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LOOSENING THE CRITICAL CORSET: NEW APPROACHES TO THE SHORT FICTION
OF KATE CHOPIN AND RUTH STUART

by

KATE O'DONOGHUE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Kate O'Donoghue

Adviser: Professor Morris Dickstein

My dissertation uses the works and lives of two popular late-nineteenth-century writers, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin, as a heuristic to solve the literary mystery of how “fiction by women” became “women’s fiction.” While feminist scholars resuscitated Chopin, Stuart remains ignored. The realism and irony of Chopin’s novel *The Awakening* resonate with modern readers, but the sentimental aspects of Stuart’s work and Chopin’s short fiction remain problematic. The aesthetic movements of realism and naturalism influenced literary taste to the extent that sentimentalism is anathema to contemporary critics. I participate in recent scholarship that explores how sentimentalism has been used by countless writers in all eras as a literary device. I posit that Chopin and Stuart use sentimental devices to remain commercially successful in a difficult publishing market and to introduce transgressive elements in their fiction that broaden realism and naturalism’s often narrow and denigrating portrayals of mothers. My methodology consists of library research of published scholarly journals and texts.

Preface: Loosening the Critical Corset

“For the rest of the twentieth century, the assumed tension between the freedom and equality of women and the well-being of the family would remain the most frequent and effective argument against fundamental change for women (Matthews 94-95).”

*

One afternoon last summer, after I had picked my three children up from camp and had them settled into doing an art project, my oldest daughter looked up at me and asked, “is Raquel coming today?”

“Yes,” I explained, “it’s Monday and I have to work tonight.”

“I wish you could be a regular mom and stay home with us.”

“Working moms are regular moms,” I explained. “I’m lucky enough to have a flexible job so that I can pick you up from camp and school.”

“You should stay home,” she responded, “and take care of us.”

“But what I do is important,” I replied. “I’m a teacher.”

“You are important HERE,” she emphasized. “We’re important.”

When I relayed this story to my own mother, she recalled having a similar dialogue with me when I was a child. These conversations, separated by thirty years, reflect pervasive and static societal expectations of mothers, despite the dynamic realities and economics of modern life. My mother also once told me that the brightest, most academically ambitious woman she knew in the early 1970s was my Aunt Carol. She was valedictorian of her class, went to Cornell on a full scholarship, eventually earned her PhD, and became a tenured professor. “Even Carol,” she lamented, “got married right after college. It was what we were expected to do.”

When my attorney this past summer crafted my motion for financial support from my ex-husband, she carefully framed my narrative to highlight the sacrifices I've made in my career and studies to care for our children. That I would be the one to make those sacrifices, rather than their father, was implicit and assumed, although my attorney explained its importance: "We want to make sure it is clear that you weren't focused on your job to the detriment of the children." Presumably, if I had taken the male prerogative to place my career ambitions over the children's needs, I would be seen as a derelict mother, not entitled to as much financial compensation. In 2003, journalist Lisa Belkin published "The Opt-Out Generation" in the New York Times, about college-educated, professional women who chose to opt out of the workforce to focus on raising their children. Ten years later, Judith Warner prepared a follow-up article, "The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In." Many of the women who opted out in 2003 found that they could not easily or profitably transition back into the workforce once their children began school or grew more independent. More frightening, many women found themselves economically unstable after a divorce or a spouse's lay-off because their time off with their children translated to a loss of viability on the labor market.

I highlight these personal anecdotes and the Belkin and Warner articles to underscore the importance of the following point. American motherhood has always occupied political, public, civic, and economic spheres that overlap and interlink with the domestic and private circles. From the beginning of the Republic, mothers were assumed to have multiple duties: taking care of the home and the family, nurturing children, and raising those children (especially sons) to become responsible and civic-minded citizens.

Indeed, women today face many of the same challenges. Despite vast cultural, political, economic, and societal changes, working women in 2013 share the tension between work and family with not only mothers and grandmothers, but also late nineteenth-century working mothers and writers such as Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart.

Chopin and Stuart lived similar lives, and were contemporary writers on similar themes. Both women were natives of Louisiana, young widows who never remarried, and single working mothers. They knew each other, and shared a larger circle of literary acquaintances. However, Kate Chopin's greater economic independence and freedom allowed her to write fiction that saw past the literary marketplace of the 1890s. This is important because Ruth Stuart was more popular, more feted, more lauded than Chopin in the 1890s. As Helen Taylor chronicles, Stuart's entry into New York literary life was supported by luminaries such as Charles Dudley Warner, William Dean Howells, Mary Wilkins, Frances Hodges Burnett (90-95).

The prevalence of works like Chopin's *The Awakening*, when taught alongside Wharton, Jewett, and Freeman, as female realist works to accompany Dreiser, James, Crane, and the like, give an incomplete picture of the literary contexts of the 1890s; works like Stuart's—often overtly feminist texts that nonetheless support white supremacist ideologies—were enjoyed by contemporaries more than works like Chopin's. Whenever I teach American literature survey classes, I assign at least one pro-slavery novel and a few pro-Confederate poems alongside “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” Thoreau's “Civil Disobedience,” *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Contemporary literary studies is multidisciplinary, and while I would much prefer to spend an evening rereading Chopin, Wharton, Cather, or Jewett, Stuart's fiction features amazing germs of subversiveness—her works show a world in which women had

to run things, and they had to interact with blacks as partners. However, Stuart did not have the chances her extraordinarily talented, comparably privileged, and financially savvy colleague Kate Chopin did.

Perhaps Stuart didn't have the gift that Chopin had. She certainly did not have the background, the fine education, and the matrilineal family of Chopin. She was an eldest daughter of a confederate family in a difficult time. Her role was to take care of her siblings and keep the household afloat. Then, later, when she became a writer, she took a chance. She left her son in Louisiana and moved to New York. Chopin had the luxury to become an artist. Stuart was a working writer. In many ways, Stuart was beholden to the publishing industry and economic currents beyond her control. Then, as now, women like Chopin and Stuart who became successful writers were the exception. Indeed, most writers now supplement their income with another job, often teaching.

For decades, teaching has been the de facto career of English PhDs. Research coexists with teaching, and departmental service, at colleges and universities: one does not exist, usually, without the other, in a college teaching career, although certain institutions may weight one over the other. For many PhD candidates, myself included, a heavy teaching load delays the completion of the dissertation monograph. Yet, while it takes longer, certainly, to write a dissertation while teaching nearly a full course load, ultimately I think it makes the work more relevant. For two years, my progress on the dissertation slowed while I struggled to reconcile what I was teaching—introductory survey classes and composition—with what I was writing about. I feel that undergraduate teaching and doctoral-level research should not exist in separate spheres. The skills we learn in doctoral programs, of analysis, context, and research, apply to undergraduates

as well; in this time of change in higher education, these skills add value to the teaching of literature. We show students how fiction and poetry connect to, inform, and are influenced by trends and developments in the larger world. As I thought through the blocks I experienced between my own research and my own teaching, I reflected on how technology enabled research that would have taken years to accomplish without it. In fact, without technology, the primary sources for Ruth Stuart would have been nearly impossible to locate. Her books are out of print, but easily found online because of book scanning projects or through used book websites. Increasingly, the department I worked for asked me to work on faculty development projects that showcase technology. I began to think through how technology could be the link to connect research with teaching. To explore that possibility, I applied to work on a project at the New Media Lab at the Graduate Center. Over the course of the spring semester of 2013, I developed a mapping project using a less-well-known Kate Chopin story, “Miss McEnders.” I am implementing that project in the classroom this coming semester, Spring 2015, in a *Literature and Place* course I am teaching at Queens College. I am in the process of developing an assignment sequence using web-publishing and group annotation tools to engage undergraduate students in creating digital editions of Ruth Stuart’s stories that I hope to implement in the classroom in Fall 2015. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I detail these assignments, explain how I use technology to integrate teaching with research, and also why I think a combination of teaching, technology, and research are essential and inseparable in twenty-first century literary studies.

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Introduction: Context, Technology, and Recent Criticism

As Ann Douglas has articulated, in the early nineteenth century many women adopted the rhetoric of domesticity and piety to achieve commercial and popular success through writing. Yet Douglas questions the literary legacy of these women writers while she affirms their influence on both the American literary scene and the expansion of women's roles: "they were professionals masquerading as amateurs. They evaded or at least mitigated just those restrictions imposed by . . . domestic duties which they celebrated in print; in disseminating praises of the public virtues, they gained access to the public realm (100)." The disingenuously pious writers who preached about domesticity turned the culture of American literature into a marketplace and enlarged the definition of appropriate behavior for women in the public realm; I would add that these early writers established a precedent for working women writers later in the century.

While dissent to Douglas's degraded opinion of nineteenth century women writers is volatile, varied, and voluminous, she nevertheless established a timeline for a history of women writers. After the first wave of religious and domestic writers, the second generation sentimental writers, such as Fanny Fern, lost the theology and comfortably defined themselves as commercial, popular writers. This led to the third generation of postbellum sentimental writers, whom Douglas particularly excoriates:

Moreover, the cultural irresponsibility of feminized sentimentalism was revealed by its eventual fate. After the Civil War, no longer backed by any significant segment of the male (or female) cultural elite, feminine literary sentimentalism became by definition lowbrow; it had begun its downward trek in public esteem to its present degraded posi-

tion as the staple of the poorer religious press, saccharine greeting-card poetry, and the weekly soulful lyrics of certain popular singers (103).

My interests reside in this degraded arena. By analyzing representative works from two women writers of the 1890s, Kate Chopin and Ruth McEnery Stuart, I will show how the economy of women in the 1890s affected their writing then and still affects its reception now, as the work that has endured shaped literary studies and the work that was forgotten needs context and patience. As Hildegard Hoeller affirms in her article that details critical strategies and progressions in feminist literary critical analyses of sentimental fiction, critics in the 1980s (like Douglas) “found [sentimental 19th century fiction by women] hard to explore within the critical paradigms they brought to the venture: twentieth-century feminism, on the one hand, and a critical taste favoring realism and irony over sentimental expression on the other” (340). Yet Hoeller identifies that more recent critical writing on sentimental expression “has moved beyond a bifurcated focus on either the cultural work or the aesthetics of sentimental writing” (342) and “emerges as the central counter-term to individualism” (343). Indeed, both Chopin and Stuart use sentiment as a literary device in their short fiction. My project investigates how these two writers leveraged sentimental expression to create subversive content and to complicate late nineteenth century conceptions of motherhood, race, and the roles of women in society.

For over forty years, Kate Chopin’s fiction has been accepted in the American literary canon. Per Seyersted revived her work in his seminal 1969 texts, *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* and *Kate Chopin: a Critical Biography*, then biographers and critics such as Emily Toth, Bernie Koloski, Barbara Ewell, Janet Beer, and others solidified Chopin’s position in the annals of university literature courses and scholarly collections, primarily through applying modern crit-

ical techniques to her novel *The Awakening*. Chopin's fiction seems markedly malleable to critical interpretation, perhaps because it reads as unusually timeless. In her fiction, she emphasized the universality of human experiences and employed sharp observations of human behavior.

Chopin's body of work continues to invite new perspectives, especially as the twenty-first century classroom fosters deeper and more complex understandings of her fiction.

Technology is important—I would say essential—to research and teaching in 2014. I detail some specific classroom techniques I have developed to teach Stuart and Chopin in the final chapter of this dissertation; using open source web publishing tools and free digital mapping tools, I ask students to use technology to enhance their understanding of place and to become dynamic producers of literary criticism. Digital tools revitalize literary scholarship by offering new tools to investigate the cultural and material conditions under which works of fiction in previous centuries were composed and also by democratizing and popularizing the publication process. Using these technologies in the classroom creates exciting moments of discovery that instructors and students can share. In the case of forgotten writers like Ruth Stuart, technology engenders their resuscitation. Without the vast and widespread digitization projects that have occurred over the past decade, Stuart's work would be very difficult to obtain. As it is now, anyone with internet access can read her oeuvre. This allows Stuart's work to enter into the classroom and the literary conversation. As educators and scholars continue to include forgotten writers like Stuart into their course reading lists, the conception of nineteenth century fiction itself will adapt to this new discourse. For example, teaching Stuart alongside Chopin offers an implicit lesson in how racial attitudes affected the literary marketplace; Stuart, as a feminist who was also a white supremacist, offers students an important struggle with which to contend and brings up probing

questions. Do the sometimes surprisingly subversive subplots in Stuart's fiction indicate her personal rebellion against the dominant white supremacist ideology of her time or do they exemplify the often contradictory and conflicted racial views of white America? Can one read and enjoy a superbly crafted short story that denigrates African Americans? When read alongside Chopin, Stuart's work becomes even more problematic in relief. Chopin has some troubling racial aspects in her work, but she clearly does not support white supremacy. The contrast between these two writers, their economic needs, and the context in which they wrote all are classroom and scholarly discussions that can be facilitated by technology and digital tools.

Since using digital tools allows scholars to discover forgotten writers and works, and also allows researchers easier access to in-depth context, it is not surprising that the most innovative Chopin criticism over the past ten years tends to focus more on her short stories and lesser-known works (such as her first novel *At Fault*). Established Chopin scholars like Emily Toth, Mary Papke, and Heather Ostman, and new voices such as Diana Epelbaum, Corrie Merricks, and Rafael Walker all have recent essays or conference presentations that focus on two main elements, that I take up in my dissertation. These critical texts place Chopin's work in context with political and socioeconomic changes in the postbellum South, the Northern literary marketplace for fiction, and with other women writers of her time. They also regard Chopin's short fiction pieces as entities worthy of inquiry unto themselves. There has been no scholarly work on Ruth Stuart since Helen Taylor's excellent 1989 book, *Race and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin* but I hope that my interest, the trend in Chopin studies towards placing her writings in a contemporary context and the widespread availability of Stu-

art's work through digital retrieval projects over the past several years will yield more activity on her.

Indeed, the contrast between writers like Stuart and Chopin is clarified by the following analyses from Emily Toth and Helen Taylor about the market for fiction in the 1890s. In "A Writer, Her Reviewers, and Her Markets," Toth writes about Chopin's experimental fictional portrayals of relationships among women and between black and white characters. Toth notes how these portrayals prevented the magazines and editors that had the most literary influence from publishing her work. As Toth affirms, "[t]he genteel tradition, as represented by William Dean Howells, was simply not hospitable to her vision of women. As the powerful editor of the *Atlantic* and then *Harper's*, Howells preferred 'the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American,' rather than the tragic or melancholy themes treated by such Europeans as Guy de Maupassant" (163). Helen Taylor documents William Dean Howells' accolades of Ruth Stuart, and the attraction is easy to see: Stuart took her inspiration from the American writers admired by Howells; her stories, on the surface, emphasize the harmony of life. Stuart couldn't afford for Howells and, by proxy, the *Atlantic* and *Harper's* to reject her, like Chopin could. Moreover, she did not draw from the French realist tradition of Flaubert and de Maupassant as Chopin did. While some of Chopin's earlier short stories exhibit the same patronizing portrayals of African Americans found in nearly all of Stuart's fiction, Toth notes Chopin's decision to treat race in a more experimental and nuanced way; again, this choice speaks both to Chopin's economic independence from the literary marketplace and to her artistic ambition. Toth also discusses the white supremacist preferences of the 1890s literary journals and Chopin's increasing split from reductive dichotomies: "[m]agazine writers in the 1890s, all of them white, liked stories of unequal

relationships between blacks and whites—in which, for instance, the black character sacrifices for his or her ‘white folks’” Yet “Chopin had been seeking new challenges” (162). In her stories after *Bayou Folk*, Chopin began presenting female characters of different races in equal relationships and enjoying cross-cultural relationships. She also explored the nuances and constructions of race in her short fiction, and female desire that transcended gender, racial, cultural, and marital boundaries. Major magazines such as *The Atlantic*, the *Century*, *Youth’s Companion* and *Harp-er’s* all declined this radical work—the very pieces that have cemented Chopin’s place in the literary canons of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Toth, “A Writer” 156-163). In fact, as Toth affirms, without *Vogue* magazine and its idiosyncratic publisher in the 1890s, Josephine Redding, Chopin may have vanished from the late-nineteenth-century literary scene entirely: “In the mid-to late 1890s, *Vogue* was the place where Chopin published her most daring and surprising stories, those most in the French, Guy de Maupassant mold . . . Alone among magazines of the 1890s, *Vogue* published fearless and truthful portrayals of women’s lives” (164).

Chopin was lucky to have found *Vogue*, and readers of her work are fortunate, as well. However, the strands of discontent and the incredible nuances about race and gender that modern readers enjoy in Chopin’s work are present in the work of writers such as Stuart, albeit these elements are hidden and coded. Central to my dissertation project are the economic considerations that Chopin and Stuart faced when publishing their fiction and the relationships and connections that exist between their works. I think that it is essential to view Chopin’s exceptionalism as an outgrowth of her economic independence and literary tastes, and to see the overt themes realized in her work as covert elements in writers such as Stuart who were more beholden to the demands of the literary marketplace.

Critics such as Heather Ostman have also begun to examine Chopin's treatment of motherhood in her work, particularly her short fiction. Both Stuart and Chopin defied traditional ideologies of separate spheres and True Womanhood by being single working mothers—although, as I explain in the dissertation, the seemingly discordant status of being a working mother was not necessarily unusual by the 1890s. The ideology of separate spheres outlived its practical application. Ostman analyzes Chopin's quarrel with the essentialist ideas of motherhood—that women are naturally nurturing—through a deep exploration of an often overlooked short story, "Regret."

Diana Epelbaum, in a forthcoming essay in *Kate Chopin in Context: New Approaches*, "Pioneering Chopin's Radical Feminism: Nineteenth-Century Patchwork in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgensons*," sees Chopin's realized feminism in *The Awakening* as continuing the nascent feminist themes in Stoddard's novel. Likewise, in "'I'm So Happy; It Frightens Me': Female Genealogy in Kate Chopin's and Pauline Hopkins's Fiction," Corrie Catlett Merricks examines Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" and "La Belle Zoraïde" alongside Pauline Hopkins's novel *Contending Forces*. These narratives showcase the fraught and complicated worlds of the feminine culture and complicated genealogies of whites and blacks on plantations in the ante and postbellum South. Merricks analyzes how Chopin and Hopkins depict the complex nuances of race in a culture in which sexual relationships between white men and black women, and the power dynamics and exploitation embedded within these unions, were hidden but commonplace and how this historical reality manifests in their fiction through allusion and metaphor. I continue the work of scholars such as Epelbaum and Merricks by placing Chopin in conversation with Stuart and in-

investigating how the complicated cultural mores and ideologies of race, class, and sex manifest in their fiction.

In her essay, “Kate Chopin’s Social Fiction,” Mary Papke contextualizes Chopin’s fiction not with other writers dealing with similar themes or in the space of the literary publishing environment, but with the “culture wars” of the postbellum era and how white southern men sought to rationalize and promote antebellum morals through the continued subjugation of women and African Americans. Writers from the mid-nineteenth century equated feminist and abolitionist concerns: Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is perhaps the most famous novel that acts as a political and domestic tract (28). Chopin continues this symbolic pairing in her short fiction. As Papke writes,

[Chopin] is writing . . . within a period of enormous transmogrification: the pre-capitalist, patriarchal plantation economy built on slavery giving way to industrialization of the land and economic assimilation of the South into a post-Civil War ‘united’ state built on a new class system and based, in part, on the retention of a large working class and the subordination of women of all classes. (27)

Papke is interested in how Chopin represented characters who apprehend “the irreconcilable contradictions between ideological theory and social practice” and the “moral double standard” in the “male sexual practices” of “miscegenation”. She writes that

Chopin saw that for women of any color life in the antebellum and postbellum South was potentially abysmal. The struggle against cultural imperatives is a fierce one, made even

more notable in Chopin's representation of it through her focus on states of liminality (Papke 28).

I use Papke's argument as a spring board for my discussions about the intersections of slavery, marriage, and motherhood in "Désirée's Baby," "Athénaïse," and "La Belle Zoraïde." However, I also apply it to my interpretations of two of Stuart's short stories, "An Arkansas Prophet" and "Blink." Although at first glance, these stories reinforce a nostalgia and romance of the old south—elements that Papke emphasizes Chopin actively works against (28)—these tales actually are shockingly subversive, when given the same political context that Papke uses for her take on Chopin's fiction. "An Arkansas Prophet" ultimately deems a former slave a hero for killing a white man with a stolen and reuniting a fallen woman and her bastard child with her prominent plantation family and "Blink" advocates for an egalitarian and labor-sharing relationship between a young woman and her father's former slave.

In Rafael Walker's presentation at the Kate Chopin panel in the 2013 *American Literature Association* conference, "Kate Chopin's Rejection of Individualism," he argues that the literary work of Chopin should be viewed as a transitional moment in the history of literary realism. Walker claims that Chopin's work shows how the cultural turn to consumerism at the turn of the twentieth century radically transformed bourgeois domesticity in America and how this shift helped to redirect women's attention from the home to their own personal fulfillment. In Chopin's short fiction such as "A Pair of Silk Stockings" and "Miss McEnders," I posit that Chopin directly confronts the sentimental and realist literary modes. In Stuart's fiction she, too, addresses realism directly, often using sentimental devices. Chopin's recent inclusion and shaky

position on the periphery of American realism and Stuart's complete exclusion from it continue the male hegemonic stronghold on this genre. Walker's argument begins a path to expand realism's definition. Combined with the work of scholars such as Hildegard Hoeller and Elizabeth Ammons who advocate for a reconsideration of sentimentalism in fiction, both Chopin and Stuart can be seen as questioning the sentimental tradition and using it for ironic effect to further realistic aims of accurately depicting the complex and dynamic worlds in which they lived.

While I accept that Chopin stood out from her contemporaries, I subscribe her exceptionalism to economic independence and literary preferences, and I agree with Toth, Papke, and Walker about the integrity of her short stories as standalone works. One finds it difficult to view Chopin out of context without ascribing her status as a unique visionary genius, so different is much of her fiction from her contemporaries, like Stuart. But, as Emily Toth has pointed out continually throughout her career, Chopin had other means of income and her ambition as a writer rested upon more than publication—she sought to write about the world she saw as accurately as possible. It is important to view Chopin in context with Ruth Stuart—Chopin was exceptional in her treatment of race and women's independence. Much of this exceptionalism derives from her economic independence and identification with French realists. Stuart found more inspiration from contemporary American writers (such as Howells, Chandler, Garland) and she supported her family with her income as a writer, so she had less freedom to be radical. Yet both writers tackle similar themes, and I expand the work of Epelbaum and Merricks to place Chopin in context with Stuart—who was more popular than Chopin in the 1890s but who is virtually forgotten in 2014. I leverage the scholarship of Toth that explains the problems Chopin faced in the 1890s in publishing her radical fiction and how economic independence and *Vogue* magazine made

these important publications possible. I provide a historical analysis of the complicated formation of the separate spheres and True Womanhood ideologies that Ostman's recent work on Chopin focuses on. I build on Mary Papke's affirmation of Chopin's recognition of the fraught and oppressive political and cultural conditions that the patriarchal southern ruling class used to subjugate women and African Americans and apply it not only to Chopin's stories of women trapped in motherhood and marriage, but to Ruth Stuart's tales of plucky former belles and subversive former slaves living integrated, commingled lives during a decade in which separation (accompanied by violence) became a keyword for race relations. And I use Rafael Walker's expansive definition of realism and Hildegard Hoeller's and Elizabeth Ammon's assessment of sentimentalism as a device rather than a genre to argue for an expansion of the realist canon that moves Chopin to the center from the periphery and makes room for writers such as Stuart. In this dissertation I add my voice to the most recent and exciting voices in the ongoing scholarly conversations about Kate Chopin and her contemporaries.

Finally, my research informs not only the several literature classes I have taught as a graduate student, but also those I will get hired to teach once I earn my doctorate; with this essential relationship in mind, I offer some thoughts about how using multimedia techniques and leveraging the increased availability of digital texts to teach Chopin and Stuart offers fresh perspectives for literary studies in terms of both research and pedagogy.

To arrive at a thesis, I will first offer an overview of the political and cultural formation of American motherhood as an ideology, the fiction market of the late nineteenth century, and the historians and theorists who posit that the separate spheres ideology upon which much of our understanding of 19th century womanhood rests was less actual than it seems. The next chapters

analyze significant representative works of Chopin and Stuart, and the final chapter investigates the impact of digital humanities and technology on both studying and teaching Chopin and Stuart.

