouraged writing and music lessons, as writing poetry and essays was “considered appropriate to a woman’s grace.”⁷² Sewing courses were also popular at Sacred Heart, and they ran through all the years of schooling. After all, sewing for girls of Sacred Heart was a sign of docility, purity, and domesticity, explaining why Kate Chopin’s characters dislike needlework.⁷³ After graduation in 1868, Kate kept a diary where she wrote quotes and opinions on books she read, such as Alphonse de Lamartine’s *Graziella* and Björnstjerne Björnson’s *The Fisher Maiden*, or her own experiences and ideas.⁷⁴

In February of 1869, when the St. Louis suffragists had grown impatient and traveled to Jefferson City to lobby all-male legislators, Kate O’Flaherty wondered “whether intellectual and political women had to be misfits.” In her diary, she dedicated many pages to women’s roles quoting Dinah Mulock’s *The Woman’s Kingdom*, expressing the traditional ideas. Even though Chopin never joined the women’s suffrage movement,⁷⁵ she shared “the common problem of intellectual woman” with the suffragist, since her ideas were not taken seriously.⁷⁶ Throughout her life, she was battling whether it is better for a woman “to be loved (and dead), or to be a courageous artist with a soul that dares and defines.” In her earliest surviving story, “Emancipation. A Life Fable,” written in 1869, Chopin deals with a will to freely express her thoughts about the life of a social belle, suppressed by conventions and kept away from “experiencing all of life.”⁷⁷ Nevertheless, eventually, Kate did what was expected of her when attending the social gatherings, although she despised the people she was supposed to dance with.⁷⁸

At nineteen, Kate O’Flaherty met Oscar Chopin, an eligible young man who was learning to be a cotton factor, “the middleman between the cotton growers and the cotton buyers” who spoke perfect French coming from the right social circles, whom she married a year later.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 39.

⁷² Chopin, *The Awakening*, edited by Nancy A. Walker, 4.

⁷³ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 46.

⁷⁴ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 96.

⁷⁵ Showalter, „Tradition and the Feamel Talent,“ in *The Awakening*, edited by Nancy A. Walker, 177.

⁷⁶ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 89-90.

⁷⁷ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 96.

⁷⁸ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 91.

⁷⁹ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 92-93.

After three months of traveling in Europe during their honeymoon, witnessing the siege of Paris by the Prussian army, the couple moved to New Orleans, where they stayed for nine years.⁸⁰ During their marriage, Kate gave birth to five sons – Jean Baptiste, Oscar Charles, George Francis, Frederick, and Felix Andrew – and one daughter Lélia. Chopin entered motherhood with excitement, doubts, and fears, and for the rest of her life, she would always do what Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* refused: “Remember the children.”⁸¹ The Chopins spent the social season in New Orleans, but the summer vacation they spent with the children at Grand Isle. Most of the people at Grand Isle were Creoles, and even though Kate spoke French and was a Catholic, she was not a Creole descended like her husband, and she felt like a foreigner, just like Edna Pontellier.⁸² For both Kate Chopin and Edna Pontellier, was Grand Isle escape from the city. The tropical paradise with “strange, rare odors, [...] the heavy perfume of a field of white blossoms, [...] and the seductive odor of the sea” Edna Pontellier describes in *The Awakening* provided a safe and calm place for the wives with their children to stay, while the husbands were working in the city during the week, coming back to Grand Isle for a weekend for parties, poker, dance, and music.

Not yet being thirty, Kate Chopin with her family moved to Cloutierville. Kate was known for being flirtatious and independent even before her husband’s death in 1882. She was horseback riding and smoked cigarettes, which was not inappropriate for a woman or a lady. Chopin was very popular in the company of men than with women. “She was not domestic, she was powerful socially, and she was considered rather aggressive for a woman.” In *The Awakening*, she showed that it is possible for a woman, who had married without passion, to discover her deep desires even in her late twenties.⁸³ Edna started to “realize her position in the universe as a human being,” recognizing “her relations as an individual to the world within and about her.”⁸⁴ Chopin began to feel that her husband had grown comfortable and predictable and indicated a good husband he was through Léonce Pontellier⁸⁵ when the Creoles agree he is “the best husband in the world.” Edna is “forced to admit that she knew none better.”⁸⁶ During that time, the Chopins lived in Cloutierville, where she should meet the object of her desires, Albert Sampite. After eleven years of Kate Chopin’s husband’s

⁸⁰ Chopin, *The Awakening*, edited by Nancy A. Walker, 6.

⁸¹ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 128, Chopin, *The Awakening*, 175.

⁸² Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 137.

⁸³ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 154-155

⁸⁴ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 21.

⁸⁵ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 155.

