

# Kate Chopin and Feminism: the Significance of Water

Brittany Groves <sup>1\*</sup>

*B.A. Candidate, Department of English, California State University Stanislaus, 1 University Circle, Turlock, CA 95382*

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## Abstract

Late nineteenth century writer Kate Chopin in her time was commonly recognized as a regionalist or realist author, focusing on the lifestyle and setting of the Louisiana region. An author's intentions are extremely important. The way a writer crafts a story is telling of how that person views the world they are in. Because of this, although she did not directly advocate for it, she should be considered a feminist writer as well. Chopin's writing tells the story of women claiming their own independence in the only ways they can in patriarchal society. Within that, she uses water in many of her stories as a representation of independence and baptism into a new way of life. Most of the female characters who have an experience with water, also act in a way that goes against the societal norm for each situation. Even though Chopin made her career through the use of regionalism and realism (Chopin and Levine et al. 441), it does not take away from the fact that she was representing women in her stories as fighting for their independence in their own ways. While regionalism and realism are very important parts to understanding Chopin as a writer, the fact that she, in her own way, advocates for women to have their own agency is also a huge part of her writing. Water is used as a tool to represent the independence of the characters, and can be used to show how Chopin can be considered a feminist writer.

*Keywords:* Kate Chopin, feminism, water, symbolism

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## Introduction

Kate Chopin was a late nineteenth century American author who wrote three novels and over a hundred short stories in her lifetime. Her writing is commonly considered to be regionalistic in nature, which focused on the culture, characters, setting and dialect of the Louisiana region; she was also considered to be a realist writer as well, for her depiction of what everyday life was like in each particular setting. In her writings, regionalism focuses more on setting while realism looks more at how the situations in the story are realistic. While Chopin's writing does fulfil aspects of both regionalism and realism, her writing also possess' a lot of feminist aspects. Her writing contains situations and instances that examine women's independence in a way that was unusual and unaccepted by men in that time period. Lois Tyson in chapter six of her book *Using Critical Theory* explains feminist theory as "examin[ing] the ways in which our personal identity is formed by our culture's definition of what it means to be a man or a woman" (139). This can be done through looking at the way patriarchy can be seen in society, what gender roles are expected to be fulfilled, sexism, etc. Chopin's stories mostly contain aspects of feminist theory in them in one form or another. Because of this, Kate Chopin should also

be considered a feminist writer as well as a regionalist and realist. Placing the sole focus on the two forms takes away from the fact that Chopin was representing women in her stories as fighting for their independence in their own ways. While regionalism and realism are very important parts to understanding Chopin as a writer, the fact that she advocates for women to have their own agency is also a huge part of her writing. An author's intentions are extremely important. The way a writer crafts a story is telling of how that person views the world they are in. For Kate Chopin, her writing tells the story of women claiming their own independence in the only ways they can in patriarchal society.

Symbolism and imagery are very important to delve into the deeper meanings of a story, and Kate Chopin utilizes water to do so. Water symbolism is littered throughout her stories as a representation of both the characters feelings, as well as a rebirth aspect into the female characters and their transitions into their independence. Stories that have a female character having direct agency in their lives apart from the norms of society also have water symbolism. Motherhood and maternal instincts also play a large part in Chopin's writing, and for the stories used in this research, where there was not symbolism with water, there was symbolism with motherhood. Looking at the way Chopin

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<sup>1\*</sup> Email: bgroves1@csustan.edu

represents water further explains her role as a feminist writer.