Chapter 1: Overview: Motherhood, Fiction Markets of the 1890s, and Separate Spheres

1.1. Republican Motherhood

The short stories of Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart, published in popular and literary magazines of the 1890s, illustrate the influence, transformation, and contradictory ideologies of American motherhood. To understand how these stories represent such, I will offer a brief history of motherhood as a political and cultural construct, and an abridged summary of how the ideology of motherhood intersects with women's labor history in the United States.

American motherhood has always occupied political, public, civic, and economic spheres that overlap with the domestic and private circles. From the beginning of the Republic, mothers were assumed to have multiple duties: taking care of the home and the family, nurturing children, and raising those children to become responsible and civic-minded citizens. Feminist critic and historian Linda Kerber's book *Women of the Republic* documents, explains, and analyzes the formation of the contradictory duties of American women and mothers as simultaneously public and private, civic and domestic. On the one hand, certain Enlightenment thinkers, whose writings would influence early American intellectuals and politicians, used the mother's essential role within a family to undermine the divine, absolute, patriarchal rights of kings; on the other, women were property and inhabited a separate, private, lesser realm that was nonetheless political. The "Republican Mother" occupied an essential place in the creation of Americans: not only were mothers to instill civic and social values in their children, but their inclusion in political life was a key aspect of John Locke's argument against the divine right of kings: "If familial power is shared with women and limited by mutual responsibilities, the nature of royal authority must also be shared and limited. What Locke accomplished in the First Treatise was the integration of

women into social theory” (Kerber 189). Women, particularly mothers, were essential to creating strong citizens; moreover, granting them power undermined the authority of monarchism and absolutism. When the strategy to subvert England’s power became economic, women’s purchasing power in the home became actively political; as the agitation against England grew, women’s private duties of procuring goods for the home and the family increasingly transformed into publicly political acts. The Revolution cemented women’s position in the political sphere of American life (Kerber 7-8).

After the Revolutionary War, key players in the new republic “sought to fill the inadequacies of inherited political theory” by assigning women a position in civic and political life (Kerber 188). The Republican mother was supposed to be educated in order to inculcate the values of the Republic into the younger generation. “It made use of the classic formulation of the Spartan Mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the polis” (Kerber 188). The Republican Mother offered a bridge between the domestic and the public, and a rationalization of how to leverage women’s increasingly political duties during the years of rebellion and revolution into the new task of nation-building through an amalgamation of domesticity, economics, parenting, and patriotism.

The language of Republican Motherhood provided the justification of women’s political behavior; it bridged the gap between idiocy and the polis. The woman now claimed a significant political role, though she played it in the home. This new identity had the advantage of appearing to reconcile politics and domesticity; it justified continued political education and political sensibility. (Kerber 12)

Kerber invokes the writings of influential political philosophers to show how the particularities of American motherhood—at once public and private, domestic and political—formed. However, it may be up for debate that early American women resided in a separate sphere, living isolated and separate lives, whose public assignments the budding revolution slowly teased out. Kerber insists that the pre-Revolutionary American world was one in which women were separate from men:

Like most women in preindustrial societies, eighteenth-century American women lived in what might be called a woman's domain. Their daily activities took place within a feminine, domestic circle: infants were delivered by midwives, the sick were cared for by nurses, women who traveled stayed overnight at boardinghouses owned or run by females. (Kerber 7)

Yet other historians, such as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, have suggested that women in the eighteenth century actually lived lives that were more varied and less separate than women in the nineteenth century. Older women acted as midwives, whose duties extended beyond assisting at childbirth to postpartum and infant care and treating childhood illnesses. Early American women turned the crops and animals on the farm into nourishing meals, prepared fruits and vegetables for winter, concocted herbal salves and remedies, and made clothes and household linens from fabric they produced themselves. They also educated their children on practical, academic, political, and cultural matters.. Colonial women—particularly mothers—sustained the first American frontier. Ulrich writes,

the late 18th century was not only a time of political revolution but of medical, economic, and sexual transformation. Not surprisingly, it was also a time when a new ideology of

womanhood self-consciously connected domestic virtue to the survival of the state . . . the nation's political revolution and the social revolutions that accompanied it were related. It is not as easy as it once was to dismiss domestic concerns as 'trivia' (Ulrich 27).

Ulrich affirms Kerber's assertion that the ideologies of womanhood and motherhood in the new American republic were politically motivated and would influence public and private roles for future centuries of American women. But she offers compelling evidence (from the remarkable diary of a midwife in Maine that spans the years 1785-1812) against Kerber's thesis that women and men occupied separate spheres. "Martha's diary," Ulrich explains, "shows how women and men worked together to sustain this eighteenth-century town" (30). Nonetheless, both Kerber and Ulrich emphasize that women's labor and practical knowledge (work such as cloth-making, sewing, cleaning, child rearing, food preparation and storage, midwifery, gathering and preparing herbal medicines and salves, and managing large households, required strength, experience, and intellect) gave early American women a certain power that transcended the domestic sphere. Women kept their families and communities alive even if, as Ulrich points out, their contributions were not usually officially documented (343-347).

Ulrich's assertion about the conjoined lives of women and men in early America coincides with other critical arguments against the prevailing view that nineteenth-century men and women resided in separate spheres. Before I discuss how these views influence my interpretation of the work of Chopin and Stuart and why these recent critical arguments make it important to reexamine commercially successful short fiction by women from the late nineteenth century, first I will explain how the eighteenth-century Republican mother influenced the nineteenth-century sentimental mother, and what effects these cultural constructions had on women and work.

1.2. The Commodification of Motherhood

When the industrial revolution in the Northern states changed the economy, the agrarian Republican mother became the idealized sentimental mother. The sentimental mother strictly defined ideal mothers as white women of means who possessed certain inborn character traits, such as gentleness, subservience, reticence, fragility, and nurturance (Cherniavsky). The economic shift to an industrial society, with its out-of-home workplace, along with labor-saving household machines, the availability of ready-made fabrics, and mail-order stores meant not only that men were outside of the house more, but also that women's labor was no longer essential to the entire well-being of the household. The value of motherhood became symbolic, moral, and intellectual. As more men left the home to go out into the world of commerce and more women stayed in the home to attend to domestic "[duties] freely performed, to make a nest where conjugal love and maternal care would nurture, secure, and protect the family from the 'outside'" (Trachtenberg 129), they were accompanied by a cultural celebration and idealization of motherhood.

While this cultural creation could be plausible, even understandable, for affluent women, what bears investigation is that the upper-class ideal of a lady had become a prototype for even middle and working class women by the mid-nineteenth century. As feminist historian Sarah Eisenstein explains, "the image of the lady as the model for all women . . . developed in some complexity, and with uneasy insistence, in the early nineteenth century, in literature, popular magazines, religious tracts and public debate" (55). The idea that women should aspire to a life of relative leisure, at home, as mothers and wives, had enormous repercussions throughout the nineteenth century, especially in the decades after the Civil War, as the practicality of this ideology unraveled amongst various socio-economic classes. The Civil War created a need for

women's work, as the Revolutionary War also had, and the staggering amount of male casualties meant that the patriarchal model was not realistic for many women. Indeed, as labor historian Alice Kessler Harris reports:

The New York *Times* estimated in 1869 that about a quarter of a million young women in the eastern seaboard states could never look forward to any matrimonial alliance, because they outnumbered men by that much. By 1883 . . . one-third of all women over twenty-one were not married . . . (98).

Additionally, the influx of immigrants from mid-century onward and the emancipation of slaves created a large population of working women; African American, immigrant, and poor women always worked outside the home. The ideology of "the lady" must have seemed ridiculously unattainable for many women. However, the cultural standard for all women remained informed by a bourgeois mentality. As Eisenstein explains:

The ideas with which women had to confront and interpret their increasing involvement with work outside the home at the turn of the century were rooted in basic Victorian notions about woman's place and woman's nature. These ideas had not developed out of the situation of working-class women, nor were they consistent with it, yet they informed the ideology of the period so thoroughly that they dominated prevailing attitudes toward working women, and shaped the terms in which those women interpreted their own experience (55).

Yet, in typical contradictory fashion, many critics and historians have pointed out that during this period, the early to mid-nineteenth century, women writers became commercially successful, working off this essential contradiction that existed between the ideology of private

domestic motherhood and mothers public and political duties that Kerber elucidates at the beginning of this chapter.

Perhaps because of the educational legacy of the Republican Mother ideology, many progressive and well-off families sought to educate their daughters as well as their sons, which created two generations of educated, highly literate, and self-consciously intellectual women. Using Kerber's analysis of the legacy of the Republican Mother, Mary Kelley asserts that affluent white women's education in the nineteenth century continued the tradition of bourgeois women receiving high-quality educations in order to prepare their sons for civic life in America. The women being educated at these elite female academies did not relinquish their role in the domestic sphere; rather they conjoined it with a more vocal role in the public, civic, and thus, economic world. Kelley speaks to this complication—the essential, enduring, contradiction of motherhood in America. In Kelly's assessment, although the earlier part of the nineteenth century saw major gains in the quality and quantity of women's education, the results were dubious:

Teachers and principals at these [female] academies and seminaries were also committed to preparing their students for engagement with antebellum America's public life. . . The schools and their teachers opened the future for young women to shape--a gift that enriched life's possibilities. Yet, ultimately, it complicated those lives still more (Kelley 60).

Many twentieth century feminist critics have criticized the mid-nineteenth century ideology of True Womanhood, which defined feminine virtue as domestic and maternal, and held that these qualities were of an enormous benefit to society. These critics condemn the sentimental fiction that evangelized True Womanhood for placing women, particularly mothers, on an isolated

and powerless pedestal. However, critics such as Kelley contend that the contemporary influence and cohesion of separate spheres ideology has been overstated. As Kelley explains,

The more familiar I became with the world of women writers and their contemporaries, the more I came to differ with [Barbara] Welter's argument that antebellum women had been held hostage to the tenets of 'piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.' Whereas Welter's 'Womanhood' was a seamless ideology with transparent directives, the fiction I was reading and the lives I was exploring reflected ambivalence, tension, and contradiction. (Kelley 5).

Ideologically, the centrality of the mother in American families remained a cornerstone of nineteenth-century culture, but her role in terms of actual household work diminished. She became a figurehead and a symbol. The Republican mother transformed into the sentimental mother. This symbol—of ladylike gentility distanced from actual work—never could have been an actuality for most American women, but after the Civil War, the nation experienced an economic shift to a capital-based market economy and the ideal mother became a successful consumer. As historian Alan Trachtenberg affirms, "[w]ith the rise of food and clothing industries, domestic labor came to consist chiefly of budgeting and shopping rather than making. From place of labor for self-support, the home had become a place of consumption" (129). The home as refuge from the marketplace indicates the primacy and importance of commercial endeavors and places the home as a passive space of rest. Indeed, as Kerber points out, the idea that mothers and their household shopping held political power had its roots in revolutionary anti-British rhetoric.

As the economy transformed into a capital-based market with its attendant fluctuations, the country dealt with a shortage of male workers. Moreover, many women had learned indepen-

dence due to wartime hardships. The uncertain economy, decimation of the male population, and rising feminist movements meant that women's public duties began to include financial responsibilities to their families. Historian Sarah Eisenstein explains the continued increase in working women after Reconstruction in *Give Us Bread But Give Us Roses*: “[b]y the 1880s and 1890s . . . [w]omen were going to college in greater numbers, and entering the labor force in the professions as well as at wage labor. Even upper-class women were increasingly involved outside their homes, whether in pursuing very conspicuous consumptions” (Eisenstein 50).

The Republican Mother holds enormous cultural significance: not only did it enable the nineteenth century phenomenon of the sentimental mother, it set a template for the uneven negotiation between domestic and economic duties that remains a contemporary debate, as evidenced by the recent articles in the *New York Times* that I refer to in the preface. Indeed, women writers have often explored this uneven line between women's private and public desires and duties—with varying degrees of acceptance and controversy. While Kate Chopin's breakout novel, *The Awakening*, interrogates women and their essential maternity, her short stories also reference these issues. What interests me is how writers like Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart, as working mothers, negotiated a tricky publishing and political environment with their commercially successful short stories. They continued, in difficult and changing times, not only a tradition of women writers but also a tradition of women creating an industry for themselves in which they could work and parent independently.

1.3. Women, Motherhood, and Work

Perhaps this highly developed rhetoric lauding motherhood and domesticity means that women and mothers never really left the public arena of the Republican Mother, which, as I de-

tail above, by the end of the nineteenth century had been thoroughly transformed. However, the Republican mother and the sentimental mother gave birth to certain cottage industries, so to speak. Whatever the actual separate sphere of women was or wasn't, certain professions were dominated by women until after the Civil War. Midwifery and writing, for example, changed, in the late nineteenth century, into regulated, commodified, and male-dominated fields. Childbirth itself became a public, regulated, commodity. By the end of the nineteenth century, medical schools had begun teaching their (mostly male) students the lucrative science of obstetrics and by the turn of the twentieth century most women, of all classes and demographics, experienced male doctors rather than female midwives during labor and delivery. These doctors frequently administered pain medication and used tools, such as forceps, to aid delivery. While some, like Dr. Mandelet in *The Awakening*, believed that these medical advents lifted the biblical curse of childbed pain and benefited women, on a deeper level, the changes in modes of childbirth embody emerging cultural beliefs in the physical fragility of women, add pregnancy and childbirth into the market economy as a commodity that can be bought and sold, and symbolize the death of women-centered home economies, such as Martha Ballard's thriving midwifery practice which Ulrich writes about.

Although these home economies became increasingly less viable throughout the nineteenth century, women did not stop working. Particularly, women in the industrialized cities of the Northeast joined men in greater numbers in the workforce. By the 1890s, increasing amounts of women of all classes and ethnicities worked outside the home, albeit for jobs that had little parity in terms of stability and income with equivalent jobs for men. Indeed, the idea of "the lady" that remained entrenched from the earlier decades of the nineteenth century even con-

tributed to an argument against women working. Kessler Harris relates a newspaper's diatribe against working women who "were 'not in indigent circumstances, but . . . [earned] the means of freer expenditures for dress or some other darling object of ambition and pride'" (Harris 99). The argument, voiced repeatedly throughout the latter half of the century, was that the women who worked only to attain material goods—to better imitate a lady-like ideal—kept wages low, which spelled disaster for women truly in need of work. As Harris articulates, "this persistent assertion . . . buttressed a creeping suspicion that despite claims of widowhood and poverty, most women workers were no more than frivolous. If women who earned money had no justification for seeking jobs, they had little chance to ameliorate their condition" (100). Likewise, much official attention focused on the morality of working conditions. Workplaces of mixed races and sexes were especially thought to encourage immoral behavior (Harris 103), but "[i]ncome was also important because it was the key, though not the only, variable in keeping women 'moral'—or fit for motherhood" (Harris 101). Low wages were blamed for inducing working-class women to prostitution. "If women could not earn enough by dint of strenuous effort to support themselves, investigators thought, they would inevitably turn to prostitution" (Harris 104). Labor publications and the popular press, as well as women's clubs and congressional committees, shared this concern. However, despite the focus on extreme poverty driving women to prostitution, there was some concern about more affluent working women also finding prostitution an acceptable career.

Kate Richards O'Hare, socialist and journalist, surveyed prostitutes and concluded that 'most fallen women' were not poor slum women, but the 'equal or superior in education and accomplishments' of other women. 'The ranks of the fallen women are not recruited

to any great extent from the lower stratum of the working class, but from the middle and upper class. For the most part, we found the fallen women had not been educated with any idea of ever having to earn their own living.’ (Harris 105)

The problem was not isolated to poor women, but also extended to working women who were ill-prepared for the marketplace. Women who left the separate sphere of the home for work were tempted by consumer goods—goods she had been taught to covet—and a world of variety and excitement (Harris 105), but the extreme poverty of many working women led them to prostitution, and more affluent women’s lack of skills made prostitution seem an adequate choice for income. This idea, of prostitution lurking as a possible source of income, undergirds the characterizations of some of Chopin’s characters, such as Mademoiselle Salambre in “Miss McEnders” and Mrs. Sommers in “A Pair of Silk Stockings,” both of which I discuss in Chapter Five.

Despite entering every level of the work force in greater numbers—factory workers, office workers, and professionals such as teachers, doctors, or lawyers—advancement opportunities for women workers in the nineteenth century were sharply limited compared to their male peers. The declining birth rate for middle and upper class white women throughout the nineteenth century coincided with the rising percentage of middle and upper class women entering the job market. This caused great popular concern in the late nineteenth century, and sparked a public debate about the role of women in society, and whether working in the “Wide Wide World” made young women either unfit or spoiled for motherhood. Nonetheless, the debate may have been for naught: the vast majority of well-heeled women workers stopped work once they married. Indeed, it was assumed that motherhood precluded work. Yet the vacillations of the

economy and the fact that many young women married much older men meant that often mothers had to work in order to support themselves and their children (Matthews 48-53).

Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart interest me as a source for this study because both women defied and participated in economic trends at the end of the nineteenth century. Both women were single working mothers, who participated in a typical cottage industry of women—regionalist writing of short stories for popular literary magazines—yet successfully navigated an increasingly male-dominated profession. Both writers used their Southern backgrounds as their stock-in-trade. Demand was high for such literature in the northeastern literary journals of the 1890s (Taylor 88-91). Perhaps these tales reminded readers of the country's early beginnings, perhaps they seemed to heal the still stinging gashes between North and South, and perhaps they showcased contemporary themes with just enough exoticism and sentimental distance that the stories felt fresh but not jarring.

In certain ways, the lives of white Southern women after the Civil War echo the experiences of eighteenth-century women in the Northeast. Kate Chopin's stories often feature women in rural environments surviving independently within and without the world of men; some heroines created by fellow Louisianan writer Ruth Stuart share traits of grit and fortitude. Indeed, Chopin and Stuart in their own lives successfully navigated the literary and business worlds of men while writing to primarily female audiences. They did this through inclination, because of their educations, and by using sentimental literary devices to create fiction that spoke to contemporary women's issues while retaining popularity for the reading public.

Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart continued the tradition of antebellum women writers who narrated the realism of women's experiences. Sentimentalism was part of this tradition but it

need not define it; historicizing sentimentalism as a genre limits interpretive strategies for women's fiction in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, David Reynolds points out the limits of ascribing a theoretically similar trajectory to male American writers in *Beneath the American Renaissance*:

. . . Harold Bloom has described a phenomenon he calls 'the anxiety of influence,' whereby each major author is described as waging a titanic struggle to get free of the overwhelming influence of classic writers. While such struggles are indeed visible in American writers, it has not been recognized that one of the main weapons wielded by the American writers against oppressive literary influence was a native idiom learned from their own popular culture. The truly indigenous American literary texts were produced mainly by those who had opened sensitive ears to a large variety of popular cultural voices (Reynolds 4-5).

The popularity of Chopin's and Stuart's local color fiction points to an enduring late-nineteenth-century appetite for literature of diverse American idioms. Stuart's popularity was due in large part to her extensive use of dialect (Taylor 99). However, the dialect stories that earned her contemporary reputation are difficult to read, both in terms of muddling through the language and the patronizing and pervasive racism. Yet those select short works from the 1890s not dominated by dialect feature astonishingly subversive elements cloaked within sentimental literary devices.

1.4. Questioning Separate Spheres

Linda Kerber writes of early American women who forged a new literary tradition because they did not find themselves or their experiences reflected in much political or literary

writings that their male counterparts endorsed. These women yet persisted in reading by forming their own milieu and genre, with a vast and sustainable readership, supported by women writing to and about one another and the texts they immersed themselves in. This reading and writing community created a precedent for the literary community of women writers and readers in the nineteenth century (Kerber 10-12). Kerber confirms that for women, writing (on a personal and a public level), organizing within societies, and forming communities were all political acts, from the beginning of America as a nation.

Likewise, feminist critics have argued that nineteenth-century sentimental fiction created a community of women writers and readers who held real power in the marketplace outside of the home. Sentimental authors such as Lydia Maria Child and Harriet Beecher Stowe enacted powerful social change and resisted the imperial projects of their male contemporaries by creating a moral and feminist alternative in their fictions. Lucy Freibert and Barbara White discuss the lasting legacy and themes of mid-century women-authored fiction in their critical anthology, *Hidden Hands*. In the introduction, Freibert and White stress the commercial success of many women writers in the nineteenth century. These best-sellers changed the conversation about women writers: “The popular success of some women writers made it easier, however, for others to pursue a writing career, and it also shifted the focus of the debate from whether women should write to what they should write (2).” Susan Coultrap-McQuin further emphasizes the cultural conditions that created opportunities for women to become published, professional writers:

Cultural ambiguities and social circumstances both played a role in creating the paradoxical place of the woman writer in nineteenth-century America. [. . .] The overlapping nature of the ideals and concepts made it possible for women to be accepted as writers and

yet as often devalued and ignored. Moreover the social circumstances of middle-class women—their background, education, role models, economic position, and marital and childbearing status . . . opened the way for some women to become authors. (McQuin 25-26)

Ann Douglas questions the literary legacy of these women writers, while affirming their commercial success and power—a power they achieved through disingenuous rhetoric that emphasized domesticity and piety while the act of writing commercially, popularly, and successfully negated those stated values.

Yet the literary and commercial success of the . . . women in question is significant because it underlines the fact that they pursued less vocations than careers; they were professionals masquerading as amateurs. They evaded or at least mitigated just those restrictions imposed by . . . domestic duties which they celebrated in print; in disseminating praises of the public virtues, they gained access to the public realm. If they were confined to the kitchen . . . they could sit down at the kitchen table or the desk and send out sermons, poems, and stories to compete, as they themselves were forbidden to do, in the markets of the masculine world (100).

Although she questions the artistic literary merits of such writers (as, notably, Chopin did too in characters such as the title character of “Miss Witherwell’s Mistake” and Miss Mayblunt in *The Awakening*) Douglas establishes a timeline for a history of women writers. The second generation sentimental writers defined themselves less through the church or theology and more as popular writers, paving the way for late nineteenth century commercially successful writers such as Stuart.

Chopin and Stuart both published in popular journals, and used elements of sentimentalism in their fiction, which complicates their inclusion into the genre of serious fiction. Stuart, in particular, relied on sentimental language and tropes in her fiction. Yet in their time, she enjoyed more critical and popular recognition than Chopin. Some of the major proponents of American literary realism lauded Stuart as one of their own (Taylor 90-95).

Magazines like *Vogue* in the 1890s treated sentimentality sardonically and pragmatically. *Vogue* featured fashion, writing, letters, advertisements, poetry and fiction—all with a mocking, sophisticated tone. For example, the cover image of the January 14, 1893 issue of *Vogue*, in which Kate Chopin’s “*Désirée’s Baby*” appeared, shows three stylish, unchaperoned young women walking along the waterfront promenade of a foreign locale, perhaps Istanbul, with the dome of a mosque and its minarets in the background.



Figure 1

The title of the illustration is “19th Century Sentiment” and the caption reads:

Gladys: “How do you like a man to propose?”

Mervie: “By mail.”

Gladys: “But that is so prosaic.”

Mervie: “Prose goes further than poetry in a breach of promise suit.”

This tone is typical of *Vogue* in the 1890s and pervades the content portion of the magazine—the reviews of fashion, the poetry, the fiction, and the commentary. While it may certainly represent a degraded culture, the young women on this cover combine Jane Austen’s disdainful appreciation for the realities of the marriage market with the new woman’s freedom. Notably, the wealth of these women as leisurely travelers of confidence and savviness

creates a class divide; their style and independence is clearly tied to their wealth and privilege. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Kate Chopin published most of her short fiction in *Vogue*, in the 1890s. Ruth Stuart found more champions in typical literary magazines such as *The Atlantic* and *Harper's* than Chopin did. *Vogue* magazine was one aspect that allowed Chopin to market and publish her fiction as she wished, whereas Stuart, the more popular and critically regarded writer in the 1890s, perhaps felt more beholden to conform to contemporary literary taste.

Indeed, by the late nineteenth century the business of fiction and publishing had become lucrative and more competitive. As midwifery turned into a male-dominated field, so, too did Hawthorne's hordes of scribbling women turn into the lucrative fiction market. As Susan Coultrap-McQuin writes in *Doing Literary Business*, ". . . as women became visible successes in the literary marketplace, there was a struggle over literary territory, played out in the words of literary critics—male and female—and male writers who wanted to keep women writers in their own sphere" (19). This created a situation in which women writers were actively excluded by male critics and writers, and the changed relationships between publisher and writer became more fraught for women.