⁸⁶ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 11.

death, she suggested in her diary that her relationship with Albert Sampite was more than a friendship, more likely an affair. As a result, Albert can be a templet for Alcée and Robert in *The Awakening* and others, like “The Storm” and “At the Cadian Ball.” Nevertheless, Albert Sampite was married, and even though Kate Chopin was later widowed, she could not marry Albert since there was no divorce among Catholics.⁸⁷

When Oscar Chopin died, he left Kate alone with six children and over twelve thousand dollars in debt. As many of Chopin’s widowed characters emphasize hope and lean toward discovering new possibilities for their life rather than grief for their husbands, it is also indicated that Kate acted similarly since she stayed in Cloutierville. Chopin took care of her life, and her money, ran her husband’s store, and settled all the debts. In the meantime, Kate Chopin “had discovered more about the pleasure of being an independent woman.”⁸⁸ Eventually, in 1884, she returned to St. Louis to her mother. A year after moving to St. Louis, Kate Chopin’s mother, Eliza O’Flaherty, died. Exhausted with grief, Chopin moved from her house to a different part of St. Louis to signal the beginning of her life, left the church,⁸⁹ and being encouraged by her friends, she wrote her first short story, “Euphrasie,” in 1888.⁹⁰

By 1889, Kate Chopin became a published author when her poem “If It Might Be” was printed in Chicago magazine *America*. Later that year, *Philadelphia Musical Journal* published her short story “Wiser than a God,” and “A Point at Issue!” had been printed in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. In the same year, she started writing her first novel, *At Fault*.⁹¹ Among her short stories worth mentioning belong “At the Cadian Ball” (1892), “The Story of an Hour” (1894), and “Désirée Baby” (1895). Besides her short stories and poems appearing in the magazines, Chopin wrote two other novels before *The Awakening* (1899), *Bayou Folk* (1894), and *A Night in Acadie* (1897).

The Awakening was published on April 22, 1899, and after a few days, the first reviews started to appear. However, critics appeared to be “schizophrenic” in their reviews. Admiration of Chopin’s skills and praises of her prose style in the reviews were often accompanied by comments on Edna being a “morally offensive woman” and “unacceptable focus for a book.”⁹² Most of the reviews, though, were negative, calling the novel “morbid,”

⁸⁷ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 168-171.

⁸⁸ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 159-162.

⁸⁹ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 176.

⁹⁰ Published in 1894 as “A No-Account Creole”

⁹¹ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 180-181.

⁹² Dyer, *The Awakening*, 19.

“unhealthy,” and even “poison.” Willa Cather denounced *The Awakening*’s theme as “trite sordid” and called Edna “The Creole Bovary.” As Emily Toth pointed out in Kate Chopin’s biography (1990), Chopin was the only one in her era who described a pregnant woman, and none of the reviewers mentioned it, nor did they criticize the childbirth scene, which would be unacceptable at that time. They would only decry Edna’s behavior and relationships with Robert and Arobin.⁹³

In July 1899, two months after the book was published, the issue of *Book News* published Kate Chopin’s response to the reviews on *The Awakening*.

Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was too late.

Even after this publication, the reviews kept coming, and more negative ones appeared. Some sources suggest that Kate Chopin stopped writing entirely after all the negative comments. However, Emily Toth proved otherwise, as Chopin’s stories were published in *Youth’s Companion* and later in *Vogue*.⁹⁴ The later generation also believed that the novel had been banned and removed from the libraries. According to Emily Toth and her research, the novel was never banned nor removed from any library.⁹⁵

Kate Chopin died on August 22, 1904.⁹⁶ Kate Chopin was a nationally admired writer of a local color who wrote stories about women “who created their own destinies.”⁹⁷ Years ahead of the time, *The Awakening* pictured what she “learned in forty-eight years” of her life.⁹⁸ She wrote four novels, more than eighty short stories, and at least twenty-five poems in ten years.

⁹³ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 336-362.

⁹⁴ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 377.

⁹⁵ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 421-425.

⁹⁶ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 403.

⁹⁷ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 186.

⁹⁸ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 340.

2.2 Willa Cather

Willa Sibert Cather was born on December 7, 1873, in Virginia. She grew up on a farm, not attending school, and a grandmother taught her. Willa spent most of her childhood outside, helping to herd the sheep. When Willa was nine years old, the Cathers left Virginia and moved to Nebraska.⁹⁹ They moved to Webster County, where Willa got to meet Silas Garber. He was in 1875 elected Governor of Nebraska and was an inspiration for the character of Captain Forrester in *A Lost Lady*.¹⁰⁰ In one of her interviews, Cather claimed that the writer gathered his thematic material until he is fifteen. “The years from eight and fifteen are the formative period in a writer’s life when he unconsciously gathers basic material.”¹⁰¹ Nebraska appears in her fiction very often as well as in *A Lost Lady*, in contrast to Virginia, which is depicted only rarely.