### **Background Information**

Kate Chopin was born in St. Louis Missouri in 1850, and lived until 1904. With her father having passed away in a railroad accident when she was about five, Chopin was raised primarily by her mother and grandmother. She also went to school at St. Louis Academy of the Sacred Heart, where she received most of her education by the nuns there who helped to shape her education. Because of the way she was raised, and who she was raised by, Chopin had a lot of influence from independent woman in her life. In her biography *Unveiling Kate Chopin*, Emily Toth mentions that, “She was a bit too smart, or too forthright, for high society. Although she was ‘one of the acknowledged belles,’ known for beauty and ‘amiability of character,’ she was also noted for ‘cleverness’ – which, for women, is not always praise. Often it means that a young woman is unwilling to hide her intelligence. She has a voice and she wants it to be known that she has brains” (45). Chopin had a habit of not conforming to what society asked of her. She did not want to pretend to be someone she was not in order to appease the patriarchal standards of her time.

Once Chopin was older, she married and moved to New Orleans, Louisiana where most of her writing is set. Kate Chopin was her own person, she did not conform to what society expected of her, and she was lucky enough to have a husband who loved that about her. In her biography, Toth mentions that, “Oscar was a rare man who preferred an original woman, one who was neither quiet nor stay-at-home” (67). He did not mind that Chopin was her own person, and did things independently, like go for walks alone or even smoking cigarettes. Oscar Chopin’s extended family, however “regarded her with great suspicion and disapproval” (67). They would often tell him that he needed to put her in her place, but he would just wave them off and laugh about their comments with his wife. Chopin’s own personality can be seen in her writing, as many of her characters act in this way.

Kelly A. Ryan in her article “Women and Patriarchy in Early America, 1600–1800” discusses the roles that women held in the time period from 1600-1800. Ryan notes that “Laws and religious practices demanded women’s subordination to men, and governmental and extralegal controls on women’s sexual and familial lives buttressed patriarchal ideals and practices by enforcing their dependence on white men” (par. 1). Women were meant to be completely dependent on men, and were seen as little more than property.

### ***The Awakening***

*The Awakening* tells the story of wife and mother Edna Pontellier as she struggles with understanding who she is and what she wants to do with her life. The story is set in both Grand Isle, an island off the coast of New Orleans, and the city itself. The novel starts with Edna’s husband reading the newspaper, and when his wife and companion Robert come back from the ocean, he notices that his wife has been sunburnt. He tells her so and is “looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage” (Chopin and Culley 4). Right away we see a disconnect between Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier, and the fact that he views her as property shows the patriarchal stance of her husband. During their stay there over the summer, the couple constantly are at odds with one another, and Edna is happier when he is away doing other things. During one such fight, where Mr. Pontellier accuses Edna of being a bad mother, she sits outside and it is noted that “There was no sound abroad except the hooting of an old owl in the top of a water-oak, and the everlasting voice of the sea” (7). The ocean is constantly referenced and Edna thinks of it longingly as if it was calling to her. The moment that Edna begins her awakening, or realization that there is more to life than just being an obedient wife and mother occurs while she is at the ocean:

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.

The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (14).

The ocean to Edna is an escape from her life with her family. She loves her children, but they are a drain, and her husband’s constant judgement of her capability to be a good wife and mother causes her to seek independence from that even more. Edna reflects on the summer before, when her kids had gone to their grandmothers house. “Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility, which she had blindly assumed, and for which Fate had not fitted her” (19). She does not feel she has what it takes to be a perfect mother, as she is called to do by society.

Nearing the end of their vacation, Edna was laying outside on their porch one night. Her husband finds her, and tells her to come in; when she refuses, he gets angry and tells her that he “can’t permit you to stay out there all night. You must come in the house instantly” (31). This causes her to insist on staying out even more. “She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of

course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did" (31). She no longer feels like it is her duty to follow her husband's every wish. She has begun to be her own person, and she does not want to follow anyone else's desires but her own. Upon reflection one evening, Edna thought about everything that had happened this summer, attempting to figure out what had happened that changed her. "She could only realize that she herself—her present self—was in some way different from the other self" (39). She has become more aware of the change beginning to occur within her.