While in the early period [mid-nineteenth century] neither the Gentleman Publishers nor writers . . . ever ignored the economic underpinnings of the literary market, both authors and publishers tried to relate to one another in the context of personal relationships, non-commercial aims, and moral guardianship—'feminine' values that seem to have facilitated women's success in the mid-century. In contrast, by the early 1900s, the market had . . . become aggressively 'masculine' in literary style and business approach, emphasizing instead competition, profits, and timeliness. (McQuin 192)

Whether the influx of male writers and the attentions of male critics changed the language of literature, or combined with other forces such as literary realism and turbulent economic times to produce a grittier national literature, certainly the language of sentiment, by 1893, had changed, even though readers still craved it.

Douglas implies that sentimentality, the feminization as she calls it, of American culture at its core was a persuasive technique—a way for the powerless to wield power. The cover illustration from *Vogue* that I reference above takes this idea of sentimental, domestic power and capitalizes it. These savvy young women could use their passiveness, their supposed roles as victims of seduction, as business tools. Sentimental language is not removed from the culture; it is part of it. These words are cutthroat, but so were business practices in the 1890s, fiction markets included. Chopin and Stuart, and other women writers of the late nineteenth century, were caught between a publishing environment that demanded sentimentalism and critics who denigrated it.

1.5. The Subversiveness of Chopin's and Stuart's Short Fiction

Kate Chopin published two novels, *At Fault* (1890) and *The Awakening* (1899). Ruth Stuart published several novels over her long career. However, my interest in this project is on the short stories that they wrote and published in magazines, journals, and newspapers in the 1890s. The stories I will analyze in the following chapters all can be considered as regional sketches. It is this particular genre, I argue, that allowed Chopin and Stuart to at once introduce contradictory yet subversive themes and topics that remain acceptable and popular with wide audiences. The shortness, exoticism, geographic and historical distance, and the seeming spontaneity of these works, combined with Chopin and Stuart's skillful use of sentimental literary devices, allow subversive themes, such as women's sexual desire and the limitations of maternity

and wifehood to bring fulfillment, a multicultural society propelled by female labor, and interracial violence to emerge—themes that seemed shocking and unacceptable in longer, supposedly more serious, more purposeful works like novels.

Elizabeth Ammons, drawing on the work of Marjorie Pryse, defines the regional sketch genre as “developed and manipulated by [women] into what may very well be one of the few existing distinctly female genres. The sketch does not seek to control its subject as do novels, epic poems, or traditional dramatic scripts” (Ammons xxi). However, others have argued that the regionalist sketch in the postbellum era, particularly of the immensely popular southern subjects, advances a disturbing imperialist and white supremacist nationalistic agenda. Pryse and Fetterley summarize Amy Kaplan’s approach to regionalist literature.

Regionalism, Kaplan appears to be arguing, naturalizes empire by associating an urban reader’s nostalgia for his or her regional roots with travels to bring back souvenirs from other far-away places, and conversely by creating a context within which imperial excursions to dominate and expropriate resources and labor from exotically ‘other’ cultures may be viewed as just another form of the domestic tourist’s desire . . . (Fetterley and Pryse 227).

In terms of my project, the above quote deserves continued attention through my analyses of the literature. In fact, where subversiveness ends and white supremacist ideology, often in the form of contrasting white characters with black characters or nostalgic depictions of antebellum plantations, begins is unclear in many of the stories I discuss, particularly in Stuart’s case. A central tenet of my argument is that Chopin aligned herself creatively with the European realists and found more inspiration from the French tradition, a position that she took due to inclination, edu-

cation, and training but also due to her economic independence from the literary marketplace, removed her fiction from the dominant racial language of her time. Yet Stuart, whose family did not have the real estate holdings that Chopin's did, and who was charged with caring for her son and her sister on her own, was compelled to curry favor with the literary establishment of the 1890s, which demanded and rewarded work that emphasized a gentle antebellum past and supported a patronizing white supremacism. Indeed, Pryse and Fetterley level criticism at Kaplan for only grappling with the hegemony of female writers, when the criticism can and should be leveled at all:

Kaplan wants to introduce empire into our thinking about America and American literature but not at the expense of calling into question the status of William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and James. Kaplan's positioning of regionalism serves as a way of displacing critique from realism and its canonical exemplars. Regionalism becomes a convenient surrogate, in effect the term that enables her to do the work of critique without destabilizing literary history's construction of realism as the dominant mode in the period. (Fetterley and Pryse 228)

Literary history needs to include writers, such as Stuart, whose politics and writing style do not fit a liberal, progressive view of literary history. Stuart, very much of and in her time and place, is a necessary counterpoint to Chopin, who had creative and economic resources that enabled her to see and write out of her time and place. Art-making is business and inspiration, creativity and observation; the writer, is a marketer of her work, a chronicler of her time, and a visionary oracle.

1.6. Sentimentalism as a Literary Device

The stories I discuss in this project represent the conundrum of women and women writers at the end of the nineteenth century. The strange consortium of factors that created a hospitable publishing environment in the mid-nineteenth century had changed by the 1890s, as had critical preferences. Yet a literary career still remained an option for educated middle-class women, and the popular taste for sentimental themes in narrative had not changed with the critical preference for realism. Magazines like *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and *Vogue*, where Stuart and Chopin published much of their short fiction in the 1890s, reflect this conjoining of the elite and the popular. As discussed in the previous section, the publishing world had also become profitable, so women writers faced competition from their male colleagues. The sentimentalism present in much of Chopin and Stuart's short fiction functions as a literary device that allows these writers to introduce radical and subversive feminist themes into their fiction.

In *Revolution and the Word*, Cathy Davidson makes the case that sentimental writing in the early American Republic functioned as community texts, guides, and advisors for 18th century women. She echoes Jane Tompkins' assertion that "contemporary tastes and values applied indiscriminately to older literature may illuminate contemporary tastes and values but say little about the literature itself" (qtd.in Davidson 143). Davidson affirms that without context, through the lens of modern critical tastes, that an evaluation of sentimental fiction from earlier centuries is skewed: "[r]eading this reader, I would even maintain, is a necessary prerequisite to reading the novels she read. The first step in that preliminary reading is to reconstruct the conditions under which she read" (111).

In order to effectively and comprehensively read sentimental fiction, the ideal critic must first understand something of the contemporary audience. For Davidson, that audience was eigh-

teenth century American women. My project concerns late-nineteenth-century American women, but her study remains essential in many ways. First, she establishes that women were a group first and foremost. Moreover, Davidson discusses the impact of the Revolutionary War on women's freedom and the postwar emphasis on domesticity, an emphasis that colored and defined the cult of True Womanhood.

Indeed, removing Douglas's assertion about literary quality from the "Platonic ideal of Literariness" and recognizing the standards she applied as well as considering the context of these works, when judging them, is part and parcel of my project. For Kate Chopin fits into Douglas's (and twentieth century Western criticism's) definition of Quality Literature. She considered herself an artist, and as the best artists in the European tradition, she did not rely solely on her writing for income. Her purported avowal that she did not "compose" and draft, (Toth "Unveiling") might be more complex than a disingenuous denial of her ambition but also a nod to her self-expressed kinship with French writers—by proclaiming herself an artist moved by emotion, not composition, she claims shared platform with Voltaire, Flaubert, and de Maupassant. As twentieth century French writer Andre Maurois explains, "[t]here is in existence a history of French clarity; it would be instructive to sketch a history of the French vagary and of uncomposed works, which would bring together Montaigne's Essays, the Characters of La Bruyere, Voltaire's Dictionary, and the Analecta of Paul Valery" (Maurois 9).

While Freibert and White argue that late-nineteenth-century female writers radically and consciously broke from the mid-century sentimental tradition, I see a clear and self-conscious homage to their foremothers. Perhaps writers like Chopin and Stuart acted as transitions between mid-century fiction and modernism. Freibert and White assert that later nineteenth century writ-

ers such as Jewett, Chopin, Wharton, and Cather “worked to create new plots and new heroines who would be as unlike as possible the nineteenth-century ‘tomb of female virtue’” (9). Freibert and White concede that the earlier writers left “a legacy” comprised mostly of publication opportunities and an enduring attachment of the moral to women-authored fiction (9). However, writers such as Chopin and Stuart, while certainly participating in an existing community of women writers of reform, also strove to fulfill the realistic endeavor of many mid-century writers. As Freibert and White concede:

Realism pointed the novel in a serious and practical direction. By mid-century its content had changed dramatically and the novel of education emerged as a major trend in fiction. . . . [These novels]. . . treated major concerns of women’s lives In the pages of education novels, several generations of women found practical advice and role models after which to pattern their own lives (4).

The short stories I discuss of Chopin and Stuart reveal much about the new reality of southern women in the postbellum, post-Reconstruction South. Stuart also participated in the project of women’s fiction as reformist; her patronizing portrayals of African American characters reveal a utopian vision that differed dramatically from the violent, divisive realities of southern race relations in the 1890s. Just as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Eliza embodies an idealized mother risking her life for her child in order to sway readers to the abolitionist cause, Stuart’s repeated vision of racial harmony and mutual dependence between whites and blacks deserves analysis. On the surface, such romanticized depictions of race relations support a white supremacist ideology, but it also shows that her vision for the future was not one of separation, but of integration. Likewise, although Chopin eschews such idealism and seems more willingly cog-

nizant of the deep racial divides and antipathies of her culture, she depicts less stable relationships between black and white that reflect more closely the increasingly divisive and separatist racialized worlds of the 1890s. She rejects reformism as patronizing and reductive, yet her short fiction often emphasizes the nuances and instability of racial definitions themselves, which calls into question the very foundation of racial separation theorists.

Women's fiction from the mid-nineteenth century often emphasized the importance of community and friendship. Freibert and White emphasize this trait as an essential difference between fiction by men and fiction by women:

Women's handling of the traditional individual-versus-society theme thus differs significantly from men's. In many works by men writers the hero appears in a confrontational stance vis-à-vis the social world . . . While the women's heroines are true, rather than self-created, outsiders, their goal is to get inside, to attain a secure position in the social fabric whereby they can work to change it (8).

The Chopin and Stuart stories that I have selected each highlight themes of community, in subtle ways. In fiction such as Chopin's "Desirée's Baby," "Athénaïse," "La Belle Zoraïde," and "A Pair of Silk Stockings" and Stuart's "The Unlived Life of Mary Ellen," problems arise for the protagonists in part because of their isolation. Chopin's "Miss McEnders," and Stuart's "An Arkansas Prophet," "Carlotta's Intended," "Blink," and "The Frey's Christmas" feature characters striving to find their ways in changed worlds. These worlds, more often than not, contain multicultural, multiracial, and multiclass characters with whom the white bourgeois protagonists must work with—if not as equals, exactly, then certainly as colleagues.

Chopin and Stuart use traditional fictional structures, and elements such as sentimentalism, to narrate their different experiences. The realities for these characters have changed. The ideals have changed. The utopian visions have changed. The marriage plot, for example, is notably absent from these stories; it no longer makes sense in the 1890s. Women must provide for themselves. If these writers' lives are indeed used as models for their characters, then ambition, determination, luck, community, and supportive female relatives are necessary for success—not husbands. Husbands lose wealth or die. Fathers lose their land. In these stories, the women who thrive do so because of their independent entrepreneurial spirit and because of their relationships with other women—relationships that are based on power structures and shifting categorizations.

Although Ann Douglas's thesis about sentimentality yielding bad writing raises interesting questions about separate spheres, and the power wielded by both women and men in terms of literary consumption, she unfairly judges sentimentalism. By the time that Chopin and Stuart were writing and publishing, the literary marketplace had become commercialized and even profitable, resulting in fewer opportunities for female authors, and yet remained somewhat hospitable to women due to the commercial success of many mid-century domestic female writers. Even the works included in the realist canon by women authors do not feature characters with motherhood as a primary factor in their lives. For example, in Jewett's "A Country Doctor" even a trail-blazing woman did not conjoin the domestic with the professional; she rather stepped out of one and into the other. As Ammons articulates:

Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is so matrifocal that it is easy to forget that it takes its shape from a myth about a daughter living not in one but in two worlds, one mother-defined, the other male-defined; and in fact it is in the second of these

worlds that Persephone, like Jewett's woman writer, spends most of the year. Mysterious, dark, ruled by a sexually powerful male, it is a world that Persephone gladly escapes each June to join her mother, Demeter, in a region of light and renewal (Ammons, *Conflicting Stories*, 44).

Ammons' insightful and nuanced analysis pegs Jewett's attempts to reconcile these two worlds, male and female, author and scribbler, sentimentalist and rigorous observer, as successful.

Like other writing women of the period, she immersed herself in and revered celebrated white male writers such as Flaubert and Tolstoi, as well as an occasional female counterpart such as George Sand, who everyone agreed was so exceptional that she belonged in elite male company anyway. But Jewett also found powerful lifelong models in non-elite women writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe. . . . for Jewett [. . .] the mid-nineteenth-century middle-class feminine ideal of special, elevated maternal values was still psychologically real and positively available at the turn of the century" (Ammons, *Conflicting Stories*, 45).

Ammons then convincingly argues for Jewett's integration of both identities--the masculine and feminine traditions--in her work and her identity as a writer (Ammons, *Conflicting Stories*, 45-47).

In many ways, the characters in the works of Chopin and Stuart that I focus on here strive for this same integration, without the formal and conceptual integrative success of Jewett. My hypothesis is that since these writers had a central experience of motherhood--specifically, single motherhood—they were immersed in both cultural and practical expectations that created an ex-

tremely different reality. Even in their fiction, which rarely features working mothers, this conflict is explored by its very lack of treatment. Another variable is their position as Southern writers from Confederate homes who experienced the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the fin-de-siecle. Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart were younger than the pioneering domestic writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, EDEN Southworth, and Fanny Fern yet older than realist writers such as Willa Cather and Edith Wharton. They were trained for lives and duties radically different from what their actuality turned out to be. As a result, the integration that Jewett achieves and even the bleakness and cynicism so prevalent in Wharton's major works are noticeably missing from their fiction. Their short stories speak to impossibilities, disappointments, and missed opportunities that, nonetheless, must be borne out, suffered through, and lived with. As Ammons remarks: "The form permits women to offer ungrandiose, concrete art, shaped, more often than not, by the rhythms of domestic and feminine experience, which is cyclical, repetitive, and often inconclusive" (Ammons, Introduction, xxii). Children, particularly, need to be cared for, nurtured, and raised. In many ways, sentimentality is a pragmatic device for Chopin and Stuart: sentimental tropes satisfy the reading public's demand for pathos. Yet sentimentalism can also be a coping device for the characters: often characters retreat into sentimental modes of thinking in order to rationalize difficult experiences. Perhaps the sentimentality that has cloaked American motherhood since its creation has a significant function: sentimentality allows women and mothers to participate in a cultural shorthand with a community of other women. It is possible that sentimentality also has an evolutionary function: the physical and cultural difficulties of motherhood are undertaken in order to fulfill parental, civic, and cultural duties, yes, but an important inspirational and continually culturally reinforced component of motherhood is love and sympathy for

one's child. Chopin and Stuart, along with other writers who utilize sentiment, seek to establish a bond with their readers, but also to narrate realistically the experience of mothers and women, even now, requires acknowledging a certain amount of sentimentality. Most important for this chapter, however, is that Chopin and Stuart often use sentimental tropes to introduce subversive elements in their work that upend patriarchal traditions.

As the aims and successes of Reconstruction eroded, sentimental and domestic fiction gave way to realism and naturalism. Yet Chopin and Stuart use sentimental devices in their work to convey themes that are more compatible with the aims of realism and naturalism and that actually undermine or significantly change the sentimental or domestic tradition. Additionally, the venue in which these Chopin published many short narratives in the 1890s, *Vogue* magazine, treated sentimentality sardonically and pragmatically. Ruth Stuart presents multiple images of non-ideal mothers throughout her short fiction, often employing sentimentalism to expand her audience's acceptance of extraordinary maternal figures.

1.7: The 1890s

The Civil War destroyed not only the sentimental and domestic moral absolutism of mid-century fiction, it destroyed the idealization of motherhood that had been a key factor in American life and letters. In the 1890s, the fallen woman/virtuous woman dichotomy, which had been popular in Victorian and sentimental fiction throughout the nineteenth century, occupied a specific place in literature: the fallen woman was often ambitious, money-driven, vapid, and beautiful. Women, especially mothers, were succubi, demanding money from their husbands and children. The man worked, and the wife took. The children were manipulated by their socially

ambitious mother, or maternal figure. When the mother was not greedy, she was farcically ineffective or absent.

What is unique about the 1890s, and the postbellum writing before 1900, is fiction's interrogation of the mother. Mother had occupied a stable place in political and domestic ideology until the Civil War. In Chopin and Stuart, the destabilizing elements of motherhood are filtered through discussions of race and class privilege. The various justifications for the clearly hypocritical existence of slavery within America stemmed from a biblical interpretation that gave whites dominion over blacks, and a firm belief in the benevolence of a paternalistic system of control that in some ways mirrored the feudal system, and a philosophy of natural law in which whites were inherently, congenitally, superior to non-whites. These justifications were recycled to rationalize the subjugation of women, as well. It isn't surprising, then, that early feminists aligned with abolitionists and that the movements later split along gender lines in terms of suffrage, with one camp advocating for black men's suffrage, another for white women's, and a third for universal suffrage.

In the 1890s, particularly, realist fiction deconstructed the sentimental tradition—motherhood and True Womanhood included. However, sentimental fiction and separate spheres ideologies remained popular with the reading public. The dichotomies between rich and poor in American society were as topical in the closing decades of the nineteenth century as they are today. The 1880s and 90s were times of violent strife between labor and capital. Many late-nineteenth-century realist writers disparage the ascendancy of business as depersonalizing and immoral. Edith Wharton, Henry James, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser all confront the growing schism between rich and poor and the immoral ascendancy of business over tradition and individualism

in their fiction. The increasing independence of women created a new media image—the New Woman—that collided with earlier visions of women as wives and mothers. As the image of the New Woman became popular in fin de siècle media, she influenced cultural portrayals of motherhood.

1.8 Summary: Economy, Ideology, and Women's Fiction

Since the separation of home and marketplace that occurred in America during the late eighteenth century, women who “work” are assumed to do so outside the home. Colonial American families depended upon female labor: women made clothes and household linens from fabric they produced themselves, created nourishing meals from the crops and animals of the farm, prepared fruits and vegetables for winter, and educated their children to grow into civic-minded citizens of the American republic (Kerber 180). Women inhabited a separate domestic sphere, but the work they performed within that circle was essential to the prosperity and survival of the family and, by proxy, the agrarian economy itself. The labor of women became politicized during the Revolutionary War, when women's services as weavers, nurses, laundresses and cooks were solicited to support the war: “Whether a woman was whig or tory, her services in a largely guerilla war were much sought after—as a provider of essential services for troops, as a civilian source of food and shelter . . .” (Kerber 68). The ideal of women as rugged producers of essential goods for home and country is radically different from the ideal of women as physically weak angels whose primary function is to consume. Indeed, the Revolutionary mandate against consumption--of British and European goods--as anti-American contradicts the late-nineteenth-century focus on household consumption as a woman's responsibility. New technologies for household work, the ready availability of pre-made cloth and clothing, and the change to an industrial

economy in the early nineteenth-century began changing this cultural conception of women. “Industrial technology reshaped the contours of domestic labor and thus began to erode the stability of households” (Kerber 135). One implication of this shift is that once household work became less physically demanding and time-consuming, and women’s civic duty as Republican mothers had diminished, the domestic position lost its integral function as the linchpin of household and family success. However, the ideology of separate spheres became even more entrenched. The ideal of a good wife changed from a strong, thrifty, and productive woman, to a loving and gentle but physically weak and emotionally fragile creature, temperamentally unsuited to negotiating the demands of the industrial and increasingly capital-based economic market. In such an ideology, women belonged in a stable and quiet domestic environment where they could create a home of harmony and peace to exist in opposition to the working world of men. Women would raise children and spend money to beautify themselves and the home. Men would gladly donate their wages to their sustenance because women provided the platonic ideals lacking in the industrial and capitalist environment.

Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart use all of these archetypes of women in various ways in their fiction, and attempt to narrate the dynamic and changing worlds in which they and their contemporaries found themselves. These women were raised to become lady-like Confederate wives, reliant on their husbands for support; however, radical changes changed that expectation. The Civil War, the changing economy, cycles of recession, increased violence towards African Americans, feminism, and reform movements are all featured in their short fiction, which was published and widely read in Northeastern magazines in the 1890s.

Chapter 2: The Paradox of Womanhood in “La Belle Zoraïde,” “Athénaïse,” “Carlotta’s Intended,” and “Désirée’s Baby”

The 1890s were a pivotal time for women in American society, particularly in the South: the stable but oppressive antebellum gender and familial roles that writers such as Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart had been born into, as privileged daughters of Confederate families, had changed drastically due to the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the economic and social upheavals of the postbellum South. Chopin and Stuart both published most of their works and enjoyed significant popularity in the 1890s. However, Chopin and Stuart were not born into the generation of “New Women.” They had been raised to inhabit domestic, marital, maternal, and gender roles that no longer existed. Indeed, the women in their short fiction often inhabit this nether region. Chopin’s stories, primarily but not exclusively set in antebellum Louisiana, feature protagonists conflicted about their assigned roles. Stuart’s narratives, primarily set in Arkansas or Louisiana during or after Reconstruction, often feature female characters who strive to possess both the passive virtues of the old ideal, and the pluck and fortitude of the new standard. The role that mothers enact in their families was always a politicized one in America, and from the beginning of the Republic, mothers were tasked with the creation of future citizens of the country. The mothers in Chopin’s and Stuart’s short fiction reveal not only cultural views of motherhood, but also what mothers should prepare their children for—the type of society they feel their children will be a part of, and their future roles as citizens.

Chopin and Stuart spoke to and for a large cross-section of Americans: their stories were regularly published in popular yet literary magazines such as *Harpers*, the *Atlantic*, and

Vogue. Although Chopin's stories remain more readable today, Stuart's works—and she was the more popular and successful writer in their time—more clearly highlight the conflicts and contradictions of Southern women in the postbellum decades. Some of the mothers in the stories I will discuss are clearly preparing their children for life in a racially and ethnically integrated world in which previous class and family distinctions have been erased or radically changed. Other maternal figures are prevented from becoming mothers by their circumstances, which speaks to a growing cultural anxiety about the “new woman” and fertility. It is not surprising, given the long history of women's private and public writing in America and its linkage to both an alternate community of women and a nod to the political role that women inhabited in the Republic, that Chopin and Stuart addressed racial and feminist issues in writings that are at once political and popular, realistic and sentimental.

Certain of Chopin's protagonists, particularly, seem incapacitated by the paradox of womanhood. Lead female characters in “Athénaïse,” “Désirée's Baby,” and “La Belle Zoraïde” are stymied by institutional standards and cultural policies. Education is not necessarily a deterrent against this paradox of incompetency, either. As Mary Kelley clarifies:

[T]he education these women received was not intended to prepare them for either a career or financial independence. Measured by the dominant prescription governing all female lives in the nineteenth century--and for that matter, before and after as well, from the colonial period into the twentieth century--a ‘happy woman’ was supposed to be the woman who married, had children, managed a household, and was materially supported by her husband (Kelley 139).

Athénaïse's convent education, for example, ill-prepared her for the life she would have to lead. In her short fiction, Chopin's women of color and her depictions of antebellum race relations often highlight the symbiotic, although unequal, relationship between white and black characters, and depict the often blurry, shifting, and dynamic line that differentiated white from black. In "Désirée's Baby," for instance, the entire plot structure implies that race is a social construction, buttressed by white male power, authority, and totalitarianism. In this story, set in antebellum Louisiana, Désirée is a foundling, with unknown origins. She falls in love and marries a wealthy planter. However, it soon becomes clear that the child she bears from their union is not altogether white (even though the standard for white changes several times throughout the story). Désirée's husband casts her out and, rather than return home to her welcoming adoptive parents, Désirée takes the baby and wanders off into the swamp, where they both, presumably, die. Her husband, while burning any evidence of his wife and son, comes across a letter from his long deceased mother to his father. His parents had lived in France for many years, and the letter reveals the reason why. Armand's mother, his father's wife, is black and was a slave. However, the reveal acts as a plot twist only for the reader, not the characters. The events have already transpired when Armand reads the letter, and it seems quite plausible that he would throw it into the fire along with Désirée's and the baby's things. The fault still lies with the mother—Armand's mother and Désirée, for perpetuating in their offspring racially mixed children. Amy Branam Armiento, in her essay, "The Color Line and Character Motivations in Chopin's 'Désirée's Baby'" details the legal framework that girds this narrative; Désirée's decision to leave the plantation with her child speaks to the legislative definitions of race in Louisiana's *code noir*; even if she could prove she was white, her child was not and this presented him with a difficult future in the post-

bellum world of racial separation enforced by violence. Given the context that Armiento documents, Désirée's apparent infanticide and suicide may stem from her maternal instinct to protect her son from a lifetime of hatred and violence (Armiento).