Cather’s mother was absent from her early childhood memories. Thus, alternative “mothering” figures appeared in Cather’s life, which contributed to Cather’s ambitiousness and drive towards independence, together with her competence in shaping her life. She witnesses possibilities for women while negotiating conventional female roles. This admiration later influenced her witting and mainly her female protagonist, who challenged the domestic convention by being heroic, stumbling between the “womanly” and the “unwomanly” properties.¹⁰²

In Nebraska, Cather was no longer homeschooled but attended proper school in Red Cloud. She was fortunate in her teachers, and one of them became her intimate friend. During her school years, she met Mrs. Charles Wiener, a Frenchwoman, who educated Cather about life in France, Germany, and Europe in general, and Willa later began to read French. Willa also read Greek and Latin.¹⁰³

Throughout her high-school years, Willa wore short hair like boys, dressed like them, and she even preferred to be called William or Billie. The only feminine concession she obtained was wearing skirts rather than trousers.¹⁰⁴ At that time of her rebellion, she was also interested in zoology, so she performed experiments on animals and cut them up. This,

⁹⁹ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 20-22

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 37.

¹⁰¹ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 3.

¹⁰² Lee, *Willa Cather*.

¹⁰³ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 32-34.

¹⁰⁴ Keene, *Willa Cather*, 20.

together with her opinions about religion, made her something like “an alien creature” in the town.¹⁰⁵

As soon as she was ready to acknowledge her nature, she decided to go to Lincoln and enroll in the preparatory academy to get to the University of Nebraska. A year later, in 1891, she became a university student attending primarily literary courses and later enrolling in courses in Greek and Latin. In the sophomore year of her studies, her first story was published, probably submitted by her English instructor. Later, she became one of the editors of the undergraduate literary periodical, the *Hesperian*, in which Willa shared her criticism verses and, more importantly, her stories.¹⁰⁶ In 1893, Cather enrolled in a course in journalism and was allowed to be a regular contributor to the *State Journal*. Willa Cather graduated from the University of Nebraska in June 1895.¹⁰⁷

After graduation, in 1896, Willa Cather was offered a job in the editorial office of *Home Monthly* magazine in Pittsburgh.¹⁰⁸ Working in a magazine that focused on housekeeping and child care, Cather featured her short stories of writers together with stories on the wives of U.S. presidential candidates and famous contemporary as she tried to broaden women's horizons beyond the domestic sphere.¹⁰⁹ After a year, she resigned, but she was given a new job offer in *Daily Leader*, Pennsylvania's most important evening paper. She made seventy-five dollars a month. She worked in *Daily Leader* for four years, and besides her editorial responsibilities, she kept writing dramatic criticism, which brought her to journalism in the first place.¹¹⁰ In 1899 she wrote a review on *The Awakening*, in which she compared Edna Pontellier to Emma Bovary and called her “a Creole Bovary.” Little time did she spend on writing her own fiction working in *Daily Leader* or *Home Monthly*. She completed her decade in Pittsburgh as a high school teacher of English and Latin.¹¹¹

Willa Cather's first book *April Twilight*, a poetry collection, was published in 1903. Most of the poems, which appeared in this volume, had been published in magazines.¹¹² This collection brought Willa recognition, and as a result, in 1906, she was offered to work in *McClure's Magazine* as a member of staff, and she worked there for six years, being able to

¹⁰⁵ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 47-48.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 49-61

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 65-70.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 74.

¹⁰⁹ Keene, *Willa Cather*, 29.

¹¹⁰ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 85.

¹¹¹ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 90-92.

¹¹² Brown, *Willa Cather*, 110.

publish her own stories.¹¹³ As a writer, she was encouraged by S. S. McClure to travel to write good manuscripts, so she traveled to Europe more than once. Later, she wrote her first novel *Alexander's Bridge*, published in three parts in McClure.¹¹⁴

Between 1912 and 1927 were the best working years for Willa Cather¹¹⁵. During them, she wrote her known novels of frontier life, *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), *My Ántonia* (1918), and *One of Ours* (1922), awarded the Pulitzer Prize. During this period, she also asked Alfred Knopf whether he would be her publisher. According to Edith Lewis, this might be one of the most influential decisions in her career.¹¹⁶