On another day, Edna is talking with one of her friends Madame Adele Ratignolle at the beach, and she attempts to explain the feelings that she is beginning to have. Previously she had told her that she was not willing to sacrifice herself for her children, and Adele had taken offense to that, telling her that nothing should matter more to her than her children. During another conversation, Edna tried again to explain what she meant by that: "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (46). She loves her children deeply, but is not willing to sacrifice her being and desires in order to be the devoted mother that society is asking her to be. Madame Ratignolle is an example of what Edna should be; a devoted wife and mother who would give up everything in order to please her family. She cannot comprehend the independence that Edna seeks, and feels that she is selfish for entertaining the idea. This comparison between the two women is brought up many times in order to show that Edna is not fulfilling the role she is meant to.

The rest of the novel occurs in New Orleans. The Pontellier's have gone home, and must go back to their everyday routine, although Edna continues to reflect about the ocean. She is still becoming her own independent person outside of what society is asking of her. One such instance of this occurs when Edna misses her Tuesday appointments. For Edna, every Tuesday she was to remain home to receive any callers that wanted to come and visit. When her husband asks her that evening how many had come, she replies "There were a good many...I found their cards when I got home; I was out" (49). Her husband is dumbfounded by this, and asks if she had at least left an excuse, saying that she was ill or something to make it seem unintentional. To this she replies that she had them say that she was out. Her husband begins to get upset by this and says "Why, my dear, I should think you'd understand by this time that people don't do such things" (49). Her husband is upset that she is neglecting her duties as a wife, and is more worried what others will think if they see that he is not able to control his wife. Edna, however, is beginning to

not care what society demands for her to do as a woman, and is instead only doing things that she wants to do.

Shortly after this encounter, Edna resolves to completely forego her Tuesday visits and do only what she feels like doing, which in her case is painting. This completely shocks her husband, and he compares her to Mrs. Adele Ratignolle, who despite her love of music "does not let everything else go to chaos" (55). It is at this time that Mr. Pontellier begins to feel that his wife is becoming mentally unstable. He notes that she does not act like herself anymore, to which the narrator responds with "That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world" (55). Edna is rejecting the role she had been assigned as a woman, and is being mistaken for someone who has lost their mind when not conforming to what society asks of her.

Not long after, Mr. Pontellier was called away on business and would be gone for a few months. Her mother-in-law comes to take the children back to her home while he is away. Edna finds herself alone, and when she expects to miss her family and wish to be with them, she instead finds peace in her solitude. She takes this opportunity to solidify her independence and move out of her big house into a small apartment on her own. When talking to one of her friends, Mademoiselle Reisz, she explains her plan to move into her own place and states that "'I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence'...whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself" (76). When her husband learns of this, he has the house remodeled so that appearances can be kept up, and no one would think that she moved out just because she wanted to. This again shows his concern with not being able to control his wife, and worrying what others will think. By the end of the novel, Edna knows that she does not want to go back to the way things are. She is happy with her independent life, and does not want to go back to being nothing more than a wife and mother. She refuses to be stripped of her own identity and forced to assume the role of someone she no longer feels she is. She decides to go back to Grand Isle and the ocean, where she first realized she had the ability to have her freedom, and decides to swim out to the ocean farther than she had ever gone before. This is symbolic of the lengths that she herself has gone in deciding her own fate within the society she lives in. The last few paragraphs of the novel state

She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known. The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous,

enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (109).

The water in this story is a representation of independence. In this section specifically, it details the struggle that Edna has faced in trying to become her own person while everyone around her discouraged her and pushed her to remain the way she was. Taking her own independence was difficult, just as the water is difficult; but the end result was worth the struggle. As she is swimming further and further, she goes back to a time in the beginning of the novel where she had gone a little too far and was terrified that she would drown. The fear sparks itself again as she swimming farther out than she has before, but it goes away in an instant. This shows the growth that she has experienced in the time that occurs in the novel. The novel ends with an implication that Edna drowns. In this way she secures her independence indefinitely through death, and does not conform to what society asks of her any longer.