Armand clearly is against a multicultural, multiethnic, mixed race future. He could not have, would not have, stayed married to Désirée and claimed ownership of his mixed race son. To do so would entail betraying his entire ideology. There is a clear implication in the story that Armand has, indeed, mixed race children already with the light-skinned slave, La Blanche. However, these children are illegitimate, and therefore unauthorized. His legal son from Désirée upsets the racial and status quo, ironically one that he lives. However, it does not count until noticed by others, and Désirée's baby caused the entire plantation to talk. Significantly, it was revealed that the baby was not white after Désirée had been breastfeeding him. Racial identity, and its perception and cultural stigma, affects and disrupts motherhood.

In another Chopin story, "La Belle Zoraïde," the enactment of motherhood is also racially charged and maternal love is impossible given the confines of racial codes and slavery. "La Belle Zoraïde" is a story within a story. Madame Delisle, who premiered as the young confederate widow in "A Lady of Bayou St. John" who forsook her lover to pledge herself to her slain Confederate soldier husband and live her life in childless abstinence amongst the slaves on their plantation, is still beautiful, yet her hair has turned silver. Her slave turned servant, Manna Loulou, still acts as a mother to Madame Deslisle, who still acts as a girl. Loulou bathes her feet, brushes her hair, and tells her stories nightly to lull her to sleep. Historically much has changed from "A Lady of Bayou St. John." The Civil War and Reconstruction have presumably ended. The young widow in the earlier story, which took place in the middle of the Civil War, was in her

twenties, and with her silver hair must be at least fifty in “La Belle Zoraïde,” which places the timeframe in the 1890s. However, the opening lines of the story emphasize the stagnant setting and the slow pace of change through the emphasis on the slowness of movement:

The summer night was hot and still; not a ripple of air swept over the marais. Yonder, across Bayou St. John, lights twinkled here and there in the darkness, and in the dark sky above a few stars were blinking. A lugger that had come out of the lake was moving with slow, lazy motion down the bayou (303).

Maternal roles, and the inherent power of race that dictate them, have not changed much either. Yet as much as racial codes govern the lives of all the characters, both in the narrative and the masque within it, these codes and delineations are shifting and difficult to define. Yet a romance with the dead, an obsession with the past, is what calls to mind the story as Manna Loulou surveys the still summer night of the opening paragraph.

The story that comes to Loulou that night is one that features a beautiful heroine named Madame Delarivière, who shares more than just a blatantly similar name with Madame Delisle. Both women engage more fully with the imaginary world of the dead than the living world. The story Manna Loulou tells highlights the instability of the mother amid realistic depictions of race and slavery: motherhood is adopted, mimicked, insisted upon, and denied. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the transgressive motherhood that Zoraïde, Madame Delisle and Madame Delarivière exemplify, but this analysis focuses on how the characters each enact maternal roles.

Madames Delisle and Delarivière are remarkably similar, starting with their (married) names that reference origins of ports and water. They both remain childless and widowed. They

both repudiate potential lovers, as does Zoraïde, and they both use black women as objects of affection. The affection the white mistresses feel for Zoraïde and Loulou respectively may be real enough, but it is contingent upon an unequal power structure, in which the women of color are reducible to commodities, beloved dolls, if they fail to please. The love of the white mistresses is exacting, demanding, and conditional. If Loulou fails to deliver a true story, her mistress is displeased. In the (true) story she tells, Zoraïde was well-beloved by her owner until she defied her by not marrying the light-skinned slave of Doctor Langlé that Madame Delarivière had chosen for her. Even worse, Zoraïde fell in love with another slave of the Doctor's, one who was very dark and proud of his African heritage, in fact, he performed an African dance on the town square. In the exchange between Zoraïde and her mistress in which she reveals her love Madame Delarivière chastizes the younger woman for falling in love with a black man. When Zoraïde reminds her owner that she is not white herself, she is rebuked and Madame Delarivière emphasizes her ownership rights over Zoraïde.

'Nénaine, you have spoken to me often of marrying. Now, at last, I have chosen a husband, but it is not M'sieur Ambroise; it is le beau Mézor that I want and no other.' And Zoraïde hid her face in her hands when she had said that, for she guessed, rightly enough, that her mistress would be very angry. And, indeed, Madame Delarivière was at first speechless with rage. When she finally spoke it was only to gasp out, exasperated: —

'That negro! that negro! Bon Dieu Seigneur, but this is too much!'

'Am I white, *nénaine*?' pleaded Zoraïde.

'You white! Malheureuse! You deserve to have the lash laid upon you like any other slave, you have proven yourself no better than the worst.'

'I am not white,' persisted Zoraïde, respectfully and gently. 'Doctor Langlé gives me his slave to marry, but he would not give me his son. Then, since I am not white, let me have from out of my own race the one whom my heart has chosen.' (305).

Zoraïde's owner forbids her from seeing Mezor. When the couple disobey the injunction, Zoraïde becomes pregnant and begs her mistresses's forgiveness. In return, Madame Delarivière persuades Doctor Langlé to sell Mezor to a plantation far away. Manna Loulou narrates that Doctor Langlé was himself a widower who wanted to marry Madame Delarivière, who, by implication, must also be a widow. When Zoraïde gives birth to the child, she has a difficult labor and nearly dies. While she is recuperating, Madame Delarivière arranges to take the baby away to a different plantation and informs Zoraïde that her baby has died.

Madame had hoped, in thus depriving Zoraïde of her child, to have her young waiting-maid again at her side free, happy, and beautiful as of old. But there was a more powerful will than Madame's at work—the will of the good God, who had already designed that Zoraïde should grieve with a sorrow that was never more to be lifted in this world. La belle Zoraïde was no more. In her stead was a sad-eyed woman who mourned night and day for her baby (306).

By exercising her rights of ownership Madame has flouted the will of God. The adjective free is ironic when applied to Zoraïde, who was coddled but never free. Madame's failed attempt to control, regulate, and commodify maternal love achieves madness and misery. Zoraïde, by the

end of the story, has adopted a bundle of rags that she mothers fiercely, insanely, and incessantly. She does not recognize her own child when, belatedly, Madame presents her daughter in an attempt to right the wrong she enacted through her deception. In the end, Manna Loulou concludes her story by describing Zoraïde's continuing delusion that a bundle of rags is her baby, and her own child is returned to the plantation "where she was never to know the love of mother or father" (307). The concluding lines speak to Madame Delisle's willful misinterpretation of the story yet seek to exoticize or remove it from a contemporary American symbolism with Chopin's emphasis on the Creole dialect:

"Are you asleep, Ma'zèlle Titite?"

"No, I am not asleep; I was thinking. Ah, the poor little one, Man Loulou, the poor little one! better had she died!"

But this is the way Madame Delisle and Manna Loulou really talked to each other:—

"You pré droumi, Ma'zèlle Titite?"

"Non, pa pré droumi; mo yapré zongler. Ah, la pauv' piti, Man Loulou. La pauv' piti! Mieux li mourì!" (308).

"*Désirée's Baby*" and "*La Belle Zoraïde*" both demonstrate how the legacy of American slavery complicates, denies, and perverts natural maternal roles through barely determinate, shifting, vague, yet brutally enforced racial codes. Additionally, isolation and separation emerge as tragic losses to which death itself is preferable. In "*Athénaïse*" and "*Carlotta's Intended*," Chopin and Stuart, respectively, feature characters struggling to adapt to their cultures, in which

marriage equates to slavery. Both stories use sentimental tropes, True Womanhood ideology, and southern “regionalist” settings as vehicles to deliver clear indictments of marriage as an institution.

In Ruth Stuart’s 1894 novella, “Carlotta’s Intended,” a young woman from a poor Italian family in New Orleans is, basically, sold by her parents for \$1,000 to Secola, a sinister mafioso widower. However, an older, peg-legged, reformed dipsomaniac Irish boarder, Patrick Rooney, saves her from the marriage through an escape plan that parallels mid-nineteenth century narratives of slave escapes. Pat was a long-term boarder of the DiCarlo family and had stood in as a maternal figure for Carlotta since she was a small child. When Carlotta realizes that her mother has sold her to Secola, she runs to Pat for help. Secola is clearly dangerous for Carlotta. Not only is he a leading member of an organized crime gang, but he is not three months a widower, which points to the difficulties Carlotta will face as his new wife. He very likely has existing children, he may have been a murderously abusive husband, and his quick rebound in seeking a young wife points to his desire to obtain both more children and a caretaker for existing ones. Carlotta’s father is weak and small, and her mother, although strong and industrious, is heartless and mercenary. Poverty and a lifetime of toil have robbed her of any sentiment. She is a cruel, debased figure who participates in the brutal toil of a working class wage earner, the base greed of a capitalist, and the lack of humanity of a slave trader. Mrs. DiCarlo rivals the brutal mother in Stephen Crane’s “Maggie” but Stuart uses Pat Rooney as a stock sentimental character whose abiding love for Carlotta ensures her happy future, far different from the sordid suicide Crane created for poor Maggie. In “Carlotta’s Intended,” Mrs. DiCarlo embodies a trifecta of nineteenth century capitalism’s brutalities: initially victimized by the wage work system, she is a capitalist willing to

value even her children on the market, which also places her in the same category as a slave trader. In Stuart's reckoning, this is a mother washed clean of sentiment. Pat Rooney, however, is all feeling, all sentiment, even the most unlikely kinds.

Pat is mother, father, lover, and martyr to Carlotta. When her mother beat her and cursed her as a child, Pat acted maternally, and offered solace, care, and unconditional love. When the unscrupulous Secola purchases her, Pat acts paternally and prevents the marriage. A more puzzling role, however, is that of lover. Pat feels romantic inclinations towards Carlotta, but he struggles against them. This becomes more difficult when Carlotta herself, strangely, confesses her romantic love for Pat. Pat eventually agrees to marry Carlotta, but his feelings of love for her are always couched in religious terms as sacred, and when he thinks of Carlotta he sequentially remembers his mother. Pat also acknowledges that he appears to Carlotta as her only hope against a forced marriage to a brutal man, and that he has been the only loving caretaker she has known and their relationship remains filial, not sexual or romantic, despite the rather puzzling narrative attempt. Pat is "the Lamplighter" but given a rather sinister turn: his lust for young Carlotta is something he is ashamed of and battles against. He realizes that her love for him is misplaced parental fealty, and allows her to become "his" in name only, to protect her from Secola. Indeed, Pat becomes Carlotta's martyr when he is murdered by the Mafia for first tricking Secola into marrying Carlotta's cousin and then defending her honor. This frees Carlotta to marry a young man her own age whom she has met and fallen in love with.

In order for Carlotta to do this seemingly mundane thing--marry an appropriate young man of her own choosing—several old world structures must be destroyed. The patriarchal old world structure has already crumbled when the story begins: her father is cowed by her mother.

Mrs. DiCarlo, however, needs to be shown a lesson. Her penchant for slave-trading and unfettered capitalism in the form of the marriage market must be thwarted, which Carlotta and Pat scheme for and accomplish through sentimental plot structures. Finally, however, the old world religion, Catholicism, and the traditional patriarchal marriage structure of an older man to a younger woman, based on protection and intended to uphold existing family structures needs to be dismantled, as well. Once these restrictions are removed, and Pat is killed by the Mafia, another old world organization, then Carlotta can be a free American girl of the 1890s, a new woman with choices and agency. On a more literary level, Stuart herself kills the earlier nineteenth-century sentimental character, Pat, and curbs the power of the new later-nineteenth-century literary creation, the monstrous mother, in order to create a female protagonist who can choose her own story.

In Chopin's "Athénaïse" the rebellious title character unquestioningly acquiesces to her husband once she realizes she is pregnant. Athénaïse's motherhood reduces her to "idiocy" as Kerber would term it:

Women were thought to make their moral choices in the context of the household, a woman's domain that Aristotle understood to be a nonpublic, lesser institution that served the polis. Having learned from Aristotle that politics was the affair of men, Americans continued to discuss political affairs in terms that largely excluded women, and that reflected the assumption that women were, as the political scientist Jean Elshtain writes, 'idiots in the Greek sense of the word, that is, persons who do not participate in the polis' (Kerber 7-8).

Athénaïse's realization of her pregnancy, in the midst of her first independent experience, brings her back into the home, the rural environment, and her husband, and moves her away from the public, the city, the possibility of wage work, and the journalist with whom she has developed a budding flirtation.

In "Athénaïse" Chopin creates a clear connection between slavery and marriage. After only being married two months, Athénaïse runs away from her husband's plantation and attempts to move back in with her family. Cazeau, her groom, at first expresses more concern for the health and well-being of the pony his wife rode than anything else. However, by the third day, when he still had not heard from her, Cazeau became impatient and annoyed and determined to fetch her, although he was disgruntled to leave his work to do so. At her family's home, her hot-headed brother Monteclin, who disliked Cazeau even before he married his sister because he had once "declined to lend Montéclin money", clarified Athénaïse's discontent and desire to end the marriage. Monteclin's dislike of Cazeau contrasts with the regard Athénaïse's oldest brother and father hold for him: "Miché and his oldest son were absent. They both esteemed Cazeau highly, and talked much of his qualities of head and heart, and thought much of his excellent standing with city merchants" (429). Cazeau manifestly and clearly symbolizes the polity. Monteclin does not spend his days on business ventures like his father, brother, and brother-in-law, but rather seeks intrigues and adventure within the world of women. Chopin describes Monteclin as slender, and "short of stature like his mother, and resembling her in feature". Monteclin is feminized and, along with Athénaïse, represents the world of women, emotions, and natural passion that exists uneasily with the civil, logical world of business and government. Chopin also reveals that even Monteclin could not find an adequate reason for Athénaïse's obstinacy. Cazeau did not

drink overly much, he did not abuse her, he did not wantonly cavort with other women. In short, he seemed an ideal husband, but Athénaïse declares that she is against the idea of marriage itself, rather than Cazeau particularly. Cazeau himself admits that “[t]he marriage had been a blunder; he had only to look into her eyes to feel that, to discover her growing aversion. But it was a thing not by any possibility to be undone. He was quite prepared to make the best of it, and expected no less than a like effort on her part” (427-428). Their separate reactions to the unhappiness of the marriage signify their separate positions in the polity. Of course, civil authority supports Cazeau’s position. In Chopin’s words: “The day had not come when a young woman might ask the court's permission to return to her mamma on the sweeping ground of a constitutional disinclination for marriage” (431). Implicit in the discussion about Athénaïse and her discontent in her marriage is the idea that women are commodities: legal and cultural authorities sanction and determine rights of ownership. She can be kept by her husband or “returned” to her family, but she cannot be valued as a person in her own right.

Cazeau has come to the rigolet, her family home, to retrieve her, and Athénaïse, realizing the flimsiness of her position, does not argue or resist: “Her husband's looks, his tones, his mere presence, brought to her a sudden sense of hopelessness, an instinctive realization of the futility of rebellion against a social and sacred institution” (432). She mounts her horse and experiences a few moments of freedom while riding ahead of her husband back to his plantation. The section that describes the couple’s trip establishes a comparison between marriage and slavery that emphasizes the supremacy of freedom as an intrinsically desirable state, independent of the kind or cruel treatment of the dependent being. Cazeau allows Athénaïse her freedom to ride ahead of him, until he experiences a childhood memory of a runaway slave:

At no time did Cazeau make an effort to overtake her until traversing an old fallow meadow that was level and hard as a table. The sight of a great solitary oak-tree, with its seemingly immutable outlines, that had been a landmark for ages—or was it the odor of elderberry stealing up from the gully to the south? or what was it that brought vividly back to Cazeau, by some association of ideas, a scene of many years ago? He had passed that old live-oak hundreds of times, but it was only now that the memory of one day came back to him. He was a very small boy that day, seated before his father on horseback. They were proceeding slowly, and Black Gabe was moving on before them at a little dog-trot. Black Gabe had run away, and had been discovered back in the Gotrain swamp. They had halted beneath this big oak to enable the negro to take breath; for Cazeau's father was a kind and considerate master, and every one had agreed at the time that Black Gabe was a fool, a great idiot indeed, for wanting to run away from him.

The whole impression was for some reason hideous, and to dispel it Cazeau spurred his horse to a swift gallop. Overtaking his wife, he rode the remainder of the way at her side in silence. (432-433).

Black Gabe and Athénaïse refuse to participate in the machinations of the polity; they value an abstract concept above the practical realities of their lives and enact essential contradictions of American identity—the pull between freedom and capital. Yet the comparison between bringing his wife back and his father bringing a runaway slave back troubles and confuses Cazeau, which opens the possibility that emotions and abstractions are more important than systems and institutions.

“Athénaïse” is one of Chopin’s postbellum stories. Although Cazeau runs a plantation, he retains servants and farm workers, not slaves. The most prominent servant in the story, Felicite--happiness--serves as a foil to Athénaïse. Felicite, presumably a slave when Cazeau was a boy, has filled in as housekeeper since the death of Cazeau’s first wife. She dislikes Athénaïse for the younger woman’s clear aversion to her situation--a situation (minus, presumably, sex) that Felicite has occupied for decades. When Athénaïse returns to the plantation, she attempts to abdicate her household duty and returns the keys to the larder to Felicite:

in a fit of temper she had returned [the keys] to Félicité's keeping . . . Cazeau had brought them back to her as if they were something she had accidentally lost, and he had recovered; and . . . he had said, in that aggravating tone of his, that it was not the custom on Cane river for the negro servants to carry the keys, when there was a mistress at the head of the household (437).

While Athénaïse physically returns to the plantation, she refuses her duties. She refuses to run the household, dole out the goods and keep household accounts. She also refuses her duties sexually in not yielding to her husband, filially in not respecting her parents’ desire to see her marriage end her rebelliousness, domestically and economically in not managing the household. Ultimately she will even refuse the authority of Monteclin when her pregnancy induces her to return to Cazeau on her own accord. Indeed, the only authority that Athénaïse concedes to in this story is her pending maternity. Using Heather Ostman’s contention that Chopin advocates for a non-essentialist motherhood in her fiction—that women become nurturing to care for children, rather than being essentially, a priori nurturing and loving beings— creates an argument that pregnancy humanizes the callous Athénaïse. However, her pending maternity is also possibly a

trap; once she is pregnant she realizes her dependence and must return to her marriage, the plantation, and the symbolic slavery.

However, she gains a certain power through motherhood, a power denied to Felicite and the mothers of color on her husband's plantation: the power to purchase. Once Athénaïse realizes she is pregnant, she resumes her economic power as a consumer and purchases items for the child and the household. When she returns home, she, like Felicite, is reconciled to her position. Happiness comes not from freedom, which we see is impossible for Athénaïse, but reconciliation to one's position. Indeed, Sylvie, the proprietor of the hotel in which Athénaïse stays in New Orleans is the one to tell the young woman about her condition. Sylvie is successful and independent because of her steadfast and strict adherence to social and racial codes. Even if Athénaïse had found work in New Orleans, which was doubtful given her dearth of practical experience, her baby would have made that impossible. The other avenue of escape for her would be a union with the journalist Gouvernail—in a relationship that would mimic the institution of marriage from which she had fled. However, Athénaïse's joyful reaction to her pregnancy and her implicit desire to return home immediately following this realization do not imply any of these things. Athénaïse reacts based on her passionate, feminine, and romantic nature. Yet Chopin has clarified Athénaïse's untenable situation in New Orleans, which contextualizes Athénaïse's seemingly artless passionate change of heart that accompanies her transition into motherhood.

There are no villains in this story. Cazeau's realization of the similarity between marriage and slavery disturbs him. He desires Athénaïse to perform her household duties, as he performs his duties as a plantation owner and business man. He does not want to subvert or dominate her. After Athénaïse's dramatic nocturnal flight from the plantation, which Monteclin orchestrated,

Cazeau decides not to chase her a second time: “For the companionship of no woman on earth would he again undergo the humiliating sensation of baseness that had overtaken him in passing the old oak-tree in the fallow meadow.” (438). Cazeau has plenty of political theory to support his seemingly intuitive aversion to force Athénaïse to return. He is, after all, an ideal and productive citizen. Montesquieu and Locke also associated men’s dominion over women with totalitarian and monarchical regimes and asserted that marriage, in which private, religious, and civic life are conjoined, should be a mutually dependent relationship based on affection and parental obligation to children. As Kerber summarizes:

Locke had implied that the availability of divorce is the ultimate test of marital freedom; Montesquieu came close to doing the same. He believed that affection and mutual benefit are the basic motives for continuing human relationships—between husband and wife, and between king and subject. The absence of divorce meant that roles, once chosen or assigned, must be played in perpetuity. Freedom within marriage, like freedom within the state, implied the ability to choose to leave (19-20).

The experience in “the fallow field” convinced Cazeau to Locke’s and Montesquieu’s views. More importantly, however, Athénaïse’s realization that her marriage has transformed her into a mother, with its attendant civic and political duties, persuades her to stop being a child and begin her civic contribution as a woman and a mother. Early in the story, after Chopin describes Monteclin as resembling the mother, she reveals that Athénaïse has often been compared to her father. Indeed, her voluntary return to her husband, spurred entirely by her impending maternity, places Athénaïse into the civic and political system she had previously eschewed.

That Athénaïse's decision to become a productive citizen by fulfilling her marital and maternal duties took her so long to come to speaks to her immaturity, but also her understandable reluctance to take on that role. When he is unhappy in the marriage, Cazeau can escape to his fields and his business interests. He has various occupations and freedoms that he takes for granted to divert him from what he considers an unfortunate mistake. Athénaïse has spent her entire life being raised to be someone's wife. This is her only possible future, and she has no outlet aside from her household duties, which she finds oppressive. As Lucy Freibert and Barbara White articulate,

For men, upward mobility according to the pattern of Benjamin Franklin seemed a simple matter of hard work and honesty, a natural formula. For women, the path was less sure. Confined to the home, they received neither the academic nor the practical education allowed to men. Moreover, they were subject to the authority of parents, husbands, brothers, or sons and seldom had an opportunity to seek advancement in 'the world' (Freibert and White 6).

Moreover, Athénaïse's sensual nature had been repressed by her religion and by a prudish tradition. Indeed, mid-century domestic fiction often features a paradoxical treatment of religion as both balm and bane: while religion "turned 'bad girls' into 'good girls'" it also caused women to "suffer at some point because of religious principles in which they [had] been schooled" (Freibert and White 7). Chopin uses this recognizable trope as further rationale for her protagonist's rapid acquiescence to authority once she realizes her pending maternity. Although she rebelled against the strict rules of the convent school, Athénaïse nostalgically remembers her time as a student as one of innocence. Before her marriage, Athénaïse had not been taught about

sex, which contributed to the fear she developed of her husband. More importantly, though, until her discussion with her landlady Athénaïse did not know that pregnancy comes from sex. With Catholicism's iconic mother's messianic firstborn being immaculately, miraculously conceived, the knowledge of her pregnancy sends Athénaïse into an ethereal ecstasy. For the first time, her natural sensuality and religious training reinforces the cultural and familial authority she had previously resisted.

Athénaïse's time in New Orleans also teaches her that she cannot survive in the market economy without assistance, either socially or financially. Without the acquaintance of Gouvernail she declares that she would have been too lonely to have lasted four weeks in the hotel on her own, and she proves inept at earning her own way financially:

The fourth week of Athénaïse's stay in the city was drawing to a close. Keeping in view the intention which she had of finding some suitable and agreeable employment, she had made a few tentatives in that direction. But with the exception of two little girls who had promised to take piano lessons at a price that would be embarrassing to mention, these attempts had been fruitless (450-451).

One thing she does achieve in New Orleans, however, is to come to terms with her sexuality. Gouvernail realizes that he acts as a stand-in for Monteclin, and Athénaïse transfers her brotherly affection to Gouvernail. However, these fraternal feelings bloom into sexual feelings in such a familiar way to Athénaïse that they do not frighten her, as they did in her marriage. Gouvernail realizes her passion while Athénaïse does not. This trajectory of transforming familial feelings of love into romantic and marital feelings of passion and sexuality prepares Athénaïse to accept her role as wife. When Sylvie begins to question Athénaïse about her malaise, it becomes

clear to the older woman that Athénaïse is pregnant and she explains it to her. This explanation, astonishingly the first that she has received, completes the circle of growing into womanhood that this story documents:

Sylvie was very wise, and Athénaïse was very ignorant. The extent of her ignorance and the depth of her subsequent enlightenment were bewildering. She stayed a long, long time quite still, quite stunned, after her interview with Sylvie, except for the short, uneven breathing that ruffled her bosom. Her whole being was steeped in a wave of ecstasy. When she finally arose from the chair in which she had been seated, and looked at herself in the mirror, a face met hers which she seemed to see for the first time, so transfigured was it with wonder and rapture (451).