A Lost Lady was published in 1923. According to Edith Lewis, Willa Cather's closest friend, *A Lost Lady* is a novel Cather struggled with the most since the characters of the Forrester are based on her memories of Mrs. Garber and her husband, Governor Garber. Cather was afraid to offend some of the still-living relatives.¹¹⁷ She also struggled with the structure of *A Lost Lady*. First, Cather wrote the novel setting it in Colorado, presumably without Niel. As it did not work, she tried to write in first-person narrative. However, in the end, she decided to use third-person narration from Niel's perspective representing her perception of Mrs. Garber as she remembered it when she was a little girl. According to Cather, Niel is a point of view, "a peephole into the world." However, the story is not fully trusted by Niel, as he would not be able to tell how fully Mrs. Forrester was lost based on society's standards by which she was a figure. Moreover, it was not the Sweet Water's society she belonged to, but rather the society of the "railroad aristocracy" Cather described at the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Forrester is in the society of "railroad aristocracy" accepted and sought out. In a way, Niel represents Cather's perception of Governor Garber and his wife from the time she was a girl.¹¹⁸ Other characters were like the ones Willa Cather had introduced, like Niel Herbert, the main protagonist is like Jim Burden from *My Ántonia*, and Ivy Peters is based on the character Bayliss Wheeler from *One of Ours*.¹¹⁹

Willa Cather believed that "serious artist, male or female, could be happily married." Even though she devoted most of her life to other women, she did not dislike men. Most of her

¹¹³ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 112-126.

¹¹⁴ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 153.

¹¹⁵ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 180.

¹¹⁶ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 214.

¹¹⁷ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 228.

¹¹⁸ Lee, *Willa Cather*.

¹¹⁹ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 228-231.

closest friends were men, but not in a romantic attachment.¹²⁰ Cather was one of the writers of her time who managed to keep her anonymity and freedom, as in the time of her first popular success, she refused to join societies, recommend a book, and write reviews. She even controlled her money herself. After finishing *A Lost Lady*, Cather again traveled to Europe and spent most of her time in France, where she wrote *The Professor's House* (1925).¹²¹ Later traveling to Mexico with Edith Lewis, she came up with *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927).¹²²

The last published novel in Cather's life was *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), which was the only set in the place she was born, Virginia.¹²³ After that, only two stories were completed. Living with poor health for the last seven years of her life, she was always accompanied by her closest friend Edith Lewis.¹²⁴ Offers were coming to make movies based on her books, such as *Death for the Archbishop*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *A Lost Lady*. She declined them all and, in her will, "expressly prohibited theatrical or cinematic treatment of her fiction."¹²⁵ She did not even want to be studied at school, as she is not like the idea of forcing children into reading. Instead, she preferred them to read and discover her work by themselves. In 1944, Cather was awarded the gold medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, which was her third award after Howells medal for fiction and Prix Femina Américaine.¹²⁶ Willa Cather died on April 24, 1947.

¹²⁰ Keene, *Willa Cather*, 34.

¹²¹ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 238.

¹²² Brown, *Willa Cather*, 251.

¹²³ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 307.

¹²⁴ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 320-321.

¹²⁵ Novels as *The Song of the Lark*, *My Antonia*, *O Pioneers!* and *A Lost Lady* have been made into movies.

¹²⁶ Brown, *Willa Cather*, 324-325.

3 MARITAL INFIDELITY IN THE NOVELS

Both female characters, Edna Pontellier and Marian Forrester, are battling the conventions of the nineteenth-century ideal of the “True Woman,” where one is entirely devoted to the family and domestic sphere through the female virtues. Nevertheless, each of them faces the ideal differently. Edna in *The Awakening* is reminded of that ideal through her friend Adèle Ratignolle, who is the embodiment of the “True Woman” and “the cult of domesticity.” She is the true “mother-woman” and a constant reminder of expectations from society. On the other hand, Marian in *A Lost Lady* is not presented as the ideal via a character she meets. But instead, she is idealized as a “True Woman” through the eyes of the narrator Niel Herbert. Niel sees Marian as a lady, and he is not willing to surrender to his expectations. Eventually, both Edna and Marian embrace the “New Woman” identity within themselves as their seeking independence and autonomy. Edna finds encouragement in a friend, Mademoiselle Reisz, who is independent but living a solitary life and is the character representation of the New Woman in *The Awakening*.

3.1 Edna Pontellier

Twenty-eight-year-old Edna Pontellier realizes the weight of her unhappiness after the summer she spends with her family at Grand Isle. “It was you who awoke me last summer out of a life-long, stupid dream,”¹²⁷ reveals Edna to her lover Robert. She is not happy as a wife, mother, and woman, and she is unsure how to cope with it. However, she is trapped in all the aspects of the True Woman – the husband, the children, the house, and the responsibilities. As help and mentor, Madame Ratignolle tries to show Edna “the joys of being a wife and mother.”¹²⁸ Contrary to Madame Ratignolle, Mademoiselle Reisz represents the “New Woman,” who understands Edna’s feelings and desires to become an independent woman. “You are the only one worth playing for,”¹²⁹ confesses Mademoiselle Reisz to Edna one evening.