This novel is arguably one of Kate Chopin's most popular works today, although in its time it was met with a lot of criticism and disapproval. In *Kate Chopin's Private Papers*, Emily Toth talks about how Chopin was a part of group called Wednesday Club that "remained loyal to her" after she left. She also mentions that "In late 1899, after *The Awakening* had been condemned by most male reviewers, the Wednesday Club invited Chopin to give a reading, and over 300 women turned out to applaud and praise her" (131). While patriarchal society rejected Chopin's novel and noted that it was "a decidedly unpleasant study of a temperament," for many women it was a breath of fresh air in a world that forced them into roles that many did not want to fulfill any longer (Chopin and Culley 166).

In his introduction to the novel *Kate Chopin: Modern Critical Views*, Harold Bloom argues that *The Awakening* is not a feminist novel, but instead is a story inspired by the poetry of American poet Walt Whitman. Bloom notes that it written in "Whitman's true mode" (1). Whitman's poetry was erotic in nature and very narcissistic, and Bloom argues that that is exactly where Chopin got the idea and style for the novel. While the similarity between the two writers is undoubtable, the meaning behind Chopin's novel is undeniable in its anti-patriarchal stance. The irony in her life and the life of her friend Adele, who is a true representation of what a woman is supposed to be like in that time, is constantly being compared. While *The Awakening* has similarity in style with the poetry of Walt Whitman, it does not take away from the anti-patriarchal message that Chopin placed in the novel.

Others were a lot more accepting of viewing Chopin's novel as feminist. One such article is "The Re-understanding of Edna Pontellier's Death" by Limin Bai, which looks at Edna's death at the end of *The Awakening*

not as a suicide or escape from a life she no longer wanted, but instead considers it a triumph in choosing a fate that she was passionate in exploring, a newfound independence that no one will be able to take away from her.

### "The Story of an Hour"

"The Story of an Hour" paints the picture of Mrs. Mallard, a devoted wife who is told the news of her husband's death. It is noted in the story that Mrs. Mallard does not react the same way most women would; rather than being in shock and paralyzed, she immediately starts weeping "with sudden, wild abandonment" (Chopin and Solomon 217). After this, "When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone" (217). It is important to note that she looks out her window and notices that "The delicious breath of rain was in the air" (217). The timing of the rain lines up with Mrs. Mallard's own reaction to the news of her husband's death. Her weeping could be occurring at the same time as the rain, and the "storm of grief" subsides as the actual storm outside does. The word delicious also gives a romantic view of the rain, which also explains Mrs. Mallard's next realization:

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sound, the scents, the color that filled the air...When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!" (218).

The parting rain is a symbol of Mrs. Mallard's own parting grief. She realizes that while she is sad that her husband is gone, this is the opportunity for her to live for herself, and not for anyone else. She now has the freedom to live her own life independently. Nearing the end of the story there is a quote that states "she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window" (219). The rain, and the aftermath of rain, is a huge symbol of Mrs. Mallard's own feelings. There is a rebirth effect that the water causes for the protagonist, an acceptance and excitement for a new way of life—a new independent life. When she comes back downstairs, her husband walks in, very much alive. Mrs. Mallard then dies and "When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills" (219). In this way, even after finding out that her husband is not dead, she still finds her independence from him in death.

It is important to note that in the beginning of the story the reader is told that Mrs. Mallard has a heart condition. This causes her appear to be weak and fragile in the view of her closest friends and to the reader as well.

This is significant, because her reaction to the news of her husband is not the reaction that they were expecting. By portraying her as weak and then showing how she is strong, Chopin negates the negative stereotype of women being weak and fragile creatures. Mrs. Mallard also experiences her awakening to this new independence after she witnesses the aftermath of rain outside her window. This story can be looked at as feminist because the main character is looking forward to living the rest of her life independently from patriarchal society. The most important part though, is that this realization comes after the protagonist's experience with water.