Athénaïse shares with many of Chopin's female characters an essential realization of her role and its limits. After returning home, compelling Monteclin to convey her thus, his disappointment centered primarily around the disappointing lack of the picaresque in his sister's return, she enjoys a passionate embrace and kiss with Cazeau. The last lines of the story, however, cement the previous comparison between marriage and slavery, and adds the third essential link: motherhood:

The country night was dark and warm and still, save for the distant notes of an accordion which some one was playing in a cabin away off. A little negro baby was crying somewhere. As Athénaïse withdrew from her husband's embrace, the sound arrested her.

"Listen, Cazeau! How Juliette's baby is crying! Pauvre ti chou, I wonder w'at is the matter with it?" (454).

Eventually, one form of authority was bound to subjugate Athénaïse. In this story, it is the authority of her future child that, combined with Athénaïse's lack of financial acumen and employability, finally reconciles her to a life of dependency, a life that Chopin implies has much in common with institutional slavery. Désirée is isolated at the plantation—her husband rules with an iron fist and she has no friends among the slaves. Her only real possibility is La Blanche, who is likely her husband's mistress and clearly prefers or at least obeys Armand in the story. Her mother is too far away and her call is not heard loudly enough by Désirée. Athénaïse's ending is troubling. She, too, is isolated—an immediate warning sign. Yet she begins to attempt to foster relationships with other women she had previously rejected—by noticing “Juliette's baby” she aligns herself with the experience of other women on the plantation. By returning, ready to assume her role, she concedes a similar life to her husband's housekeeper.

Chapter 3: Chopin and Stuart's Transgressive Mothers: "An Arkansas Prophet," "A Pair of Silk Stockings," and "The Unlived Life of Little Mary Ellen"

3.1 Fallen Woman Getting Up: "An Arkansas Prophet"

Critic and scholar Helen Taylor writes of Ruth Stuart, that although her "feminist themes are fractured throughout various stories . . . Stuart's tone—lighthearted, comic, falling constantly into sentimentality and bathos—prevents her ideas from achieving anything but superficial, fragmented effects" (121). However, I posit that in several of her stories, at least, Stuart uses sentimentality and tone to present subversive and surprising elements. For instance, Ruth Stuart presents multiple images of non-ideal mothers throughout her short fiction, often employing sentimentalism to expand her audience's acceptance of extraordinary maternal figures. Taylor foregrounds quotes from an 1896 interview with Stuart from the *Ladies Home Journal* "over the question of realism in art" before analyzing some of Stuart's tales in black dialect:

Denying that she was a 'romanticist,' she said that, although 'fidelity to life' should be a writer's first aim, 'it too often seems to be taken to mean bald and photographic fidelity to pain and helplessness. . . . An artist may paint garbage so that, in looking at the picture, one feels like using smelling-salts . . . isn't it better to take hopeful views of life?' Thus, her depictions of her native state and the people she represents in fiction and poetry were deliberately selected for their pleasing, amusing, and colorful qualities. The dark sides of southern life were smoothed over or made light of, especially as these related to New Orleans and Arkansas blacks . . . groups Stuart knew to be the subject of violence and hostility throughout and after Reconstruction. (Taylor 98)

Although, as Taylor observes, Stuart's radicalism remains "superficial and fragmented," the uncertainty and contradictions that fragment Stuart's overtly white supremacist agenda in most of her fiction featuring African Americans embody the unstable and shifting rationalizations of racism at the end of the nineteenth century. The popularity of Stuart's fiction in New York in the 1890s indicts the literary establishment and the reading public along with her. Stuart's black characters all ultimately end up reinforcing "the orthodox white supremacist version of harmonious and loving antebellum race relations" (Taylor 100) but the convoluted processes by which many get there reveal deep ambiguities about race and gender. Taylor mentions that Stuart's treatment of gender has a clearly feminist project while her race-based fiction tends to be nostalgic and light. She distinguishes these two tropes as separate in Stuart's writing, but in certain tales these elements integrate with each other and with a third element—a critique or contribution to an existing conversation about writing and realism.

In "An Arkansas Prophet," Ruth Stuart tackles the popular 1890s topic of the fallen woman: the woman who has had (or is presumed to have had) sex without being married. Rather than sell her into prostitution as Stephen Crane did to Maggie, addict her to laudanum as Wharton did to Lily Bart, or infect her with malaria as Henry James did to Daisy Miller, in Stuart's tale, her bold hussy not only lives, but resumes the life she left behind. The story tells the tale of May Day Meredith, a young woman from a small postbellum Arkansas town who ran away with a con man who never properly married her and had a child out of wedlock. Ultimately, the social code of the town compels the townsfolk either to welcome back the wayward belle and her illegitimate child or part ways with their deeply held traditions. They choose the former. The story uses sentimental mid-century tropes of the faithful retainer, the idealized heroine, and the ulti-

mate reunion of family, as well as a typical postbellum Southern tale of the corruption of outsiders, to tell an ultimately transgressive narrative in which a young woman who had a child out of wedlock is welcomed home by her family and her entire community. Moreover the hero of the story, and the engineer of the defiled young woman's triumphant return, is Prophet, an aged former slave who retrieves the young woman by shooting a white man with a stolen gun. Aside from the startling affirmation of black on white violence, Stuart plays with genre here in very clever ways: the narrators are male, patriarchs of the town, and frequently interrupt the tale to muse upon the proper form and function of fiction. While much of the story overtly ridicules Prophet, she nevertheless presents him heroically for his murder of a white man while she portrays the town patriarchs as ineffective quibblers.

The structure of the story itself invites readers to question the merits of literary realism, fallen women, sensational fiction, and representations of motherhood. The four patriarchs of the town sit around a stove smoking and conversing. *May Day* Meredith's story is told in fits and starts by the men, with frequent interruptions from speakers who pontificate on the nature and elements of storytelling and the ethics of fiction. It is told almost entirely by these male narrators, with a peculiarly personified female-gendered wood-burning stove coughing and sputtering its discontent when the men get the facts wrong or dismiss the narrative. The stove is first introduced as a superlatively popular hostess, and the initial description of it continues for two pages, and the story continually refers back to it. Indeed, the stove is not only feminine, but fertile. Hens lay eggs in it, mice are born in it. The Doctor speaks of the stove as a woman who "gets religion" and proclaims that he "won't have her disrespected." Throughout the narrative the stove attempts to speak when the narrative veers off course or the patriarchs say something she disagrees with,

thereby acting as a passive narrator, misunderstood, ever-present, acknowledged, ridiculed, both allowed in yet not given an equal voice.

In the first paragraph of this short story, Stuart sets the scene as one that could be found in any small town in the wintertime. This insistence on universality and generality returns when the men categorize May's story as one that happens frequently and is in fact so common that the tale need not be told (although the stove sputters at this declaration). Then one of the patriarchs offers a narrative theory that stories that don't end happily ought not to be told at all, echoing William Dean Howells's theories of fiction. The second paragraph specifies the location as the stove in "the back of Chris Rowton's store." Stuart reveals that it is New Year's Eve and the stray cats and patriarchs of the town are gathered around the stove. It is a cold night. Even the weather forebodes change: "The wind was raw and cold, and of a fitful mind, blowing in contrary gusts, and throwing into the faces of people going in all directions . . . a threat, a promise, or a dare as to how the new year should come in."

There has been some sort of trouble that has cast a pall over the town for the past three years, and Stuart metaphorically relates this trouble with the prolific breeding of a cat named Maltee:

"Jest look at that cat--what a dusty color she's got between spots! Th'ain't a cat in Simp-
kinsville, hardly, thet don't show a trace o' Jim Meredith's Maltee--an' I jest nachelly de-
spise it, 'cause that's one of the presents *he* brought out there--that Maltee is." Then Pete
Taylor, a man in the venerable group, remarks that "Maltee is a good enough color for a
cat ef it's kep' tru; but it's like gray paint--it'll mark up most anything it's mixed with,
and cloud it."

From this dialogue, one can ascertain that the villain of the tale brought the cat into town and that it wound up at Jim Meredith's house and caused the tragedy that led to Mrs. Meredith's illness and heartbreak. Gradually, the narrators reveal that Jim Meredith's daughter May Meredith has disappeared and that, like the promiscuous cat, her disappearance has cast a gray pall on the town. Furthermore, we learn that a disreputable man, an outsider, the bringer of Maltee, caused her disappearance:

‘Wonder where she is?’ said McMonigle. ‘My opinion is she’s dead, an’ thet her mother knows it. I wouldn’t be surprised ef the devil that enticed her away has killed her. Once-t a feller like that gits a girl into a crowded city and gits tired of her, there’s a dozen ways of gittin’ shet of her.’” (21)/

Given the parameters of the story, the implication that the white outsider caused a miscegenated muddle to occur by seducing the white insider, suggests that outsiders cause more impurity in the post-Confederate region than African Americans.

Aside from symbolizing the place of women—as editors, writers, publishers, readers and characters—in the creation of fiction, the lengthy and peculiar two-page personification of the stove serves as a transition to the introduction of Prophet. Similar to Jim in Mark Twain's *Huck Finn*, superficially Prophet is spoken of as a fool, but his actions belie that truth. Prophet, whom the patriarchs off-handedly characterize as crazy and simple-minded, ends up being the only man in the town bold enough to rescue the heroine from the situation she innocently wound up in when she ran away with the handsome St. Louisan, who happened to be married already. Prophet expertly uses the codes of the town against itself to effect May and her illegitimate child's welcome reunion with her family and society. The doctor denounces Prophet as a simpleton for con-

versing with the stove, claiming that such personification of inanimate objects is a puzzling detail of his race. Yet the doctor has just spent nearly two pages personifying the stove himself. So the doctor's rhetoric contradicts its meaning: if Prophet is a fool for talking to the stove, so, then, is he. And clearly the doctor, as the healer of ailments, and the keeper (and sharer) of town secrets, does not think himself a fool.

'They say old nigger Prophet used to set down an' talk to her same ez ef she was a person, some nights, when he'd have her all to hisself. Rowton ast him one day what made him do it, and he 'lowed thet he could converse with anything that had the breath o' life in it. There is no accountin' for what notions a nigger'll take.

No, an' there's no tellin' how much or how little they know, neither. Old Proph', half-blind and foolish, limpin' round in the woods, getherin' queer roots, and talkin' to hisself, didn't seem to have no intelligence, rightly speakin', an' yet he has called out prophecies that have come true--even befo' he prophesied about May Meredith goin' wrong.

Here comes Brother Squires, chawin' tobacco like a sinner. I do love a preacher that'll chaw tobacco.' (8)

The transition to the tobacco-chewing preacher indicates a tolerance, even an affinity for, contradictory behaviors among white men that do not extend to black men or white women. More generally, through this exchange about the stove, the main characters of the ensuing tale are introduced amid the context that people and events are not always what they seem and that people

often behave in hypocritical, surprising, and contradictory ways. Although the town is small and commonplace, the occurrences in it are not necessarily routine and can change at any moment.

In fact, it is the arrival of the Baptist minister that sparks the discussion about May Meredith. He asks about what happened. In *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann Douglas clarifies how the eighteenth and nineteenth century bond between ministers and women polarized the secular, working world (of men) and the religious, philosophical, moral realm of the home (ministers and women). Douglas analyzes how this separate spheres ideology created a dual construction of men and women: man as monster, woman as victim; man as depraved, woman as moral. She points out the claustrophobic space that this moral high ground placed women in: they were to be utterly unselfish, utterly giving, morally and ethically superior. Yet outside of this suffocating sphere of victimization, morality, vulnerability, and sensitivity, women are either monsters themselves or non-existent (17-94). Stuart acknowledges this strange ideal through not only the sputtering stove, at once an emblem of domesticity and—in its placement in a store that serves as the central hub of the town—the marketplace and a stand-in for a female perspective on the patriarch's tale, but in her characters' initial descriptions of May Day Meredith. Indeed, when May left the family home after being seduced by a monstrous man, she became nothing; her absence became an un-fillable hole to the family and the town. She vanished, and nobody (except Prophet) searched for her.

In contrast, in a passage reminiscent of the antebellum searches for fugitive slaves, the entire town searches for Prophet after he disappears, shortly after May Day's flight. Stuart uses dramatic irony to create a conflict between the reader and the male narrators: the reader clearly grasps from the details and timeline of the disappearances that Prophet has gone after May but

the patriarchs cannot see past their conceptions of racial inferiority: they view Prophet only as a fool and former slave. Prophet even manages to borrow the revolver of the main storyteller without his motive being discovered, finds the name of the man May ran off with, and leaves in pursuit of them.

It was after this mirth had all subsided and the codgers had settled down into their accustomed quiet that the parson remarked, with some show of hesitation:

‘My brothers, when I was coming towards you a while ago I heard two names. They are names that I hear now and then among my people--names of two persons whom I have never met--persons passed out of your community some time before I was stationed among you. One of them, I know, has a sad history. The details of the story I have never heard, but it is in the air. Scarcely a village in all our dear world but has, no matter how blue its skies, a little cloud above its horizon--a cloud which to its people seems always to reflect the pitiful face of one of its fair daughters. I don’t know the story of May Meredith--or is it May Day Meredith?’

‘She was born May Day, and christened that-a-way,’ answered McMonigle. ‘But she was just as often called Daisy or May--any name that’d fit a spring day or a flower would fit her.’

‘Well, I don’t know her story,’ the parson resumed, ‘but I do know her fate. And perhaps that is enough to know. The other name you called was ‘Old Proph’, or ‘Prophet.’ Tell me about him. Who was he? How was he connected with May Day Meredith?’”

There is a silence, then the doctor encourages Daniel McMonigle to tell the story. He says that May's story isn't even a story—that although it saddened the town, her type of tale is so common that it may not even be worth telling to people who are not personally acquainted with her. He then speculates that Prophet may not have anything to do with May, or her disappearance, but that the two--the girl and the old man--were inextricably linked in his memory, cementing the link between marriage and slavery that Chopin took up in "Désirée's Baby" and "Athénaïse."

“But for a story? Well, I don't see that there's much story to it, and to them that didn't know her I reckon it's common enough.

But ez to the old nigger, Proph', being mixed up in it, I can't eggsac'ly say that's so, though I don't never think about the old nigger without seemin' to see little May Day's long yaller curls, an' ef I think about her, I seem to see that old man, somehow. Don't they come to you all that-a-way?”

He paused, took a few puffs from his pipe, and looked from one face to another.

“Yas,” said the doctor, “jest exactly that-a-way, Dan'l. Go on, ol' man. You're a-tellin' it straight.”

“Well, that's what I'm aimin' to do.”

But in trying to tell this simple oft heard tale, Stuart cannot quite tell it straight. After the initial introduction of setting by the third person omniscient narrator, who retakes control of the story in the last scene, several different men tell the story—each rhetorically minimizing the tale as generic and common before, nonetheless, launching into it. The name of the main story-teller, McMonigle, sounds suspiciously like “monocle”—he sees clearly, but only from one eye, one perspective. McMonigle describes Prophet in a patronizing fashion typical for Stuart: “Proph' he

was jest one o’Meredith’s ol’slave niggers--a sort o’queer, half-luney, no-‘count darkey--never done nothin’ sence freedom but what he had a mind to, jest livin’ on Meredith right along” (13).

As Taylor affirms, “Stuart did not focus on the *problems* of black/white relations and black identity . . . the works emphasize the vivacity and humor of blacks and plantation life, playing into the orthodox white supremacist version of harmonious and loving antebellum race relations (100).” Yet the reader knows by this point that discounting Prophet is clearly a mistake.

Prophet received his name as an ironic moniker due to his penchant for fortune telling, but it nevertheless defines a real skill. Every year on New Year’s Eve Prophet would go to the big town party and predict events in the coming year--surprisingly, he was usually right. The year that May Day ran away, Prophet delivered a particularly foreboding portent. McMonigle describes May as the prettiest, the most innocent, and the most modest girl at the New Year’s Party that year, emphasizing her idealized characteristics. When the time came for Prophet to deliver his fortune for the town, he also failed to tell May’s story accurately. Yet his failure stems from his knowledge of what would happen to her and his inability to protect her, not from the confusion about appearances and moral codes that seems to befuddle the other characters. The other men of the town have difficulty telling May’s story because, on the one hand, the fallen woman tale is familiar yet May does not fit into the genre and, on the other, they cannot reconcile her modest and sweet demeanor with the facts of her transgression. Both Prophet and May Day Meredith occupy a higher moral place than the patriarchs.

Taylor also claims that while Stuart espouses feminism in her fiction, she seems stalwartly traditional on matters of black emancipation and civil rights. Here, though, both projects collide, even though a reader has to scrutinize what is not said and rely on implications to discover

the subversive content lurking below the sentimental surface. Indeed, the language and conventions of sentiment offer camouflage as Stuart undermines narratives of naturalism and the male establishment that controls them, as well as the complacent white supremacy that enables men such as the patriarchs of Simpkinsville to sit around a fire underestimating Prophet and his abilities, against the evidence they themselves present.

Prophet and May Day have something else in common in this story. Neither get to tell their own histories. The patriarchs of the town take over for both, until the last scene, when the third-person omniscient point-of-view resumes and the language around Prophet ceases being ridiculous. Ostensibly, both Prophet and May are missing throughout most of the story, yet Stuart made this narrative decision—to have others, the men who run the town—tell their stories. Yet he does not get the opportunity to explain his narrative incapacity. Even while Stuart introduces Prophet as offering another perspective, a white man delivers his words. Prophet and May Day (and the stove) are the central characters in the story; yet not only do they not get a chance to tell their own story, the patriarchs of the town constantly belittle the interest and merits of their tales. McMonigle says that he wishes he could tell the story of how Prophet spoke that night in his own dialect but “he can’t speak nigger.” This may be a variation on the by now familiar device of disclaiming a story’s merits then telling it anyway. McMonigle’s disclaimer could also signify distance; he refuses to embody a black man and must rhetorically and linguistically emphasize his difference from Prophet before delivering his words. But it also emphasizes his ineffectualness as a storyteller. This would be personal for Stuart, since she apparently prided herself on her ability to write and perform black vernacular. Even though several men tell their side of the story, they are neither astute storytellers nor accurate readers. Stuart uses dramatic irony to clarify this

point. Prophet has borrowed one of the patriarch's guns and was never heard from since; the reader immediately surmises that Prophet has taken the gun and gone after May Day, yet apparently this thought never occurs to the patriarchs.

Indeed, the narrative is constantly interrupted, and the failure of language is highlighted. At one point the speaker expresses concern that the stove, personified as a neglected and pouty lady, is hungry. The narration is paused while the man feeds the stove more wood for the fire. Daniel McMonigle passes the storytelling mantle onto the doctor, Peter, after claiming it has saddened him and he wished he hadn't begun telling it. Then they debate over who should finish: "But you're tellin' the story. Don't lemme interrupt you." "No interruption, Pete. You go on an' tell it the way you call it up. . ." (12)." At first, Prophet also cannot quite think of the words to use to tell May's story. McMonigle states, "Seemed like he couldn't sca'cely walk, an' he stumbled, an' . . . look like he never would open his mouth to begin (19)." When Prophet finally begins, he speaks softly, only gradually raising his voice:

'the sky is darkened,' says he, 'an' while I see people comin' an' goin', an' I see the doctor's buggy on the road, an' hear the church bell, an' the organ, I can't make out nothin' clair, 'cause the sky is overshadowed by a big dark cloud. An' now,' says he, 'seem like the cloud is takin' the shape of a great big bird. Now I see him spread his wings an' fly into Simpkinsville, an' while he hands over it befo' the sun seem to me I can see everybody stop an' gaze up an' hold their breath to see where he'll light--everybody hopin' to see him light in their tree. An' now--oh! now I see him coming down, down, down--an' now he's done lit,' says he. I ricollect that expression o' his--'he's done lit,' says he, 'in the limb of a tall maginolia tree' (20).

The nearest magnolia tree to town is at the Meredith's front gate. Prophet describes how this bird seems to be beautiful but his feathers hide features of a bird of prey. Shortly after his prophesy, the man from St. Louis convinces May Day Meredith to run off with him. A quick investigation proves that the man is already married, the town goes into mourning, and Prophet mysteriously disappears.

Prophet's actions heal the bereft town by returning May Day. While this act reestablishes the white power structure, it also inverts it: the town must accept May and her illegitimate child. Furthermore, Prophet effects these changes by tricking, then stealing the gun of, one white man and ultimately killing another. However, despite this shockingly celebrated transgression—black men were hanged for less in the 1890s—Prophet clearly embodies Stuart's frequently used character of the faithful African American retainer.

Anthropologist Paul Shackel, in his book *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* explains how such a characterization enforced white supremacist ideologies:

The 'faithful-slave' myth became a vehicle for southerners to justify the institution of slavery. Southern heritage groups paid homage to slaves and servants who did not rebel against their masters during the Civil War. This phenomenon allowed twentieth-century southern heritage groups to declare that African Americans were content as slaves. From the mid-1890s through the end of the 1930s, the *Confederate Veteran* published hundreds of stories about faithful slaves. David Blight (2001:287) writes, 'In this flood of testimony about faithful blacks at the heart of the Civil War memory, history gives way completely to mythology. The thousands of slaves who escaped to contra-

band camps, joined the Union army or navy, or fled when opportunities came while working in Confederate hospitals or on railroads and fortifications—as well as the daily revolution that occurred in the master-slave relationship during the war—had been steadfastly repressed in Southern memory.’ ‘This [Confederate] tradition focuses on the white South’s view of history, appreciation for rule by the white elite, a fear of the enfranchisement of African Americans, and a reverence for the Confederate cause (Blight 2001; Foster 1987:5). The paradigm preaches racial separation and the virtues of an aristocratic South” (Shackel 78).

Stuart’s contradictory views on race proliferate throughout this story. Despite the actual fact that the men personify the stove, and imbue Prophet’s omens with the profundity accorded an ancient oracle in a Greek tragedy, the patriarchs of the town repeatedly emphasize the black man’s difference from them and from the dominant white society. This difference exists, seemingly without controversy, alongside Prophet’s unquestioned devotion to May Day. McMonigle describes the peculiarity of Prophet, that he would talk to animals and plants, and even inanimate objects. But he also flatters him as an excellent hunter and a crack-shot. All the town’s children were afraid of him, and the other African Americans deemed him a sorcerer. Yet McMonigle also relays, without irony, that Prophet loved May since she was a small child and cared for her when she was sick. As a toddler May would ride in front of him on a mule, and when she was a young woman he slept on the floor beside her bed when she was sick. Once, he saved her from drowning. That an African American man considered odd at best and completely mad at worst was given carte blanche to care for the petted only child of a well-to-do planter and former slave owner is not treated ironically in this story. In fact, their fates are linked: the men affirm that they can-

not think of one without recalling the other, and when May Day disappeared, so did Prophet. The difference that is emphasized between Prophet and the patriarchs does not exist between Prophet and May Day. This twinning may cause some discomfort. After McMonigle tells about Proph's relationship with May, he emphasizes the difficulty of telling May's tale by saying he "[d]on't rightly know how to tell it, nohow." This disclaimer recalls McMonigle's earlier stated incapacity to tell Prophet's story, since he "doesn't speak nigger." Stuart places the town patriarch's in a position of symbolic power, only; any agency they may have once had has been paralyzed by incomprehension.

This inefficacy may have its roots in the transformation of the former Confederate states after the destruction of the Civil War and the corruption and unfulfilled promises of Reconstruction. McMonigle clarifies May Day's story without actually indicting her by comparing her to a piece of naive fruit: "We can't none of us deny, I reckon, thet she went wrong. A red-cheeked peach thet don't know nothin' but the dew and the sun, and to grow sweet and purty--it goes wrong when it's wrenched off the stem and et by a hog. That's one way o' goin' wrong." (15)"

May Day's innocence was based upon a white planter's daughter's ideal path to maturity. She had nothing to do except ripen. Her parents' ineffectual protections mimic the lamentations of former slaveowners who lost their wealth in the war and had to contend with raising children, particularly daughters, to a life that was vastly different from the one envisioned. As Jane Turner Censer reveals in *Reconstructing White Southern Womanhood*, "many parents found galling the the contrast between the life they had expected to give their children and their postwar poverty" (19). Censer offers evidence from a letter written by a formerly wealthy North Carolinian planter to his daughter in which the man rues the loss of wealth and property from the war

and subsequent economic crashes. “I am not able to give you 10 cents, instead of \$10,000, I would weep tears of blood if it would avail anything” (qtd. in Censer 19). Moreover, the war and the economic and social instability of the decades following it changed the notion of a Southern belle. As Censer articulates, “its impact on these contradictory images of womanhood was immediate and long-lasting. In particular, the demure image that so many parents and teachers had sought to foster lost much of its appeal for young women” (12). Although Stuart carefully creates May Day to inhabit the character of an antebellum heroine, these contexts can explain the parental and patriarchal ineffectiveness prevalent in the story.