Edna never fully committed to the role of a mother. From the beginning of the novel, the author suggests that Edna is not devoted to her role as a mother. Also, Léonce Pontellier, Edna’s husband, had a feeling that Edna “failed in her duty towards their children,” as if one of the Pontellier boys tumbled while playing, he would instead pick himself up and wipe his

¹²⁷ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 172

¹²⁸ Elz, ““The Awakening” and “A Lost Lady,”” 18.

¹²⁹ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 41.

tears than go to his mother to seek the comfort of her arms.¹³⁰ As Per Seyersted pointed out in his critical biography of Kate Chopin (1980), the boys seem “somewhat anonymous.” They never seem to have a direct dialog with their mother or father. This may suggest that even though they are part of the heroine’s life, they do not influence Edna’s awakening.¹³¹ When Old Madame Pontellier had come and carried the boys off to Iberville for some time to get to know the country, Edna felt a “genuine sigh of relief.”¹³² It was at the time when the Pontelliers came back from Grand Isle, and since Léonce was traveling to New York, Edna was left alone trying to understand her need for independence and emancipation. This implies that Edna’s children and her husband, therefore her role as a mother and wife, are burdensome for her, and thus she is trying to free herself. Edna loves her children dearly, but she sometimes “forgets about them” and even confesses that “she would never sacrifice herself for them.” Once Edna revealed to Adèle:

I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give up my life for my children; but I wouldn’t give myself. I can’t make it more clear; it’s only something that I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me.¹³³

It was at this time that Edna was starting to realize that the proper sphere for a woman at that time, the domestic sphere that Adèle deeply adores, would not be fulfilling for Edna. This is also an example of the contrasting perspective each woman believed is the meaning of being a mother. Because Adèle was convinced that a “woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that – your Bible tells you so.”¹³⁴ Nevertheless, Edna understands she is not a “mother-woman” and feels that motherhood is “a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her”: “They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.”¹³⁵

Not only did Edna not live up to the societal ideal of motherhood, but she also started to question her love and devotion to her husband as he “seemed to her now like a person whom she married without love as an excuse.”¹³⁶ Edna even confesses that her marriage to Léonce

¹³⁰ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 12.

¹³¹ Seyersted, *The Awakening*, 154.

¹³² Chopin, *The Awakening*, 113.

¹³³ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 74.

¹³⁴ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 75

¹³⁵ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 12-13.

¹³⁶ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 122.

was “purely an accident,”¹³⁷ suggesting that Edna married Léonce to secure “a fatherly protector who will not make too many domestic, emotional, or sexual demands on her.”¹³⁸ Edna seeks her autonomy throughout the novel; she does not want to be perceived as her husband’s “valuable piece of property.”¹³⁹

Edna met Robert during the summer at the Grand Isle, where they found a mutual affection. Thanks to her physical attraction to Robert, Edna makes her first “self-examination,”¹⁴⁰ realizing “her position in the universe as a human being, and [recognizing] her relations as an individual to the world within and about her.”¹⁴¹ This is where Edna’s need for emancipation is evoked and later is emphasized by Edna’s first swim as “some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. ... She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before.”¹⁴² The gradual demand for independence revolts when the Pontellier family returns to their home in New Orleans, and Edna ignores her duties as a wife. She is no longer interested in the old conventions. She “made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household *en bonne ménagère*,”¹⁴³¹⁴⁴ such as conducting the weekly receptions she has held for the past six years. Finally, Edna moves to her apartment, “the Pigeon house,” she paid with the money she made, leaving the house she lived in with her husband and her children. Moreover, she is not looking for Léonce’s approval anymore.

By any means, it was after Robert left for Mexico that Edna admitted her affection toward him. She understood that the love and affection she felt towards her both lovers, Robert Lebrun and Alcée Arobin, was more substantial than she ever felt towards her husband since

the sentiment she entertained for Robert in no way resembled that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel. ... [Her thoughts and emotions] belonged to her and were her own, and she entertained the conviction that she had a right to them and that they concerned no one but herself.¹⁴⁵

Robert symbolizes Edna’s awakening as an individual being, rather than Alcée, who embodies her double awakening as a sexual being who “craves to be an active subject rather

¹³⁷ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 29.

¹³⁸ Showalter, “Tradition and the Female Talent,” in *Kate Chopin*, ed. Walker, 183.

¹³⁹ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Stange, “Personal Property,” in *Kate Chopin*, ed. Walker, 202.

¹⁴¹ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 21.

¹⁴² Chopin, *The Awakening*, 43.