#### **“At the ‘Cadian Ball” and “The Storm”**

While the two stories are separately published, they can be read together as one piece, as the former does a good job of setting the scene and background for “The Storm.” Chopin did not publish “The Storm” herself, most likely because of its erotic content, it was instead published in 1969, with her completed works. Both work together to express the independence of Calixta.

“At the ‘Cadian Ball” is told from two separate points of view. The first is through Bobinôt, who is hopelessly in love with Calixta, the Spanish girl who is desired by almost all the men in the area. The second is through Clarisse, who is in love with Alcée Laballiere, the wealthy man who is known to have a bad reputation with women. Calixta and Alcée have feelings for each other, but Alcée knows that he would never marry Calixta because of their difference in station. He is wealthy and comes from a good background, and she does not. Her mother was an immigrant from Cuba “Calixta’s slender foot had never touched Cuban soil; but her mother’s had, and the Spanish was in her blood all the same” (Chopin and Koloski 142). Despite this, the attraction remains; Bobinôt, upon learning that Alcée will be attending the upcoming ball, decides to go as well, to make sure that Alcée does not try anything with Calixta. Clarisse, too, upon learning that Alcée has left home to go to this ball, resolves to go after him to proclaim her love and stop him from trying to be with anyone else.

At the ball, Alcée and Calixta find each other and go off to a room to talk. He asks her to come with him to the city. Calixta knows that he does not mean to marry her, but is tempted to go all the same. They are interrupted by Clarisse, who tells him there is an emergency back home. Alcée gets up and starts to leave without even a second glance to Calixta, and only turns to say goodbye when Clarisse says something about it. When Alcée asks about the emergency, she tells him that she loves him and does not want him to be with anyone else. Calixta calls Bobinôt over and asks him if he still wants to marry her. When he replies that he does, she agrees to it, making him extremely happy.

“The Storm” occurs some years after this event. Calixta and Bobinôt have been married for five years and have a son named Bibi. While Bobinôt and Bibi were out to get some things for Calixta, a storm is fast approaching, and the two were forced to wait it out in the safety of the store. Meanwhile, Calixta is noted to be oblivious to the fast approaching storm until it started to get dark. She hurries to close all the windows and grab the clothes hanging on the line when Alcée rides up and asks to take shelter in their home. Inside, Calixta begins to worry about her husband and son and staring out the window a bolt of lightning strikes a nearby tree, causing her to stagger back into Alcée’s arms. Chopin writes that “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...As she glanced up at him the fear in her liquid blue eyes had given place to a drowsy gleam that unconsciously betrayed a sensuous desire” (Chopin and Levine et al. 457). The sexual tension between the two is undeniable at this point, and the growing storm is almost a parallel to their growing desires.

While the storm is occurring Alcée notes that “Now—well, now—her lips seemed in a manner free to be tasted, as well as her round, white throat and her whiter breasts” (457). The storm is serving as an opportunity for Calixta to be her own independent person, free to be with Alcée in a way that society refused to allow. The storm represents the chaos of the feelings that she has had for Alcée for many years, and allows her to take her own agency in exploring the relationship that society would not allow her, due to their difference in station. Chopin notes that “She was a revelation in that dim, mysterious chamber; as white as the couch she lay upon. Her firm elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright, was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world” (457).

“The rain was over...Calixta, on the gallery, watched Alcée ride away” (458). Their affair lasts as long as the storm does, and with its passing, the build up of feelings between the two since the ball seems to dissipate as well. It is also important to note that Bobinôt is almost taken aback at the happiness of his wife when he returns. “Bobinôt’s explanations and apologies which he had been composing all along the way, died on his lips as Calixta felt him to see if he were dry, and seemed to express nothing but satisfaction at their safe return” (458). He had expected her to be upset and angry that they had been gone, but instead she is just happy to have them home. She makes dinner for them and “when the three seated themselves at table they laughed much and so loud that anyone might have heard them as far away as Laballiere’s” (458). Calixta has taken her independence and experienced the life that she felt that she lost, but she