The man who stole May Day away was from “St. Louis--though some says he come from Chicago, an’ some says Canada--lookin’ after some land mortgages.” Stuart never gives this man a name. Not only is he a dangerous outsider, but he is a city dweller, and probably a Northerner. Moreover, he is looking after “land mortgages” which could mean many things, all of them dire. He could be a speculator for a corporation interested in buying land for commercial use, he could be a land-owner looking after rents on tenant farms or sharecroppers: as an outsider, he would have taken advantage of one of the government Reconstruction programs to settle farmers on federal land. He is a “hog” looking to steal the local “peach.” Peaches were one crop that Arkansas grew somewhat successfully in an attempt to diversify crops after the war.

However, nobody helped their sweet peach and saved her from getting plucked by the hog. The town patriarchs are useless, and May’s parents failed to protect her, despite their best intentions. These two groups represent society and family, and they both failed. The South also failed. She is a society in decay, a forlorn mother who cannot help her children. The federal government land strategies failed, creating opportunities for land speculators and endless poverty for

sharecroppers and tenant farmers (black and white): creating a vacuum in which the natural resources of the South could be exploited by Northern corporations. The only protector of the ravaged Southern woman, in this story, is a black man. This fact both participates in white supremacist ideology by utilizing the faithful retainer stock figure that Shackel explains, and rebels against a white rationale of white on black racial violence that was firmly entrenched and gaining in popularity in the 1890s—that extremist groups such as the KKK were protecting innocent women from black men.

The cruel Northern abductor and fruit destroyer used the old-school Southern manners of the Merediths against them in order to steal their daughter. Likewise, Prophet uses the same fountain of social custom to create a successful homecoming for May Day. The town patriarchs relay the revered town custom of the New Year's handshaking, which squelches conflicts and keeps the town in accord. No matter her complicated and conflicted views on race relations, and they remain complex and twisted throughout her fiction, Stuart's rhetorical technique of telling the story through various narrators, each of whom denies his ability to tell the tale based on both its ubiquity and uniqueness, offers multiple truths and interpretations. The reader knows *what* happened to May Day very quickly (she ran off with a man against her family's wishes and had sex with him outside of marriage), but the *why* is suspended. This puts the focus of May's narrative on the *why*, not the *how*. Context, Stuart implies through this construction, makes an enormous difference in how one interprets these familiar stories. Not all transgressions are equally punishable.

Finally, the doctor reveals a plan to gather the townsfolk and meet at the Merediths for a spontaneous New Year's party. The gathering, he reasons, might benefit the health of the ailing

Mrs. Meredith and even help unite the town, which has been torn asunder by May Day's flight. Since the social code in the country forbids a host from repudiating a guest, Mrs. Meredith receives her acquaintances, and a lively party ensues. Then as the clock strikes midnight, a carriage turns into the driveway. Prophet has inexplicably returned, bringing May Day Meredith and her baby daughter. Since it is New Year's, the pair cannot be turned away, and custom dictates that old wrongs are forgotten. May Day must be forgiven. After the sentimental reunion with her parents, Prophet returns the stolen revolver to the doctor, with one shell missing. He tells him that he used it once. Since we know he is a crack shot, and we know that he followed May Day and her tempter, then we must assume that he killed him. In 1899, a Southern writer telling a tale in which a former slave is the hero because he killed a white man is rather remarkable, as well as a tale in which a woman who has fled against her family's wishes and had a child with a married man being accepted back into the family fold. This is sensation, the ending is pure sentiment, but it is also subversive. Just as the townsfolk's own social codes force them to accept May Day publicly, so the fictional codes of sentimentalism and thrillers force the reader to accept and relish this ending that breaks very firmly held cultural taboos.

As she does in two other stories that I discuss in a later chapter, "Blink" and "The Frey's Christmas Party" Stuart emphasizes the change in circumstances of white Southern women who came of age after the Civil War in a society greatly changed from the one they had been born into. However, "Blink" and "Frey's Christmas" both highlight Southern women who have successfully navigated the sudden reversals of fortune and radically revised expectations of women of this generation: the heroines of these stories rise to the challenge of reduced circumstances by participating in physically burdensome household labor and supporting themselves and their

families financially through writing, as Stuart herself did. However, in “An Arkansas Prophet,” the young heroine remains passive and in need of external help--in this case, she is saved through a devoted former slave of her parents. Helen Taylor comments on Stuart’s confused or contradictory racial messages and her puzzling self-consciousness about race and the racism of the culture she writes about, even her own racist beliefs. This contradiction is likely not puzzling but emblematic--even in our own time, racial attitudes belie each other and there is no cohesion. We have a black president, but George Zimmerman is found not guilty after fatally shooting an unarmed black teenager. Like Jim in *Huck Finn*, Stuart’s African American characters consistently sound foolish but ultimately act as the only honorable or admirable characters in a story. This could be a blend of various literary racist stock types, certainly, but it could also indicate an entire culture’s discomfort with race-based legislation--Stuart’s characters certainly all serve their white protagonists and none challenge the racial status quo: Mammy will remain a dedicated housekeeper and Prophet revert to an easily dismissed but beloved lunatic. We do not have the upward mobility and ambition present in the characters of African American writers such as Frances Watkins Harper and WEB DuBois. However, “An Arkansas Prophet” contains a thread that remains in many of Stuart’s race-based fiction: she advocates for black on white violence, when that violence enforces the integrity of the old South.

Helen Taylor also discusses Stuart’s racism as in opposition to her feminism. However, her hierarchy of feminism over racial equality reflected a common prejudice of late nineteenth century feminists, hailing from a political split over universal suffrage and enfranchisement for black men only. Historically, the abolitionist and feminist movements had shared a platform and leaders. But after the Civil War, the debate over the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments split

these movements into two camps: the former arguing for rights for black men only, and the latter for voting rights for all. After the amendments passed, enfranchising only black men, the divisions solidified. As historian Ellen Carol DuBois articulates in *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*, "The tension between abolitionism and feminism . . . forced feminists to abandon their efforts to anchor woman suffrage to black suffrage and led them to make an open break with abolitionists" (77). Unfortunately, it was not atypical for late-nineteenth century feminists to articulate the supremacy of white women over African Americans of both genders:

Some among the suffrage movement based their arguments for women suffrage, and against the enfranchisement of blacks, on racist grounds. Although the white women who [led] the association were abolitionists, they also, and not inconsequentially, held that blacks, and in particular, black men, were inferior to white women and neither as ready for nor deserving of the vote as themselves (Sundstrom).

Stuart's insistence on the benevolence of the paternalism of the slave system in the antebellum South speaks to her political stance as a feminist, and that movement's evolving view that white women deserved voting rights before black men and women.

3.2. The Consuming Mother: “A Pair of Silk Stockings”

Both Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart represent the competing mid-to-late nineteenth century views of motherhood in their short fiction: two notable examples that directly interrogate maternal duty and attachment are Chopin’s “A Pair of Silk Stockings” and Stuart’s “The Unlived Life of Mary Ellen.” In this chapter, I offer new interpretations of these stories based on late-nineteenth century anxieties about changes in the economy and their effects on women and motherhood. In “Silk Stockings,” for example, I posit that the main character contemplates prostitution as a means to secure financial security; female and male promiscuity—in the form of female sexual availability, its impact on marriage, and syphilis transmission—pervades the mock tragedy of “Mary Ellen.”

In “A Pair of Silk Stockings,” the main character is a widow who has recently come into a small sum of money. The conflict revolves around her choice of what to spend her money on. The material items she confronts ultimately seduce her, and she purchases an extravagant lunch and an impractical pair of silk stockings, rather than necessary items for her children. This story is notable for Chopin’s refusal to issue moral disdain on her character’s decision; rather she highlights the difficulty of the decision and the irresistible magnetism of the material pleasures.

Kate Chopin’s “A Pair of Silk Stockings,” published in *Vogue* on September 16, 1897 (“Kate Chopin: ‘A Pair of Silk Stockings’”) has several different possible readings. Major Chopin critics such as Bernard Koloski, Emily Toth, and Barbara Ewell view this story as a masterful example of short fiction, which illustrates the power and influence of money and displays Chopin’s sympathy for the lower-middle-class (qtd. in Arner 121). Other critics view this story as a prototype for *The Awakening*, with “little Mrs. Sommers’ ” extravagant day of personal shop-

ping as the first step on a continuum that leads to Edna Pontellier's daring break with her culture's standards for wives and mothers. Doris Davis, for example, writes that not only does Mrs. Sommers' fulfillment of her desires "nurture her sense of esthetics" and lead to the development of her character, her shopping indulgences have "developed a feeling of independence and fulfillment" that "might well serve as a model for Edna Pontellier's emerging sense of autonomy" (qtd. in Stein 358).

Indeed, this story remains a satisfying and exemplary piece of short fiction; tightly constructed, Chopin divulges just enough information about Mrs. Sommers that the reader develops an emotional connection with her. We want Mrs. Sommers to enjoy herself, yet we cringe at the choices she makes, even while we understand and identify with them. But the story exists as more than an exemplar of Chopin's craft; a careful reading reveals that this story contains insightful cultural and socioeconomic critiques. And certainly, Mrs. Sommers' attempts at freedom and breaking from her proscribed domestic sphere prefigure Edna Pontellier's radical departure from the same constraints. Of course, one could counter that while Mrs. Sommers seeks a day of freedom, Edna seeks a lifetime of it.

After unexpectedly coming into a small sum of money, fifteen dollars, Mrs. Sommers goes to a department store, buys silk stockings, shoes, gloves, and a few magazines for herself, eats lunch at an upscale restaurant, goes to a popular theater, where she converses with an extravagantly dressed woman, and then rides a streetcar where a man gazes at her intently. The opening text of the story reads: "Little Mrs. Sommers one day found herself the unexpected possessor of fifteen dollars. It seemed to her a very large amount of money, and the way in which it

stuffed and bulged her worn old porte-monnaie gave her a feeling of importance as she had not enjoyed for years” (Silk Stockings 1).

This opening passage sets the emphasis on a particular aspect of the transformative power of money that will continue throughout the story. Money’s power, in this narrative, stems from its use to purchase goods, which have the power to change Mrs. Sommers’ external and internal reality. The money has come to Mrs. Sommers unbidden—she did not work for it or scrimp and save for it. The fact that she deems fifteen dollars a large sum indicates that she does not have much money herself, but that she craves it. Even the noun, “possessor,” establishes the power money has over her. Critics such as Allen Stein have remarked on how the money takes over Mrs. Sommers, draining her of agency. Other critics, such as Robert Arner, have countered that a closer reading of the story reveals that Mrs. Sommers’ retains more control than one might initially think, especially given the context of the story. Arner points out that Stein focuses on “Mrs. Sommers’ ‘blind, impulsive, utterly desperate submission to the dictates of a commercially driven consumer ethic that insists one’s true worth is determined by the quality and worth of one’s possessions and amusements,’” (Arner 124). Yet in so doing, Arner claims that “Stein sells Chopin’s story short, overlooking, for one thing, the ‘new freedom from self-denial and . . . repression’ that one historian, William R. Leach, has claimed helps to explain the acquiescence in and even fierce loyalty to the new consumer culture by the American masses and that surely is one component of Mrs. Sommers’s experience on her memorable day in the store” (124).

Indeed, despite its power, the money does not possess Mrs. Sommers; in fact, the opening passage emphasizes that she possesses it. Its mysterious appearance and the fact that she has neither earned it nor been given it by someone for the maintenance of home or children gives this

sum a freedom that the diminutive Mrs. Sommers explores throughout the short text that follows. Mrs. Sommers herself, Chopin writes, is little, yet the money stuffs and bulges her change purse—the first description of clothing or accessories here establishes a clear association with money. A *Porte-monnaie* is a small pocketbook used for carrying money. The fact that Mrs. Sommers's purse is worn establishes a detail that Chopin elaborates in the next paragraph. Mrs. Sommers moves in the world of commerce a good deal already. She uses her *port-monnaie* frequently in seeking out bargains. Another detail establishes that Mrs. Sommers has had a downgrade in her lifestyle. One must assume, given the later information, that she made a bad marriage, and either her husband does not make much money or he does not provide her or their children with enough of it to make her life or household run easily. However, I believe that contextual evidence suggests that Mrs. Sommers may also be plotting a more permanent change in her circumstances, using a very different vehicle of escape than Edna did.

Mary Papke, building on Davis's analysis of the internal changes wrought in Mrs. Sommers through the initial touch of the silk stockings, posits that this action engages Mrs. Sommers with a forgotten female sensuality. She also adds that Mrs. Sommers actual purchase of the stockings, instigates the "contemplation and action" that she arrived at only because she felt "physically and spiritually exhausted" (qtd. in Stein 358). In other words, Mrs. Sommers arrived at the department store empty; she was a vessel waiting to be filled. This is the state that one needs to be in to achieve enlightenment in most major religions; it is also the state of woman before marriage under a patriarchal ideology. Either spiritual or matrimonial, Mrs. Sommers enters the department store primed to make a significant change. Indeed the constraints of Mrs. Sommers's life have accustomed her to living in the moment; in this sense, her seemingly uncharac-

teristic lack of planning in the department store might not actually be a major break for her character. Not only that, but the department store seduces Mrs. Sommers, as these stores were constructed to do. This reading imbues shopping with extreme importance, as, indeed, the culture then (and now) did. As Alan Trachtenberg affirms, shopping had become her prime labor, and adornment added value in the marketplace (124). Mrs. Sommers responds to the sensual pleasures of the store and its luxury goods and her unexpected sum of money repels her from the bargain bins; yet while she purchases the items for herself in a state of apparent unconsciousness or hypnosis, her purchases may be more pragmatic than it seems. For example, read this second paragraph of the story:

The question of investment was one that occupied her greatly. For a day or two she walked about apparently in a dreamy state, but really absorbed in speculation and calculation. She did not wish to act hastily, to do anything she might afterward regret. But it was during the still hours of the night when she lay awake revolving plans in her mind that she seemed to see her way clearly toward a proper and judicious use of the money (1).

Initially, after receiving the money, Mrs. Sommers planned to purchase goods for her children.

The third paragraph articulates this desire:

A dollar or two should be added to the price usually paid for Janie's shoes, which would insure their lasting an appreciable time longer than they usually did. She would buy so and so many yards of percale for new shirt waists for the boys and Janie and Mag. She had intended to make the old ones do by skilful patching. Mag should have another gown. She had seen some beautiful patterns, veritable bargains in the shop windows. And still there would be left enough for new stockings—two pairs apiece—and what darning

that would save for a while! She would get caps for the boys and sailor-hats for the girls. The vision of her little brood looking fresh and dainty and new for once in their lives excited her and made her restless and wakeful with anticipation (1).

Yet in these lines, the verb forms are subjunctive, uncertain; Mrs. Sommers had not decided this. Such a plan would not enact a dramatic change in her life, but rather further her status quo by making it more bearable for a short while longer. When she arrives in the store, after fasting (she hadn't eaten anything) and "physically and spiritually exhausted" she had actually prepared herself for a transformation. As Chopin writes, she appeared "dreamy" but appropriating the business terminology of her time, she engaged in "speculation" and "calculation." Using the ideology of the marketplace, Mrs. Sommers does indeed break with the past, not just her personal recent history of constant work, thrift, and home economy, but the history of past generations of women who also practiced such values. Arner emphasizes that these choices offer Mrs. Sommers a certain type of freedom, since they

favor the sensuous, the aesthetic, and the pleasurable . . . they are to this degree quite liberating choices not available in her domestic environment or within her domestic identity. 'The culture of consumption,' to cite Leach once again, 'was an urban and secular one of color and spectacle, of sensuous pleasure and dreams . . . [that] subverted, but never overturned, the older mentality of repression, practical utilitarianism, scarcity, and self-denial.' (Arner 125).

Her life of toil does not disappear, but another option presents itself to her.

Stein calls attention to Mrs. Sommers's lack of agency throughout the story. "Mrs. Sommers, from the moment she gets the fifteen dollars to the moment that she has spent every bit of

it, never has any more autonomy than she has had at any recent point in her married life” (358).

Stein sees Mrs. Sommers’ failure to change as pitiful but entirely her fault:

Rather than confronting the terrible constraints under which she labors, rather than seeking through such confrontation to forge what Melville characterizes as a ‘sovereign sense of self,’ Mrs. Sommers, understandably enough but also sadly, seeks merely escape from her life and from herself through her brief flight into consumerism. Such venturing, Chopin conveys implicitly here, is futile and devoid ultimately of anything approximating meaningful freedom. (358).

This assertion implies some type of revolutionary or idealistic labor and feminist agenda on Chopin’s part, however, and the context to support such a claim is simply not found in this text or in any of its contexts. First, consider the audience: “Silk Stockings” was the 16th of the 19 stories Chopin published in *Vogue* between the seven year span of 1893 and 1900. *Vogue*, even in the 1890s before *Conde Nast* took it over, was still a fashion and culture magazine that relied on advertising revenue; the original and intended audience for this text was a woman of means who did shop, yet also viewed her culture with sarcasm and irony, even while literally and figuratively buying into it. Moreover, situating the bulk of the tale in a department store (and not emphasizing in any way the shabby treatment or low pay of the workers in the store) places the emphasis on consumer culture, not the labor agitation we see as an element of “Miss McEnders.” Arner links Mrs. Sommers’ out-of-body experiences in the store to a certain complicity on her part. She wants to participate in the consumerism (Arner 140-142). And Chopin does not mock or indict Mrs. Sommers, as she might if the character represented an indictment of consumerism. Chopin, although the story itself carries a sardonic and mocking tone, refrains from mocking Mrs. Som-

mers. She is not the subject of ridicule. Peggy Skaggs and other critics have pointed out Chopin's compassionate treatment of Mrs. Sommers that leaves the readers with the same sympathy for this woman (Stein 358).

Given the intended audience, Chopin's sympathetic treatment of her character, the entrenched consumerist ethic Chopin depicts, and the limited career options available to mothers, especially those with multiple children, Mrs. Sommers' decisions actually indicate a certain amount of self-determinism, pragmatism, and planning, with a goal to change her life permanently. She purchased essentials of a middle-class woman that were not in and of themselves extravagant: reduced price silk stockings, fashionable but well-made shoes that accentuated her shapeliness, and ready-made gloves of kid leather. These items make Mrs. Sommers appear more affluent than she is; even the magazines she buys to read contribute to this superficial illusion. The class leap she attempts is not too far off; indeed her former comfortable status as a single woman emphasizes the fluidity between the working and middle classes at this time. Mrs. Sommers' day of shopping reminds her, and the readers, that although her socioeconomic status had fallen, in this world where appearances discern identity, and where therefore identity can be purchased for a small sum, she can rise incrementally up the scale, from working to middle class again. Looking this way not only gave her the confidence to enter into restaurants and theaters, but her appearance elicited the male gaze, which is where her real value lies. For the implication in the story is not that Mrs. Sommers had given up her talent, or sacrificed a lucrative career to some whim, but that her fortune had fallen because she made a bad choice, investment, or speculation, in marriage. Outfitting herself in an attractive manner may be the most logical choice for a transformation, for continued independence, that Mrs. Sommers has.

Actually, Mrs. Sommers' decision (albeit unconscious) not to purchase goods for her children places them out of the marketplace—she may not be willing to doll them up and adorn them for the admiration of others, to endure the constant observation and anxiety of being seen that Mrs. Sommers experiences throughout the story. Indeed, it is the neighbors who “sometimes talked of certain “better days” that little Mrs. Sommers had known before she had ever thought of being Mrs. Sommers.”

Critic Barbara Ewell has commented on the ability of money, and the goods it purchases, to buoy the confidence of Mrs. Sommers (qtd. in Stein 361). Indeed, as Arner affirms, once Mrs. Sommers makes the initial purchase of the stockings, she becomes a confident shoe buyer, then, without any thought, buys the gloves. She experiences a moment of self-consciousness entering the restaurant, but her magazines and her new clothing prop her up. The consumer goods are more than symbolic emblems of power, however; they are real indicators of wealth, privilege, and leisure.

Indeed, a first reading of this story might yield an interpretation that Mrs. Sommers is initially a self-abnegating and thrifty mother, and the power of marketing and the acquisitive desire for goods it engenders transforms her into a spendthrift automaton. Yet a closer reading reveals hints in the text that Mrs. Sommers possessed a penchant for luxury and that her previously practical considerations all had as their aim a lessening of her workload. She can still be devoted, but perhaps the transformation of her personality was not as abrupt or dramatic as it seemed.

It is possible to interpret this story as an illustration of a mother experiencing the clash I spoke of in the first chapter—the transformation from a thrifty, home-based woman expanding the family's economy through her labor to a woman who purchases trifles and luxury goods,

goes to plays and speaks with ‘gaudy strangers’ with whom she feels a sudden kinship, accepts the gaze of a man on a public streetcar and wishes that she could avoid her many duties and responsibilities at home. At the same time, though, Chopin treats Mrs. Sommers gently. She does have many duties and she seems to have fulfilled them adequately until this afternoon. As in many of Chopin’s narratives, Mrs. Sommers cannot find a place. She does not fit. She doesn’t fit into the exhausting life of industry, thriftiness, home economy and child rearing that her foremothers would have been stuck with, but she also does not fit into this new economy of the marketplace. She feels comfortable enough here, having been born into a life in which such luxury was expected and maintained, yet she cannot stay here. She does not have the means. The only way she could stay, and there is evidence for such a choice in context in the story itself, is by becoming a prostitute. Indeed, the gaudy woman next to her in the play quite likely was a prostitute, and the intense gaze of the man on the street car indicates his sexual interest. Given the anxiety that women working for low wages would find prostitution an attractive alternative, which I detail in a previous chapter, contemporary readers of this story might very well have made this inference. Indeed, the conversation in the 1890s around the issue of sex for money included middle-class women who had fallen in socioeconomic status for whom prostitution seemed the most rational choice. Alice Kessler Harris provides details:

Kate Richards O’Hare, socialist and journalist, surveyed prostitutes and concluded that ‘most working women’ were not poor slum women but the ‘equal or superior in education or accomplishments’ of other women. ‘The ranks of the fallen women are not recruited to any great extent from the lower stratum of the working class, but from the upper and middle class. For the most part, we found the fall women had not been educated

with any idea of ever having to earn their own living.’ O’Hare captured some of the tensions that wage work would continue to pose for women in an industrial society. (105).

Arner relates the dissociative experience that pervades “Silk Stockings” to cultural and socioeconomic changes in the 1890s, and sees that context as integral to the story’s interpretation.

The poignancy [of the story] derives in large measure from unresolved contradictions and contrasts between the established and the emerging culture that Leach has described. In her portrait of Mrs. Sommers, Kate Chopin has given us not only a story about a particular woman who is economically on the margins of society but also a story of that entire society, whether wealthy or poor, in a time of transition. . .” (Arner 125).

Implicitly, Mrs. Sommers’s costume of new goods—silk stockings, fitted kid gloves, and fashionable shoes, allow her to assume a costume and as Chopin writes, ‘had given her a feeling of assurance, of belonging to the well-dressed multitude.’ The historical double consciousness that Leach assigns to the era, in other words, plays out in Mrs. Sommers’s personal life as a feeling that she belongs to the fashionable crowd by reason of the disguise. And, indeed, the disguise itself has the power to transform appearances into reality, by offering Mrs. Sommers an option to supplement her income through prostitution. At the very least, the mother’s foray into the department store reminds her of an identity that had been subsumed through her maternal role. This identity remains; once risen to consciousness, and brought to fruition through her shopping spree, it is impossible to repress it once again. Allan Stein argues that nothing will change for Mrs. Sommers. But this can’t be true: indeed, by the end of the story, Mrs. Sommers has indeed changed, and this change may continue through Kate Chopin’s fiction and establish a template

for Edna Pontellier, or this change may represent the multitudes of women trapped between worlds, and their struggles to fit in. But the society Mrs. Sommers had been born into had been transformed. While it is unclear what she will do at the end of the story (return the man's gaze or return home), it is clear that her world has changed.