¹⁴³ As a good housewife

¹⁴⁴ Chopin. *The Awakening*. 89

¹⁴⁵ Chopin. *The Awakening*. 74

than a passive object.”¹⁴⁶ While Edna is waiting for Robert to return, she depends on the physical satisfaction she receives from Alcée. But when Alcée kisses her, she “felt like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity,” not thinking of her husband, but instead of Robert.¹⁴⁷ Thus, Edna is no longer chained to her husband. Instead, she worries about Robert considering her unwomanly.

To become fully independent, Edna is eager to improve her artistic skills she rediscovered, from which, over time, she would make some money. Encouraging her independency and creating a contrast to the mother-woman Adèle Ratignolle, there is the character of Mademoiselle Reisz, an independent artist who acquired freedom from conventional expectations for women. And even though she is an unpopular and disagreeable person, Edna grows into a fan of her and her music, as “she struggles with her own individuation.”¹⁴⁸

In her essay “Flying with Broken Wings and Raked Feathers” (2003), A. Elizabeth Elz examines the symbolism of bird imagery and metaphor in *The Awakening*. Edna starts to be pictured as a parrot in a cage. Eventually, she refuses to remain the parrot, and like a mockingbird, she insists on her way.¹⁴⁹ When Robert suggests that she is “not free” or that she must be “set free” by her husband for them to be together, Edna replies:

You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier’s possession to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, “Here, Robert, take her, and by happy, she is yours,” I should laugh at you both.¹⁵⁰

In the end when she realizes that she does not belong to anyone, nor her husband, nor any of her lovers, but only to herself. “To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else.”¹⁵¹ Thus, she becomes a master of her destiny, she decides to free herself in the only way possible for her, and therefore, she kills herself.

3.2 Marian Forrester

Marian Forrester is a young lady married to a widowed railroad man Captain Daniel Forrester who was twenty-five years older than his wife. The story of Marian and the Captain

¹⁴⁶ Seyersted, *Kate Chopin*, 143.

¹⁴⁷ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 121.

¹⁴⁸ Seyersted, *Kate Chopin*, 155.

¹⁴⁹ Elz. „The Awakening“ and „A Lost Lady,“ 13-27.

¹⁵⁰ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 171

¹⁵¹ Chopin, *The Awakening*, 181.

is told through the eyes of the character Niel Herbert, nephew of Judge Pommeroy, who was Forrester's lawyer. Niel idealizes Marian as the True Woman she wants her to be. However, curiously, he is interested in her only as "Captain Forrester's wife [...], and it was her relation to her husband that he most admired her."¹⁵² Niel's picture of Mrs. Forrester is a "lady-like" woman who was always welcoming her visitors on the front door "in her apron, waving a buttery iron spoon, or shook cherry-stained fingers."¹⁵³ He realized how "bewitching" Mrs. Forrester was:

Something about her look hold one in a flash; one became acutely conscious of her, of her fragility and grace, of her mouth which could say so much without words; lively, laughing, intimate, nearly always a little mocking.¹⁵⁴

As he spent more time with her over the period she was at Sweet Water, he became protective of her. "An impulse of affection and guardianship drew Niel up the polar-bordered road in the early light"¹⁵⁵ the morning he was visiting Marian only to discover she is having an affair with Frank Ellinger. Early in the begging of the novel, it is forewarned that Niel will try to protect Mrs. Forrester but fails. As A. Elizabeth Elz suggests in her essay "Flying with Broken Wings and Raked Feathers" (2003), comparing Mrs. Forrester to a female woodpecker that Ivy Peters eventually maims represents the society in the novel.¹⁵⁶ When Ivy released the woodpecker,

[it] rose in the air with a whirling, corkscrew motion, darted to the right, struck a tree trunk – to the left, and struck another. Up and down, backward and forward among the tangle of branches it flew, raking its feathers, falling and recovering itself.¹⁵⁷

In an attempt to "put it out of its misery," Niel climbs up the tree. When almost reaching for the woodpecker, he falls from the tree breaking his hand.¹⁵⁸ As a metaphor for Marian herself, after experiencing a financial crisis and the death of her husband, she ends up in the clutch of Ivy Peters. Nevertheless, this time, when he releases her, Marian "regains control of her flight" without anyone's help.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 44.

¹⁵³ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 19.

¹⁵⁵ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 47.

¹⁵⁶ Elz, "'The Awakening'" and "'A Lost Lady,'" 13-27.

¹⁵⁷ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 12.

¹⁵⁸ Cather, 13.

¹⁵⁹ Elz, "'The Awakening'" and "'A Lost Lady,'" 19.

Marian Forrester understood that to have the life she dreamed of and be economically secure, she must marry well. “Money is a very important thing,”¹⁶⁰ she once confessed. When she was nineteen, she was to marry a young millionaire who was shot and killed a few weeks before the wedding. To avoid a great deal of publicity for this scandal, she traveled to the mountains, where she was saved by Mr. Forrester, a wealthy widowed man, who found her caught in a pine tree with broken legs. When Mr. Forrester asked her to marry, she did not hesitate because he made her feel safe.