is also happy with the life that she has now with her husband and son. Her happiness is noted to be heard from as far as Alcée's own home, which shows that she does not need Alcée to be happy, he has not saved her from a terrible life. The story ends by stating "So the storm passed and every one was happy" (459). Calixta explored what could have been had she gone against what society asked of her when she married Bobinôt, and though she ends up being more content with the life she has with her husband, it is by her own choice, as she could have done things much differently. The storm represents a rebirth for Calixta, a chance for her to choose Bobinôt, not because he was the choice that patriarchal society gave to her, but because she was happy with him.

### "Azélie"

"Azélie" is a little different than the other stories, in that it follows the thoughts of 'Polyte, the male lead who is trying to win the affections of Azélie, whose family has the tendency to mooch off of others without working for it in exchange. Most people in their town do not take this family seriously, and are often annoyed with their inability to contribute.

The story starts out with Azélie walking to the town store from her home. She lives with her father, grandmother and little brother in a cabin that "was removed some distance from the plantation house, and only its pointed roof could be discerned like a speck far away across the field of cotton" (Chopin and Koloski 279). She is noted to be wearing "a faded calico dress that had been made the summer before, and was now too small for her in every way" (276). Azélie comes from a poor family. They live on land with crops, but they are unworked and so they are unable to make a profit from them, and rely on the grace of the shopkeeper to just give them the things that they need. 'Polyte does not like Azélie, and is annoyed that his boss is okay with just giving them the things they need free of charge. Azélie at first is only there to get some meat, but after 'Polyte sarcastically asks her if she needs anything else, she leans on the counter and lists more things. He notes that "There was no trace of any intention of coquetry in her manner. He resented this as a token of indifference toward his sex, and thought it inexcusable" (278). She is not flirtatious like other women would be in this situation, and 'Polyte feels like he is entitled to that kind of consideration because of the things he is giving her. This story focuses on the ways in which Azélie is not portraying the role she is supposed to, and shows the ways in which 'Polyte feels he is entitled to the treatment he thinks he deserves. In this way, this story is very patriarchal in nature.

After 'Polyte refuses to give her tobacco and whiskey to bring back to her father, she comes back in the middle of the night and breaks into the store to get it for

herself. This is also telling of the lengths she is willing to go to bring her father the things he desires. When 'Polyte catches her, she is not apologetic in any way, denies she was stealing and claims that "I was jus' takin' a few li'le things you all too mean to gi' me" (281). Instead of turning her in, he lets her go and instead tells her never to step foot in the store, but to come to him directly if she ever needed anything and he would just give it to her.

"After that night 'Polyte loved Azélie desperately...he was almost ashamed to acknowledge to himself" (282). 'Polyte hates that he has come to love someone "so wholly devoid of moral sense" (282). He feels he deserves better than to love this girl, who is everything but the perfect woman. Despite this however, he loves her anyways, and looks forward to every opportunity to see her. In a moment of weakness he proclaims his love to her and kisses her, and she wants absolutely nothing to do with it. He knew that her father would have to go back to Little River, and wanted to ask Azélie to marry him when he left. He "believed he would be able to awaken Azélie to finer, better impulses when he should have her apart to himself" (283). He believes that once she is married to him and is his to mold, he can turn her into the woman she should be. Instead however, Azélie refuses him and goes to Little River with her family, but even still "her reserve led him to believe, since he hoped it, that he had prevailed with her and that she had determined to stay with him and be his wife" (284). When he realizes that she has indeed gone, he quits his job in hopes to follow her there and win her over.

While this story is not exactly in the same format as the others, it still follows some of the same ideas. Water isn't used specifically, but the idea is still represented through a place with water in the title. Azélie going to Little River instead of marrying 'Polyte is her way of being her own person, despite what patriarchal society asked of her. The River represents a passage or journey, and in this case expresses Azélie's desire to be with her family, even though it means leaving her home. Azélie is also a mother type figure for her family. She is constantly the one that is coming to town to get things for her father and will leave for Little River to continue to do so.