3.3. Symbolic Motherhood Destroyed: "The Unlived Life of Mary Ellen"

In Stuart's "The Unlived Life of Little Mary Ellen," published in *Harper's* in October 1896, the protagonist's aborted wedding (her groom absconded with another woman) facilitates the full-blown manifestations of a latent insanity—that calls to mind a syphilis infection—which births a delusion that a doll from a mail order catalogue is her baby, whom she names Mary Ellen. The emotional and social realities of motherhood, in this story, do not even need an actual child; motherhood has become so conceptualized that it can be empathically performed using a doll. However, the actual dangers of motherhood, birth, and sexual relations are mimicked to the extent that they are actualized. The virginal Miss Bradley dies with her doll-child at the end of the story, just as many women died in childbirth. Although Stuart utilizes sentimental techniques, much of the content seriously examines cultural and individual responses to maternal roles, and also attends to the often dire implications of motherhood in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, when read carefully, even these sentimental devices are complicated. The most sentimental moment in the story occurs during the farcical funeral ceremony for the deceased doll. The minister and the townsfolk, after successfully subsuming their mirth, listen seriously to the excerpts from Scripture the minister has prepared. Miss Bradley's quiet death of apparent heart failure during the Benediction is indeed sentimental, but it also confirms the inherited syphilis infection.

Another of Stuart's Simpkinsville, Arkansas stories, community and collective morality frame "The Unlived Life of Mary Ellen." The opening pages establish the scene as late summer, and very hot. Yet the opening paragraphs detail the heat by explaining the townsfolk's struggles to maintain sartorial propriety in the heat and their accommodations to this challenge. So, from the start, the narrative concerns itself with variations on custom and tradition and collective reactions to deviance. Helen Taylor sees the "focus of the story . . . [as] not Mary Ellen herself, but the very question of her imaginary relationship with the doll . . . the story reveals how unsettling the community finds Mary Ellen's behavior to its collective morality and indeed unconscious" (125).

Stuart defines this collectivity as feminine in nature, by personifying the town as a woman. She also establishes a narrative distance from the story—the teller of the tale may know of this environment intimately enough to describe it, but she is no longer in it and speaks at some remove to an urban audience.

When Simpkinsville sits in shirt-sleeves along her storefronts in summer, she does not wish to be considered *en déshabillé*. Indeed, excepting in extreme cases, she would—after requiring that you translate it into plain American, perhaps—deny the soft impeachment.

Simpkinsville knows about coats, and she knows about ladies, and she knows that coats and ladies are to be taken together.

But there are hot hours during August when nothing should be required to be taken with anything—unless, indeed, it be ice with everything excepting more ice (1-2).

The heat and languor of the afternoon inspire the town's two doctors to begin a conversation about their practice, and the townsfolk who keep them busy: most notably, the "chronics" and the babies. This leads into a discussion of the young people in the town, and how irreverent, wild, and disrespectful they seem—they whistle jaunty tunes to a preacher resolved against dancing and music as he rides into town. Then, on cue "a shabby woman in a shabby carriage" approaches, and the young men stop whistling. The store keeper, who rarely dons a coat in August, puts his coat on to take her order from the carriage.

She is important to the doctors, as both a chronic and having a baby, of sorts. One doctor has even written a report on her that he plans to publish after her death, to save her embarrassment. Out of kindness and confusion, the doctors and the townsfolk comply with Mary Ellen's delusions that her childhood sweetheart did not ditch her on their wedding day to run off with a "strange" woman, that the marriage actually took place, and that an expensive wax doll is her infant. Mary Ellen, however, fulfills a role in the community even as she destabilizes its most revered institutions of medicine, church, and family. This "pore little half-demented woman" inspires a type of gentleness in otherwise rough or unreachable men. Her effectiveness contrasts with the ridicule faced by the preacher. The doctor describes her message, carried out unwittingly through her madness, as enacting a preaching

where it's much needed. . . to our young people. There ain't many preachers can reach 'em but—

Did you notice jest now how, as soon as she turned into the road, all that whistlin'

stopped? . . . An' she's the only woman in town thet'll make old Rowton put on a coat.

He'll wait on your wife or mine in his shirt-sleeves, an' it's all right. But there's some-

thin' in that broken-hearted woman nursin' a wax doll that even a fellow like Rowton'll feel (16-17).

In this passage, Stuart continues a tradition in western literature of imbuing the mad with transformative abilities and the sick with saintliness. She also perverts True Womanhood to a hilarious and ridiculous degree. Mary Ellen Williams inspires the gentleness and propriety of men in the way that True Womanhood held all women, particularly mothers, innately should and would in direct contrast to the other women of the town. But she is not sane, and she is not actually a mother.

Yet, strangely, Mary Ellen is held up as a beneficial negative example to the young people of the town. Usually, such an example implies some culpability—but what has Miss Williams done? I believe that reading this story closely reveals that Miss Williams represents, among other things, the danger of congenital syphilis through married sexual relations with an infected man. Indeed, several textual clues support this claim, and some literature of the late-nineteenth-century features syphilitic characters infected unwittingly from their parents or spouse, and who either pass it on to their children or decide to abstain from reproduction to avoid this possibility, perhaps most notably Sarah Grand's *Heavenly Twins*, and Chopin's "Mrs. Mobry's Reason." As William Driscoll explains in "The Metaphor of Syphilis in Grand's *Heavenly Twins*," the frequency of congenital syphilis infection and its impact on a woman's reproductive abilities and the health of her children was a topic of discussion and controversy in the late nineteenth century.

Although doctors and scientists were aware of the hereditary risk of syphilis, they had commonly (intentionally or not) downplayed these dangers. In the advertisement to his

medical text, Holmes Coote, without any evidence, goes so far as to state “I am far from regarding them in that very serious light, which some would make us believe—that they [syphilis contaminants]...pass out of one infection from generation to generation” (Coote). This type of unsupported rhetoric enabled the medical community to focus, as Coote does, on the dangers of prostitutes while ignoring the men they infect. More importantly such rhetoric suggested that syphilis had very little impact on the virtue of maternity.

This laissez faire attitude toward hereditary syphilis began to crumble in 1881 when Dr. Alfred Fournier’s seminal work, *Syphilis and Marriage*, was translated into English. This medical text clearly stressed the risks of syphilitic husbands infecting both their wives and babies by stating that a pregnancy would be the worst misfortune which could befall you. For, one of two things would happen: either your child will die before being born; or it would come into the world with the pox...the poor creature could not long survive. (Fournier 154)

Although hereditary syphilis was not discovered by Fournier, this text was pivotal in making it part of the public discourse (Liggins 178). (Driscoll).

This analysis explains why Stuart took such pains to frame Mary Ellen’s story within the context of a community, why her appearance inspires such pity from the doctors, and why she included the doctors’ discussion about God allowing such suffering on innocents in this supposed just world. Driscoll quotes Jared Diamond’s contention, from his medical history *Guns, Germs and Steel*, that diseases, like syphilis, which can pass from the mother to her infant, “pose[d] ethical dilemmas with which believers in a fundamentally just universe have had to struggle desper-

ately” (qtd. in Driscoll). The two town doctors engage in this very conversation right before the pathetic Mary Ellen arrives on the scene with her “haggard” face and wax baby.

The motif of dangers in marriage enters this fictional conversation as it had entered the cultural conversation around marriage in the late nineteenth century. Symbolically, Mary Ellen becomes mad when sexuality is interrupted by the presence of another woman, a “strange” woman, and has a child who should not have existed. Indeed, real women faced real danger in childbirth, from death to loss of the baby to postpartum depression. Indeed, Stuart explicitly invites the reader to interpret this story symbolically in the passage describing the niece of Mary Ellen (the intended recipient of the toy) holding the doll. After explaining the debate the family had over whether to allow the young niece to visit her deranged aunt and hold the fake baby, Stuart explains:

Still there couldn't be any harm in letting her see the beautiful toy. And so, as she [the niece] held it in her arms, the child came vaguely to realize that a great mystery of anxious love hovered about this strange, weird doll, a mystery which, to her young perception, as she read it in the serious home faces, was as full of tragic possibilities as that which concerned the real baby sister who lay and slept and waked and grew in the home cradle (61).

Throughout the narrative the speakers in the town try to assign blame, but settle on nobody. The doctors try to blame themselves for perpetuating the hallucination, one doctor blames Mary Ellen's brother for naming his daughter after her, and thereby occasioning the accidental delivery of a baby doll that speaks Mama and Papa to the older Mary Ellen's house, which sets off the delusion, and the women of the town convene a meeting to discuss how to solve the prob-

lem. Yet despite their resolution to help Mary Ellen dismantle the hallucination, her pathetic and poignant love for the doll shames them into equally shameful participation in the deception.

Mary Ellen's insanity is contagious and infectious.

Without wishing her actual harm, the women of Simpkinsville pray for her removal.

Mary Ellen represents a dangerous innocence and a destabilizing womanhood that does not comply with the pragmatism and toughness needed for actual motherhood. Taylor pinpoints the danger that Mary Ellen poses to the town. Mary Ellen has real emotions, that each person in the town sentimentally responds to, to an inappropriate object. Stuart dubs this, "the meeting point between the real and the imaginary" and Taylor explains, "[t]his is precisely what is undermining to the community, whose version of sanity and reality is circumscribed by familiar, established ideas and practices. The symbolic description of 'normal' family relations and attachments disorients everyone and produces new sets of relations and emotions" (125).

Using the syphilis metaphor, such sexual ignorance, by the end of the nineteenth century, was viewed as facilitating the diseases's infection rates and a movement to educate women. Driscoll points out how novelists such as Grand opened up a conversation that advocated for sexual knowledge in women:

In light of hereditary syphilis and the invisibility of the disease in the carrier, a healthy maternal instinct would demand male purity, would demand an "immodest" knowledge of sexual diseases—in short, would demand the ability to avert this type of disaster. One realizes that a healthy Church would demand that women be taught about venereal diseases. The death of the innocent demands the reevaluation of the entire system. By engaging conventions and revealing their internal contradictions, Grand makes demands on

the most conservative to reconfigure their concepts of marriage, maternal instinct and even Christianity, which imposes an ideal of “blissful ignorance” on its “angels” (Driscoll).

Another motif is the extreme importance placed on marriage in a small community. Mary Ellen’s whole life had been lived to marry Ned, and all of her hopes and dreams rested on the wedding day; when that did not happen, she had no other illusions or hopes to buoy her and her mind retreated into irrationality and hallucinations. Stuart takes an older cultural fear, that spinners would go crazy from a lack of sexual outlet, and gives it a late-nineteenth-century spin: if women do not have another intellectual outlet, then they will go insane. Indeed, according to Driscoll, Grand attributes the germination and development of syphilis in Edith from *Heavenly Twins* to a lack of intellectual stimulation and too much sensuality:

Edith Beale, Grand’s syphilitic, is a woman who has lost that which had once “elevate[d] her” and as a result, she has sunk into a state of animal sensuality:

‘Her [Edith’s] intellectual life, such as it was, had stopped short from the time of her intimate association with Menteith; and her spiritual nature had been starved in close contact with him; only her senses had been nourished, and these were now being rendered morbidly active by disease (280).’

Edith’s fall from grace, however, is not the result of a sinful choice, but rather a product of naïve innocence. (Driscoll).

Mary Ellen, as a symbol of sexual ignorance, innocence, and True Womanhood, is mad and irrational in the world of the 1890s. Eventually, tragicomedy strikes. The dog, Rover, takes the doll from the cradle and drags it around. When Mary Ellen sees the dog dragging the muddy

doll across the kitchen floor, she faints. This loss of consciousness occurs at her wedding day too, when it becomes clear that her lover will not show up. When she regains consciousness, the doctor realizes something will have changed, again, for Mary Ellen. The continued prayers of the women are referenced when the doctor thinks that “Accident, chance, or mayhap a kind Providence, had done for her the thing he had long wished to try but had not dared” (75).

Taylor comments on Stuart’s use of sentimentality and humor: “the women of the church feel the need collectively to explore their attitudes to [the doll] after a meeting; and . . . when a decision is taken to give the doll a proper ‘funeral’, after its despoliation by a dog in the rain, the townspeople do not know whether to laugh or cry” (Taylor 125). It is sentiment that gives this story its weight—and invites metaphorical and symbolic interpretations. Without sentiment, the story would not resonate and would lack any cultural relevancy. The instability of the townspeople mimics the instability of the reader—the coexistence of comedy and pathos forces further analysis.

When Mary Ellen unexpectedly dies during the farcical funeral service for her doll, “There is general relief . . . and an acknowledgment that what they had prayed for had been granted.’ (Taylor 125). Her death, which reads as tragic but hilarious, exemplifies the death of an earlier conception of ideal womanhood as largely symbolic, and an irrational cultural emphasis on marriage as the only state for women, and that hypocritically preached sexual ignorance.

Chapter 4: She Works Hard for the Money: “Miss McEnders,” “Blink,” and “The Frey’s Christmas”

This chapter analyzes the role of working women with maternal duties in Chopin’s “Miss McEnders” and Stuart’s “Blink” and “The Freys’ Christmas Party.” The protagonists in “Miss McEnders” and “Blink” are uniquely ill-equipped to negotiate their way within the cutthroat late-nineteenth-century economic marketplace, especially when compared to competent working-class women, like Mlle. Salambre and Mrs. Frey, who are successful in this market. Marriage and eventual motherhood offer no rescue in these stories since Chopin and Stuart explicitly illustrate how unstable marriages can be. Mrs. Frey is an impoverished widow with several children to support, Miss Evelyn in “Blink” must take care of her feeble father rather than vice versa, and Miss McEnders learns the dangers of trusting both her father and fiancé. In all three stories, it is financially disastrous and dangerous for women to rely solely on their husbands or fathers.

4.1: Lingerie and Labor: Working Women in Chopin’s “Miss McEnders”

In “Miss McEnders,” Kate Chopin tackles the fraught relationship in the late 1880s between capital and labor, coming out on the side of labor. The smug hypocrisy of the “1%” is the most obvious critique Chopin makes of the owner and worker relationship in “Miss McEnders.” Chopin herself was briefly involved with an intellectual and reform-minded club, the Wednesday Group in St. Louis. Emily Toth confirms the frustration Chopin felt with the unexamined zealotry and inefficacy of the bourgeois do-gooders in the group (Toth, *Unveiling*, 127). Allen Stein further elaborates that Chopin deemed the club “irritatingly self-congratulatory and self-important as it stressed moral uplift for the general community” (78). Indeed, the title character of “Miss McEnders” belongs to several such clubs. Georgie McEnders is twenty-five years old

and beautiful. Her daddy is rich and her fiancé is good-looking (and also rich). She has the makings of a perfect sentimental heroine. But Georgie is no Clarissa. She is a very busy young woman with a great interest in social reform and a great many appointments at committees and lectures. As the story opens, Georgie has just finished getting ready for her jam-packed day by “divest[ing] herself completely of rings, bangles, brooches--everything to suggest that she stood in friendly relations with fortune. For Georgie was going to read a paper upon ‘The Dignity of Labor’ before the Woman’s Reform Club; and if she was blessed with an abundance of wealth, she possessed a no less amount of good taste” (204). Georgie is an essentially well-meaning young woman whose innocence makes her a fool.

Georgie’s first appointment of the day is with Mademoiselle Salambre, who has recently acquired the business of making bespoke lingerie for Georgie’s wedding trousseau. Georgie wants to visit the modiste out of a seemingly benevolent desire to “know the people who worked for her, as far as she could” (204). This whimsy is quickly shown to be intrusive and judgmental, rather than altruistic and liberal: Georgie appears unannounced in Mlle. Salambre’s room, interrupts her work, and discovers that the apparent “Mademoiselle” is the mother of a young girl. Miss McEnders is morally outraged and withdraws all her work from Mlle. Salambre. However, Mlle. Salambre returns the surprise visit, and defines Georgie’s much older and corpulent fiance as a rake and a libertine, a Gilded Age Lovelace. She also exposes the truth of Mr. McEnders’s fortune, which was made in the Whiskey Ring Scandal of the 1870s. Not only is Georgie’s hypocrisy exposed, but also her precarious financial position. If the marriage with Holt goes forth, he is likely to leave her a widow with young children to support. Moreover, the sexually promiscuous Holt may very well have contracted syphilis or another infection from his sexual

liaisons, which would not only endanger Georgie's health but her future children's as well (indeed, congenital syphilis is central in Chopin's short story "Mrs. Mobry's Reason"). Georgie's stable position of moral certitude at the beginning of the tale is also shaken by its end. Her annoying sanctimoniousness rests upon the concept of *noblesse oblige*. She has mistakenly grown up to believe that looking like a gentleman and having enough money to act like one equates with adhering to a code of chivalry. When she discovers that her father has acted neither nobly nor honorably, and that her wealth does not entitle her to any sort of moral superiority, she suffers the beginnings of an existential crisis. As Chopin writes, she "shrank within herself" (211).

Georgie is literally and symbolically near-sighted, but her visit with Mlle. Salambre improves her vision on both counts: as she approached Salambre's boarding house "she held a severely simple lorgnon up to her short-sighted blue eyes" (205). The Whiskey Ring scandal was linked with the corrupt Grant administration. For years, federal agents and local businessmen withheld tax money on domestic whiskey. The participants likely made hundreds of thousands of dollars that should have gone to the cash-strapped government, still recovering from the Civil War. The Whiskey Ring was the Enron of its time. Media outlets nationwide reported on the intricacies of the trial. On January 22, 1876, The New York Times ran a story on the prosecution's testimony against William McKee, the man Emily Toth and others have proven to be the real life model for Mr. McEnders. The witnesses brought forth by the prosecution not only clearly implicate McKee in the crimes but also betray him as cowardly and foolish. Georgie McEnders must have been near-sighted indeed to have remained ignorant of her father's key role in the biggest financial scandal in St. Louis history. Most of the principal players in the Whiskey Ring escaped justice, largely due to the intervention of President Grant. McKee himself was released from in-

carceration via a pardon from Grant in November 1876, after serving a scant six months. Sixteen years later, when Chopin knew his daughter Ellen (a social reformer like Georgie), McKee's fortune remained intact. Likewise, the fictional McEnders has emerged materially unscathed from the scandal.

In contrast, Mlle. Salambre lives in a shabby boarding house in a rough part of town. Her face is careworn: "there were lines about her . . . face that denoted close acquaintance with struggles, hardships and all manner of unkind experiences" (205). She labors as a cog in the commercial enterprise of lingerie, assigned to clients like Georgie by Push and Prodem, a firm specializing in wedding trousseau which is not just a funny name for a lingerie company but also, as Pamela Knights has commented, an allusion to the aggressive tactics of St. Louis businessmen (378). Georgie does not even need to fire Mlle. Salambre personally. She outsources the uncomfortable task to the firm. However, Salambre will not be pushed or prodded. After denuding the superficiality of Horace McEnders and Meredith Holt, Mlle. Salambre pops another ideological bubble for Miss Georgie: she tells her that wealth is not distributed to those who deserve it most. Salambre irons out Georgie's misguided philosophies of life and economy. Indeed, she even entices Georgie to go out into the street to solicit information from passerby about how her father acquired his wealth. Significantly, when Georgie asks questions of men in the street about her own home, it is only the working-class ones who tell her the truth. The gentleman she accosts reproaches her for asking an "indiscreet question". Since Mr. McEnders's corrupt wealth finances Georgie's expensive trousseau, Georgie discovers that her fancy underwear has been aired publicly for years. Georgie suddenly feels exposed and mortified: "Her heart was beating

violently now, and her cheeks were flaming. So everybody knew it; even to the street gamins!” (211).

At the beginning of the story, Georgie’s youth and naïveté rationalize her rigidly moralistic behavior. However, by the tale’s close, the seamstress of Georgie McEnders’s custom wedding lingerie has schooled her and the tale ends with Georgie “sinking into a chair and [weeping] bitterly” (211). Her ignorance has been replaced by despair. This despair must lead to one of two actions: acquiescence or rebellion. Even her surname highlights this choice: McEnders could symbolize the existential end of Georgie. Or it could mean the end, finally, of her short-sightedness and hypocrisy.

As Mary Papke has written, “Chopin’s most complex stories take up . . . women who experience some sort of personal and social awakening” (51). In “Miss McEnders,” Chopin describes a young woman on the threshold of personal and social change. Georgie is going to have to choose: live immorally with her father and then Holt, or morally as an independent woman herself; she can be impoverished but honest like Mlle. Salambre, or a wealthy hypocrite like her father. The impetuous rage with which Georgie “cast[s] the [white flowers]” that Holt has sent to her while she was in the street learning about her father’s ill-begotten fortune into the fireplace indicates that she may actually possess the gumption that will be required to make it on her own. On the other hand, after she throws the flowers, she sinks into the chair. She may just settle and wither into depression and unhappiness.

Through Mlle. Salambre, Chopin gives the voice of moral authority to labor, placing the worker on the side of right in the labor vs. capital debate of the late nineteenth century. Through the character of Horace McEnders, she also denounces the literary marketplace of the 1890s. Mr.

McEnders's real life counterpart, William McKee, was not only a tax evader and embezzler, he was also the editor of a St. Louis newspaper, the *Globe-Democrat*. His daughter, Ellen, was not just a goody-goody social reformer, she was also a publisher (Schwab 113). Chopin wrote the story in 1892--around the time she quit the socially progressive Wednesday Club in exasperation (Stein 78), but it was not published until 1897 in the *St. Louis Criterion*, under the pen name La Tour. Oddly, as Emily Toth has pointed out, the owner of the *Criterion* was Ellen McKee (Toth, *Unveiling*, 199). McKee and Chopin were antipodes, as are Georgie and Mlle. Salambre: Miss McKee was a moralizing advocate of social reform, Chopin was a committed individualist with a streak of the libertine, Miss McKee was a financier of literary venues, Chopin was a contributor. McKee: owner, Chopin: artisan. McKee: capital. Chopin: labor.

Although she satirizes media portrayals of the New Woman in "Miss McEnders", Chopin shows the relevance of labor rights for all women. Since the mid-century successes of woman-authored sentimental fiction had created a publishing environment that (while not exactly welcoming) was not outright hostile, many literate women in need of employment sought their daily bread in the literary marketplace.

If Georgie chooses rebellion over acquiescence--if she chooses to continue to throw the flowers into the ashcan rather than sink into the sumptuous chair-- she must leave her father's home, break the engagement with Holt, and support herself financially. Indeed, even if she decides still to marry Holt, she may eventually need to support herself. Mlle. Salambre is infinitely more qualified than Georgie to maintain herself and her child financially through labor. The only marketable skill Georgie possesses in this narrative is writing. It would be a logical step for Georgie to attempt a literary career. Chopin grew up reading sentimental fiction from the mid-

nineteenth century. These works introduced the idea that writing was a tenable way for a woman to earn a living. However, the American fiction market in the 1890s became less receptive to women writers. Competition increased and a backlash against rising numbers of women workers limited opportunities. Nonetheless, Chopin owed much to the sorority of extraordinarily popular mid-century domestic writers. However, as Heather Kirk Thomas points out, Chopin cruelly caricatured commercially rather than artistically-motivated female writers in some of her fiction. The title characters of “Miss Witherwell’s Mistake” and “Elizabeth Stock’s One Story,” as well as *The Awakening’s* Miss Mayblunt are, like Georgie McEnders, silly, short-sighted, and dull. As Thomas articulates: “Chopin . . . satirizes women writers in ways that strongly imply she wished to dissociate herself from the traditional female litterateur”(5). By creating the narrative possibility that the jejune Georgie may eventually embark on a literary career, Chopin disdains the literary marketplace of the 1890s.

Chopin rebukes the bourgeoisie for smug hypocrisy. She criticizes the blatant corruption of President Grant’s Republican administration during Reconstruction. She ridicules the New Woman, with her clubs, and her speeches, and her causes. She satirizes women writers. But Is that all? Does this story do anything else than poke fun? I think it does. Through Mlle. Salambre, Chopin deftly threads domestic labor into the needle of industrial labor. Mlle. Salambre is labor attacking the product of capital, Georgie. She refuses to be dismissed by a corporate intermediary. She agitates the status quo. She threatens to strike by not finishing Georgie’s trousseau. She upends Georgie’s bourgeois presumptions. She may not be refined, but she is honest. Capital, on the other hand, in the personages of Holt and Mr. McEnders is dishonest, exploitative, and corrupt. Georgie is the offspring of cutthroat postbellum laissez-fair economic policies. She is a pro-

to-Thorstein Veblen creature borne from conspicuous consumption, but trapped in the mid-century ideology of True Womanhood. Additionally, since the only profession the story implies Georgie would be fit for is writing, Chopin also rebukes the literary marketplace of the 1890s. If there is a heroine in this story it would have to be Mlle. Salambre, a single mother with the strength of character, determination, and skills to make it on her own in an economy reliant upon but resistant to women's contributions. The working class Mlle. Salambre is a character after Chopin's own heart.