When it comes to motherhood, Marian Forrester does not have children, nor does Captain Forrester from his first marriage. Maternal instincts are not even mentioned throughout the novel. When Niel falls from a tree, Marian is there to help only as a caregiver, not as a maternal figure. She was “concerned, but not frightened.”¹⁶¹ Not even once is the question regarding children brought up, as no one would expect that Marian would want to be a mother. As it was mentioned earlier in the thesis, Cather did not like to place her characters in conventional environment of the domestic sphere, rather she would make the character challenge them, suggesting, that she did not view Mrs. Forrester as a mother.

Marian honored her marriage, and she honored Mr. Forrester. Apart from Edna Pontellier, to whom marriage seemed like a cage, Marian did not feel like the property of Mr. Forrester. There was complete confidence and acceptance between the Forresters that even Niel acknowledged: “He felt that the Captain knew his wife better even than she knew herself; and that, knowing her, he – to use one of his own expressions – valued her.”¹⁶² After Mr. Forrester lost his money, Marian never blamed him for it, even though it meant staying in Sweet Waters all year long and dismissing their servants. Furthermore, when Mr. Forrester had a stroke, she took care of him, never questioning her devotion to her husband.

Marian’s infidelity does not seem to threaten her marriage, nor does it seem to threaten her social status.¹⁶³ To compare it to Frank Ellinger’s first description:

All the while that he was making a scandalous chronicle for himself, young Ellinger had been devotedly caring for an invalid mother, and he was described to strangers as a terribly fast young man and model.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 64.

¹⁶¹ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 13.

¹⁶² Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 82.

¹⁶³ Morrow, “Lost Lady – The Novel of Adultery,” 296.

¹⁶⁴ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 28.

So, it is suggested that the social circle would not judge Marian for the infidelity, as “her devotion and loyalty in a spiritual sense does seem to be more valued than [...] infidelity in the physical sense.”¹⁶⁵ The character of Adolph Blum is given as an example of honoring such values. When he sees Mrs. Forrester and Frank Ellinger together, he decides to keep it a secret because: “she never haggled about the price. She treated him like a human being.”¹⁶⁶ Niel even came to a conclusion that Mr. Forrester knew himself about the affair and accepted it, as “he felt sure that [Mr. Forrester] knew everything; more than anyone else; all there was to know about Marian Forrester.”¹⁶⁷ Therefore, it seems that Niel Herbert is the only one who cannot accept Marian’s infidelity, as it does not respond to the values he set for her and with the idea of the True Woman he wants her to be.

After the Captain’s death, when Marian chooses to live in the present and manage for herself as the New Woman would do, Niel perceives her as the woman she was in the past, claiming she is the one “who had changed.”¹⁶⁸ Moreover, even after she managed to marry one last time “to a rich, cranky old Englishman,” he did not want to remember her as Daniel Forrester’s widow but as a “bright, impersonal memory” of Daniel Forrester’s wife.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Morrow, “Lost Lady – The Novel of Adultery,” 298.

¹⁶⁶ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 38.

¹⁶⁷ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 65.

¹⁶⁸ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 88.

¹⁶⁹ Cather, *A Lost Lady*, 99.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to determine certain roles of a woman in American society in the 19th and early 20th centuries and examine how the marital infidelity of the female protagonist in *The Awakening* and *A Lost Lady* contradicted those roles.

Thanks to industrialization, urbanization, and growing business, a new middle class was created in the 19th century. Women moved from fields and farms where they were helping with the family production to home, where their primary role was a wife and mother.

A public sphere was rough for a delicate creature, such as a woman, so she meant to occupy mainly the domestic sphere. Women were limited to the basic knowledge of household chores, including reading, writing, and sewing. The new idea of a “True Woman” was created, identifying women as pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. Without those four virtues, a woman had no value. However, when fulfilling them all, a woman was promised to live a happy life and marry well. At that time, it was widespread to marry and settle for economic stability with a suitable husband rather than marry out of love. In becoming a wife, she was expected to pursue the role of a mother as well.

As a reaction to the “True Woman” ideal, the “New Woman” ideal emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This ideal represented contemporary women demanding freedom and independence while getting university degrees and pursuing a career. Often, to the detriment of pursuing a career, a woman decided either to postpone getting married or not to marry at all.