### "A Sentimental Soul"

"A Sentimental Soul" follows the everyday life of Mamzelle Fleurette as she runs a little shop in her town. Against her better judgement, she has fallen in love with the locksmith Lacodie. He is married, and Mamzelle Fleurette knows that nothing can come of her affection for him, and that she should not have the feelings at all. She goes to confession to tell Father Fochelle about it, and he tells her that she needs to do everything in her power not to entertain the feelings any longer. She starts to work on

pushing him from her mind, when he suddenly stops coming in to get the paper, as he did every day before. His wife comes instead one day and tells her that Lacodie has fallen ill. More and more days pass and Lacodie continues to get worse and worse until eventually on a “chill and misty” evening Mamzelle Fleurette is up all night praying for Lacodie, who dies the next morning (Chopin and Koloski 300). The misty evening is the only reference to water that this story has, which makes it unlike all the other stories that have water directly relate to the independence of the character. However, she does spend the entire night praying and thinking about Lacodie, which she had been told specifically not to do by Father Fochelle.

Formerly, Mamzelle Fleurette had enjoyed going to confession; but after Lacodie’s death she did not enjoy it any longer. “Her heart went on loving Lacodie and her soul went on struggling; for she made this delicate and puzzling distinction between heart and soul, and pictured the two as set in a very death struggle against each other” (300). She continued to pray for him despite her best attempts not to, and she continued to feel bad for the feelings that she still had for Lacodie. However, once she finds out that his wife has gotten married to another shortly after his passing, she is furious and “was preparing for the first time in her life to take her conscience into her own keeping” (302). Instead of going to confession to where she usually does, she takes a car to a church much farther away, to confess to a priest there. She does, without any mention whatsoever of Lacodie. Afterwards, “Mamzelle Fleurette did not ride back to her home; she walked. The sensation of walking on air was altogether delicious; she had never experienced it before” (302). Walking was a very uncommon thing for women to do alone, especially with as much distance as Fleurette had from her home. By walking home and not confessing to being in love with the dead husband of another woman, Mamzelle Fleurette owns her own independence in the matter. Upon returning home as well she takes a picture frame and “neatly and deftly pasted Lacodie’s picture. Then she re-entered her room and deliberately hung it upon the wall...and she did not care if the Gascon’s wife ever saw it or not” (303). The environment surrounding her on her walk home fills her with the strength she needs in order to take her consciousness into her own hands. She no longer feels she needs to do whatever Father Fochelle tells her to in order to save her soul. She decides to not push away her feelings for Lacodie, and live her life with his presence always near her.

While it isn’t water that helps Mamzelle Fleurette come to this conclusion, her walk provides the clarity that she needs to finally act in the way that she has been wanting to since the beginning. In this way, the setting is still a representation of her independence, even if it is not through water specifically.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, most of the stories analyzed had symbolism with water that helped to provide the ability for the female characters to have agency in their own lives apart from what patriarchal society was asking of them. Water is used as a baptism or rebirth into a new life, and mirrored the emotions that the women were feeling in their situations. Because of the way that water was used in these stories and novel, Kate Chopin should be considered a feminist writer. She worked hard to show what life was like for an American woman in the nineteenth century, as well as the struggle that women faced with being accepted and able to determine their own destinies. While Kate Chopin did a lot of work with regionalism and depicting the lifestyle of Louisiana, she also had a big part to play in showing the lives of women who were beginning to break out of the patriarchal bubble they were forced into. She uses her skill as a regionalist writer to uses aspects of that setting to influence these women into accepting their own agency and independence. By viewing Chopin as a feminist writer, as well as a regionalist and realist writer, we can begin to have a more accurate view of history.

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