A representation of those two ideals serves not only the protagonist of the two novels but also the authors, thus Kate Chopin and Willa Cather. Being born twenty-three years earlier and therefore raised on the ideals of the “True Woman,” Kate Chopin got married at the age of twenty and gave birth to six children. While being rebellious and not always lady-like, Chopin believed women could step out of the domestic sphere. She did so herself. After her husband died, she managed to run his business, pay off his debts, and later became a famous writer of short stories of local color and novels, such as *The Awakening*. This novel particularly was way too controversial for its audience at the time of its publishing. Even though there are noticeable similarities between Kate Chopin and Edna Pontellier, such as living in St. Louis, traveling to Grand Isle during the season, or having a love interest whilst their marriage, it was not evidenced that Edna was projecting Kate Chopin’s life. Instead, Chopin brought to life a character in her late twenties trying to discover her deep desires and

autonomy, to which Chopin could relate. Neither Kate Chopin nor Edna Pontellier was finding fulfillment in the domestic sphere. But apart from Chopin, Edna could not even find meaning in life in motherhood. Edna's need to seek independence and her first awakening evoked Robert when she realized that she did not want to be anyone's property and that there is much to live in than motherhood and marriage. The second awakening came to Alcée, thanks to whom Edna realized her sexual needs and desires that could not have been met in her passionless marriage to Léonce.

Through two woman characters in the novel, Edna is presented with the two ideals of that time. First, she meets Madame Ratignolle, representing the "True Woman" and mother-woman who sees her attainment as a mother and wife, while Edna could never live up to these expectations. As it was pointed out in the analysis, Edna was struggling from the very start of the novel with the idea of being the perfect mother she saw in Madame Ratignolle, admitting that she was not destined for such a role. Since Edna was struggling to find herself, the contrasting character of Mademoiselle Reiz, an independent artist living alone, is there to present her with the idea of the "New Woman," in which a woman is believed to be free of the conventional roles of women. Edna manages to free herself of the conventional by admitting her desires and needs, which terminate in her moving from her family house and therefore form the cage of the "True Woman."

Edna eventually realizes that she does not want to live as either of these characters, nor does she want to seek the approval of any character, especially from men. As the "New Woman," she wants to decide her destiny herself. Thus, she sees her death as the only way where she can retain her autonomy.

On the other hand, Willa Cather, born in 1873, lived as the "New Woman," she was able to pursue her career right after graduating from college. Aware of Kate Chopin, Cather published a review for *The Awakening*, comparing Edna to Flaubert's Emma Bovary. Known for her novels about frontier life, to pursue her career, Cather decided never to get married, and she spent most of her life alongside female companions. She was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for her novel *One of Ours* (1922). In *A Lost Lady*, Cather brought to life the character of Marian Forrester, based on the real person she knew when she was a child and her family moved to Webster County. Since she was describing a person she knew, met, and basically adored, she struggled with the novel's composition. Eventually, she decided to tell the story through the eyes of the male character of Niel Herbert.

Niel idealizes Marian as the “True Woman” he wants her to be, but as she does not live up to his expectation, he leaves her to the mercy of her own destiny. Niel realized that he adores Marian for being Captain Forrester’s wife, not her true character.

When Marian marries twenty-five-year-old Captain Forrester, he provides her with social and economic security. Marian realizes that money is essential in life, and since she cannot make her own, she is not ashamed to admit she will secure them via marriage. But even though her need for a secure home and financial freedom is fulfilled, her sexual needs are not. And Captain Forrester is aware of that. As mentioned in the analysis, Captain Forrester knows his wife well enough, and to Niel’s surprise, he understands why she is having an affair.

Though Marian can be seen as unfaithful to her husband, she is loyal to him. Marian would not leave him when they struggled financially, not even after Captain’s first and later second stroke. She may not be a “True Woman” in the sense of fulfilling both motherhood and marriage. But she is undoubtedly a loyal wife devoted to her husband. When her husband dies, she is left alone, without any support as Edna could get from Madame Ratignolle or Mademoiselle Reisz. Marian struggles to get back on her feet. However, eventually, she leaves Sweet Water, manages to remarry a wealthy man, and dies peacefully as an old lady, honoring Captain Forrester until her final days.

In the two novels, marital infidelity is perceived differently by each main character. Kate Chopin’s Edna uses her affair as a medium to find her inner self and her freedom. She realizes that she married without passion, and she is not eager to get back to her husband or children. In a way, she failed as a mother and a wife, but she found herself as a human being. She emphasized the “New Woman” she found within herself, and since she does not want to lose the autonomy she believed she gained, she decides to take her life. Willa Cather’s Marian, on the other hand, understands her sexual desires and that she must find fulfillment outside of her marriage while still appearing – and in her own way remaining – loyal to her husband. Although it leads to her death, Edna embraced the “New Woman” in herself. At the same time, Marian took the “New Woman’s” approach to provide for herself financially, and she decides to remarry and thus become the “True Woman” again.

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