4.2: The Faithful Retainer as Muse, Stuart's "Blink"

The downfall of Miss McEnders is a story that Chopin never wrote, but Ruth Stuart takes up a Southern belle's plight in the postbellum economy in her 1893 short story "Blink." In "Blink," a young woman moves to New Orleans to seek work after the family plantation is sold due to debt from the fluctuations of the cotton market. The fictional Evelyn Bruce represents a generation of elite white women whose circumstances forced them to adapt to a world that was quite different from the one they had been raised to inhabit. Indeed, as Jane Turner Censer affirms in *Reconstructing White Southern Womanhood*:

Notions of proper behavior and the characteristics of the ideal woman were in flux after the war. Some southern white women in the 1870s and 1880s forged identities that challenged the notion of the 'southern belle,' the version of femininity that stressed power through 'fascination' and romantic appeal (9).

"Blink" relies, like much of Stuart's fiction, on sentimental tropes. Evelyn exhibits genteel bravery when she confronts the hard truths that the family plantation must be sold and that she must support what is left of her family. While in Chopin's "Miss McEnders" the single work-

ing mother is a secondary character, the maternity in “Blink” is symbolic. The maternity that Evelyn adopts signifies the change from a patriarchal plantation-based economy to a matriarchal urban model, enforces her character’s role as an ideal sentimental heroine, and embodies the changed generational expectations and responsibilities of affluent Southern white women coming of age in the decades following the Civil War.

The weight of the plantation is on the young protagonist’s shoulders. Her father has become child-like in his dotage, and the love she feels for him is maternal rather than filial. She also has responsibility for their former slave, Mammy (who, disturbingly, is called by no other name in the story). The maternal role that Evelyn will play in the story is established very quickly and clearly in the opening scene. It is Christmas Eve, and Evelyn sits in an over-sized arm-chair in front of a dying fire, a “withered old black woman . . . on the rug at her feet” (163). Evelyn is explaining to the woman that her father, Mr. Bruce, finally sold the over-mortgaged plantation to a Mr. Jacobs. Hemmed in by the conventions of her class and lady-like expectations for her race and gender, Evelyn cannot state the truth about Mr. Jacobs. But Mammy can. She refers to him as ‘Mr. Citified’ and lambasts him for being an opportunistic commission merchant, who was not equipped to run the plantation traditionally. Indeed, many over-mortgaged plantations “fell to the control of their creditors, including commission merchants, cotton factors, and even country storekeepers, who created novel relationships with laborers” (Berlin vii). The records show, and Stuart tells us, that this transfer occurred frequently. The reader learns of Evelyn’s father:

Since the beginning of the war Colonel Bruce’s history had been the oft-told tale of loss and disaster, and at the opening of each year since, there had been a flaring up of hope

and expenditure, then a long summer of wavering promise, followed by an inevitable winter of disappointment.

The old colonel was, both by inheritance and the habit of many successful years, a man of great affairs, and when the crash came he was too old to change. When he bought, he bought heavily. He planted for large results (Stuart, “Blink”, 166).

Significantly, Stuart clarifies that Mr. Bruce is not flexible and adaptable to the demands of the new economy. Successful planters had to change to meet the demands of the marketplace. Mr. Jacobs, for example, questioned Mammy—the font of practical knowledge as he sagely realized—about the health and output of the pecan trees, even though the bulk of the plantation’s crops must surely have been cotton or tobacco. Capitalism demands flexibility and operates on units, not whole measures. A market-based economy rewards products as they are needed: planting acres of cotton for a market that may fall out the next year is disastrous. The plantation is not self-sustaining. Increasingly, her father exhibits symptoms of senility—making one question who negotiated the deal with Mr. Jacobs, and, if the father, about the justness and parity of the transaction.

In the second scene, after Stuart establishes Evelyn as both mother and patriarch in the armchair, dictating policy to her dependent as effectively as the most authoritarian pater familias but as gently and graciously as the greatest of sentimental mid-century mothers, to her “child” Mammy, Evelyn enters her father’s room, where he “slept as peacefully as a babe” to say good night: “Falling upon her knees at his side, she engaged for a moment in a silent prayer, consecrating herself in love to the life which lay before her, and as she rose she kissed his forehead gently, and passed to her own room” (Stuart, “Blink” 166). In this scene, Stuart establishes Evelyn as

both the dutiful daughter, kneeling at her father's side in prayer, and a watchful, devoted mother pledging to care for a helpless being. Not only does this scene establish Evelyn's responsibility as the sole living member of her family, but it symbolizes the immense changes in southern family structures after the Civil War.

As female aspirations and self-definitions were changing in the wake of the Civil War, elite white women put such concepts to work in their households and families. These households were in flux, for the war had rearranged combinations of those living together. The loss of fathers, brothers, husbands, suitors, and friends created temporary alterations, some of which became permanent. . . . Even southern women from privileged families found the postwar household filled with different responsibilities and challenges. Like wealthy northern households, antebellum southern establishments had included servants along with the nuclear family, but most southern servants were enslaved African Americans. Emancipation allowed these freed people to leave the white household and, as a result, new relationships arose between white mistresses and their servants. . . . In the wake of the demise of 'domestic slavery,' southern white women would themselves become more adept but also more 'domesticated.' (Censer 51)

In contrast to Mr. Bruce's inability to change, Mammy and Evelyn adapt to the new economy and family structures. Evelyn decides to move the family to a small house in New Orleans. This move reflects a national trend in the decades after the Civil War: "[t]he growth of towns and cities and a new urban culture" (Berlin vi). The demise of the plantation contributes greatly to the increasing importance of cities in the southern and national economy. Evelyn, a

reluctant new woman (even her name, with its root in Eve, symbolizes her role as a woman of the new South), realizes the untenability of her family traditions. Her father's reduced financial circumstances and inability to cope with the postbellum changes to society and economy contribute to his loss of reason. Indeed, many parents who had anticipated raising their daughters in privilege lamented the life of labor that replaced the hitherto life of leisure:

Peter Evans Smith poignantly expressed this feeling in a long, sad letter that he wrote his eldest daughter, Lena, on her twenty-first birthday . . . Both he and his wife belonged to North Carolina's wealthiest planter families . . . But the war was followed by the 'dreadful crash and loss of property. I lost all . . . ' He ruefully summed up his state in 1875: 'I am not able to give you 10 cents, instead of \$10,000, I could weep tears of blood if it would avail anything.' (Censer 19).

The older generation may indeed regret the lives their children will lead after the war, but in "Blink," Stuart indulges no nostalgia of the antebellum world. Mammy's attachments to the plantation are all food-based—she rues leaving the implements she knows can sustain them in an uncertain economy. Indeed, she is right—there was a garden in their new abode in New Orleans and an important element of home economy perished when Evelyn insisted they leave their gardening tools and chickens on the plantation. Nonetheless, while the reader learns that Evelyn's past involves death and loss—of her mother, of her brothers, of her childhood home, Mammy's past also involves tragedy—the reader only learns bare outlines of Mammy's life. Stuart relates that she nursed Evelyn and her own daughter simultaneously. She also divulges that Mammy's infant did not thrive, although Stuart does not articulate what exactly happened to Mammy's daughter. The reader has to assume Mammy's child died in childhood or was sold. Likewise, the

father of Mammy's children is not identified. Mammy is not a fully realized character in this story; rather her role exemplifies the changing relationships between white and black women in the postbellum years referred to by Censer. Indeed, although Evelyn is first introduced as the mother figure, soon after leaving the plantation, Mammy adopts "the Mammy cliché as supreme mother-figure" (Schmidt 82). This transformation can be read symbolically: when Mammy and Evelyn reach New Orleans, Mammy proves to hold more economic power, at least initially, and the women's roles switch. Mammy becomes the mother figure, providing economically for Evelyn and Mr. Bruce, offering advice and emotional as well as financial support. On two occasions, Mammy even threatens to "whip" Evelyn for not writing. Literally, this threat emphasizes Mammy's enactment of motherly discipline for Evelyn but Stuart's tacit condoning of black-on-white punishment and violence is notable, particularly since it is a recurrent element in her short fiction.

Perhaps this switch in roles showcases Stuart's attempt to change the cultural concept of the plantation as a monarchical system of governance. In early America, women's inclusion in political life was a key aspect of John Locke's argument against the divine right of kings: "If familial power is shared with women and limited by mutual responsibilities, the nature of royal authority must also be shared and limited. What Locke accomplished in the First Treatise was the integration of women into social theory" (Kerber 189). Just as the eighteenth-century ideal of the Republican Mother charged mothers with the politically essential duty of educating the future citizens for the republic, Stuart shows how the patriarchal plantation tradition has been transferred to, and significantly changed by, young white women. "Blink" is a sentimental tale that upends traditional Southern domestic relationships that were based not only a separate spheres

ideology of gender but also of race. In many ways, economic factors caused these radical revisions. Ira Berlin details the postbellum upheaval of plantation-based labor systems:

New forms of corporate organization also appeared, transforming the plantation from a family proprietorship into a variant of modern corporate capitalism. . . . These transformations tended to dissolve the personal or paternal bonds between planters and workers, completing the alienation of most agricultural laborers from communal attachments to local plantations. They also altered relations within the plantation household, as women—of both the owning class and the laboring class—took new roles within the larger community. The transformation of femininity and masculinity set in motion conflicts, some of which aimed for still greater change, others of which called for a restoration of the old ideal. The reordering of gender roles deeply affected race relations (vii).

Male characters are only alluded to in the story, never actually introduced or developed: the descriptions of Mr. Bruce reveal a passive, senile character who sleeps most of the time; the man who purchased the Bruce plantation exists only in second-hand descriptions by Mammy and Evelyn; and the New York publishers of Evelyn's fiction remain an elusive presence. Yet even though men rarely actually appear in the story, their authority informs the entire structure: Mr. Bruce's inability to adapt to the changing economy led to disastrous business decisions culminating in the sale of the plantation, and the New York publishers are in charge of accepting or rejecting Evelyn's fiction which is her primary plan for financial survival. The only actual embodiment of masculinity is the titular character, Blink, an ironic symbol of hidden but potent male authority. Blink is a rooster who cannot crow. Mammy steals him from the plantation in her bosom and he becomes her special pet.

Ostensibly, Blink's name derived from the way he peeped out at Mammy from his newly-hatched egg. Symbolically, "blink" serves as a keyword for the narrative. To blink implies involuntary change: one blinks upon awaking from a deep sleep, from surprise, or to indicate disbelief. Blinking also indicates transience, suddenness, and the unexpected. The characters in "Blink" who are successful are able to adapt to change. They can adjust to the blinks of life. It is possible that Stuart also obliquely references Corinthians 15, which recounts the resurrection of Jesus. A line from Corinthians reads, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again incorruptible: and we shall be changed (Corinthians 15:52)." In some translations and versions, "twinkling" has been translated as "blink." Indeed the theme of Easter recurs throughout the story, and its transformation and rebirth, of human sacrifice and cruelty giving way to transcendence. However, Corinthians may also offer a reading of Stuart's seemingly contradictory stance on slavery, emancipation, and African Americans. Clearly, Evelyn is written to be superior to Mammy, yet Mammy is in many ways a more effective character and models unbelievable devotion to the Bruce family. The idea may be that she is a servant to the Bruce family as she is a servant to Christ, which offers a disturbingly familiar defense of slavery. However, Evelyn becomes, through strife, a servant in some ways herself, guided by Mammy. In many ways, Mammy, Evelyn, and Mr. Bruce model groups that would have had division in the 1890s but are sympathetically united in this story through Stuart's use of the sentimental literary tradition. Mr. Bruce represents the antebellum patriarchal authority of slave owners and planters. But his power has been eroded, he is a diminished Mr. Rochester at the mercy of the women in his life in this story. Evelyn represents the young women who came of age during Reconstruction. These women were born into a society

that changed drastically in their lifetimes. They were raised to become women of leisure, and the arts they learned were decorative. Their parents had very different views of how they should be trained for success in life. Mammy represents someone who was also born into a very different life than the one she ended up with: born into slavery and emancipated as an older woman, Mammy's experiences as a slave and a worker, as a woman who relied on her ingenuity, work ethic, and flexible thinking to survive, rather than someone who clung to the way things should have or could have been (as Mr. Bruce did), prepared her extremely well for the new life she lives in New Orleans. Comparing the work they had to do to slaves' work was a common enough complaint of formerly privileged white women after the war (Censer 76). But Stuart elevates this work. Evelyn thrives because she adapts to this new way of living, and she listens to Mammy's advice. She becomes a likable character because she does not grumble about her work; rather she rolls up her sleeves and participates. It is interesting that this tale of an impoverished Southern belle mimics the rags-to-riches tales popular during the 1890s. But Evelyn Bruce's inspiration and model for survival is Mammy. However, Stuart's relationship with slavery and the North is complicated. Readers may find some rationalizations by picking up textual clues and finding Biblical and classical literary connections that would have resonated with Stuart.

For example, the city-state Corinth had a tumultuous history with Rome, first being razed for rejecting Roman authority; after the Achean war all the men were killed and the women and children sold into slavery, then during Caesar's time the region was reestablished as a Roman colony (Fitzmyer 24). This metaphor, although perhaps a bit tangential, offers a way to read this story. The South has become a symbolic colony of the North, all the young men are killed off, and the women, although free, live as slaves. Yet, in this story, the women live equally as slaves.

The role of Paul as an apostle, which he declares in Corinthians, is that of a spreader of the gospel: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its meaning” (qtd. in Fitzmyer 137). In the story, Evelyn struggles with an overly ornate writing style, a decorative flourish that she has been taught. It is Mammy who suggests that she “spread the gospel” and write the truth, as she sees it, in plain language. The eloquence of Evelyn’s former writing style disguised its lack of substance, and implicitly had little relevance to her changed life. It was a vestige of the old world that no longer existed. Likewise, the protagonist’s surname, Bruce, conjures Robert of Bruce, the legendary King of Scotland who eventually wrested autonomy from the British, in the battle of Brannockburn (Britannia). In this post-Reconstruction novel, perhaps Stuart is suggesting that resurrection will arrive to those who accept their current state and evolve with the transformations, that, as Paul clearly indicates in Corinthians, Christ is not for a select few but for all. However, she may also be suggesting that slavery echoed Christian devotion, that the institution of slavery functioned as a microcosm of Christian faith, and that the colonizer, the North, brought division. The Bruce reference indicates a preference for independence and, thus, the Confederacy. These conflicting viewpoints reconcile somewhat if Evelyn can be read as the apostle spreading the gospel of unity, whether that means advocating for the antebellum life of oppression or the postbellum freedom for all.

Evelyn, as Censer implies, approaches her new role with its increased responsibilities, authority, and additional domestic chores cheerfully and confidently. She does not realize, however, the difficulties of navigating the new urban labor market. Evelyn is a daughter of privilege despite her recent poverty. She lost her brothers in the war and her mother died shortly after, so

although she has experienced emotional trauma, she has not known want or hunger. Mammy's status as a former slave implies that she has more practical first-hand experience of deprivation and disappointment. Readers never learn what will happen to the other laborers on the large plantation, assumedly former slaves and now low-paid wage workers like Mammy, and also with whom Mammy must have a community. Her anxiety about the workers who remain on the plantation as well as her skepticism about the career opportunities awaiting the optimistic Evelyn in New Orleans manifest in her preoccupation with the eggs that a favorite hen has recently laid. Mammy also expresses shock and concern about not bringing gardening implements with them since, as Evelyn wrongly explains, there won't be a garden. She worries about food, about how they will sustain themselves, while Evelyn trusts in her natural talents and the fortune that has favored her since birth. Even the plantation, being sold intact, compares well to the plight of other former planters: "The war itself left many estates in ruins, their tools and implements wrecked, animals decimated, fields in ruins, and buildings devastated" (Berlin v). In fact, Mammy ends up stealing a recently hatched chick and secreting it away in her dress on the stagecoach to New Orleans. The chick, who turns out to be a rooster, becomes the titular character, "Blink." He symbolizes the marriage between plantation life and urban life, the decreased power of the patriarchy, and, when he finally, belatedly, learns to crow at the end of the narrative, he symbolizes the voice that both Evelyn and Mammy find in New Orleans, only through eschewing traditional gender, class, and racial relations.

Although written comically, Mammy's advice is usually sound and borne of practical knowledge. Her actions reveal inner strength and resourcefulness. The fear she admits to Evelyn about the poisonous gas that flows through New Orleans reveals, literally, the widespread suspi-

cion of gaslight but also symbolizes other, less easily assuaged fears about a move to this metropolis, such as the recurring epidemics of yellow fever and the uptick of violence against African Americans in economically uncertain times. Historian Edward Blum recounts that “a devastating yellow fever outbreak in 1878 ravaged much of the South . . . [d]uring the summer and fall the pestilence claimed over 20,000 lives and infected roughly 120,000 people” (792). Northern newspapers reported on the epidemic as it spread outward from New Orleans, and Blum credits an outpouring of sympathy from the North with steps towards white national reconciliation--the gruesome peculiarities of the plague may also help account for the interest in southern literature about New Orleans:

“The yellow fever outbreak of 1878 . . . offered a traumatic national moment during which thousands of northerners and southerners could reconcile. There had been yellow fever outbreaks before, but none were as devastating as the one that began in New Orleans in late May, likely with the arrival of a sailor infected in Havana. While the disease spread slowly in and around New Orleans during June, the number of victims began to multiply in late July” (Blum 797).

Indeed, the gruesomeness of yellow fever, which “[i]n severe cases [turned] skin . . . yellow as the disease incapacitated the liver, kidneys, and heart” and usually caused death within two weeks likely contributed both to its role in the cultural fear and fascination it elicited. Moreover, its nexus in New Orleans, probably due to that city’s tradition of keeping drinking water in open vats and its distinction as an international trading hub (Blum 792-797), herald empirical evidence of danger to Mammy.

Perhaps even more troubling to this character, however, would have been the increase in racial violence in the post-Reconstruction South.

In the 1933 classic *The Tragedy of Lynching*, Arthur Raper presents graphic evidence apparently linking the incidence of lethal mob violence against southern blacks to variation in the value of southern cotton crops. Raper concludes periods of relative prosperity bring reductions in lynching and periods of depression cause an increase (Beck and Tolnay 526).

The beginning of "Blink" details the fluctuations in fortune Mr. Bruce experienced due to the market-based commodity economy. The final blow to his fortune which caused him to consent to the sale of his plantation likely coincides with another low in the cotton market. The Bruce family was certainly not alone in this loss:

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were years of shrinking fortunes for many southern rural whites. The rate of white farm tenancy increased throughout the period (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975), and black and white labor was thrown into direct competition on a significant scale for the first time (Jaynes 1986). This was an undesirable situation for marginal whites during the best of times; when the cotton economy was slack it was virtually intolerable. Poor whites, suffering from reduced incomes, perceived neighboring blacks to be competitors for a shrunken economic "pie," as well as a challenge to their superior social station that was "guaranteed" by the caste system (Beck and Tolnay 527).

Moving away from the known society of the rural plantation to join the groups of other displaced persons seeking employment in southern cities creates a situation in which Mammy will be competing with other blacks and also with whites for low-level jobs. Although it is un-

likely that the patterns of increased violence and its linkage to depressed agricultural markets was acknowledged at the time, the informal delivery of news and communications that marks any oppressed group's social networks is very likely to have delivered to Mammy that it was not safe to be black and seeking employment in an unknown and strange city:

Sour market prices threatened the life chances of many southern whites, especially those on the margins of society. Economic distress also raised the possibility of a coalition between black and white labor, which threatened the social, economic and political advantages held by the white elite. The combination of these forces, which cut across class lines, generated aggressive and hostile behavior directed at the most vulnerable and powerless targets- southern blacks. The most radical form of this aggression was lethal mob violence, lynching (Beck and Tolnay 533).

The setting of "Blink" is probably sometime soon after Reconstruction, around 1880. The story was published, however, in 1893. Racial tolerance and civil rights for African Americans deteriorated in the 1880s and 1890s. By the time Stuart wrote this story, Jim Crow laws were routine throughout the South and progress towards racial integration had halted or reversed. As modern readers it is easy to feel offended by Stuart's caricatured, one-dimensional portrayal of Mammy as the quintessential loyal servant whose ties to her white mistress spring from love and devotion, not forced servitude and economic necessity. Indeed, others have convincingly argued this view: Helen Taylor Anne Goodwyn Jones's *Tomorrow is Another Day* (1981); Louise Westling's *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens* (1985); and Katherine Seidel's *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (1985) all discuss these issues in depth. However, read as a text published in 1893 for a popular audience, Stuart's insistence on the working, egalitarian relationship between

Evelyn and Mammy can be interpreted differently. Rather than emphasizing Evelyn's superiority, which Stuart does through language, the actual plot of the story depicts Mammy as the more successful and admirable character. At no point does Evelyn chafe against helping Mammy with her work. Although Reconstruction-era racial harmony has very likely been overestimated, a commonly held view is that racial relations worsened after Reconstruction:

Historians have written extensively on race relations in America after the Civil War.

Much of the writing has been influenced in one way or another by the publication in 1955 of C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. This brief collection of history lectures was largely addressed to the national debate then raging over racial segregation in the South. 'The national discussion over the questions of how deeply rooted, how in-eradicable, and how amenable to change the segregation practices really are,' Woodward asserted, 'is being conducted against a background of faulty or inadequate historical information.'

The career of 'Jim Crow' segregation was strange, he argued, because it was not a continuous feature of the South since the end of the Civil War, as was then commonly assumed. Rather, it appeared in full force only at the turn of the century when the first state Jim Crow laws appeared in the South. In the years before that, during the 'Reconstruction' and 'Redemption' periods (roughly 1865 to 1890), white and black people interacted with a certain amount of freedom and equality. (*The Persistent Career of Jim Crow*).

Whether or not one accepts the view that enforced policies of exclusion and segregation were a hallmark of the closing decades of the nineteenth century rather than the entire postbellum period, "[t]he broad historical sequence is uncontested: the peak of black lynchings in the

early 1890s coincided with a softening demand for southern cotton, the rise of populism and agrarian protest, and the birth of radical racism (Gaither 1977; Hahn 1983; Shapiro 1988; White 1969; Williamson 1984; Wright 1986)” (Beck and Tolnay 528). The deterioration of interactions between whites and blacks, not just in the South but nationwide, and the increase in economic and labor competition that fomented white on black violence in the 1880s and 1890s allows a more nuanced and political reading of Stuart’s nostalgic portrayal of the relationship between Mammy and Evelyn. The women work together to form a successful household one that even, at the very end of the story, creates a successful male character—Blink, the cock, learns to crow after Evelyn’s story wins the \$500 prize. These women working together save the patriarchy. Racial alliances and female labor empower the South, rather than threaten it.

Women wanted and expected a greater influence in the household. While they read about and heard abundant testimony to their high moral status, their actual power had its limits in both moral and mundane matters. In 1868, Prudence Person discoursed in a school essay on a woman’s right during wartime to be a ‘ministering angel’ and her right to ‘brighten the fireside.’ Prudence was advocating a form of separate spheres, in which the ‘provinces’ of men and women were ‘distinct.’ Most of all, she asserted, ‘The Right of Woman is to elevate man’s moral nature to be to him in the language of [Alexander] Pope ‘God’s last best gift.’” Perhaps prompted by the suicides, financial failures, and heavy drinking of the men around them, these young women believed they needed to uplift the male sex rather than mankind in its more generic sense (Censer 84).

These factors make it more impressive—and Stuart would have known these cultural facts, as would her audience, very likely—that Mammy walks these unfamiliar streets in pursuit

of work, successfully, in fact. She is not only traversing a city in which unknown diseases threaten her (newcomers to the city were more likely to succumb to yellow fever) but she places herself in direct competition with poor whites—a dangerous venture in the post-Reconstruction South. In fact, also, it is Mammy who supports the family when they first arrive in New Orleans and Evelyn cannot find work. Furthermore, it is Mammy whose criticisms of her fiction prompt publishable revisions. Mammy articulates realist mores: colloquial language, realistic stories and settings. Mammy's value on the market is higher than Evelyn's and Mr. Bruce's. Ultimately, Mammy's sage advice about making the story more realistic improves the narrative to the point where it wins a \$500 prize that redeems the family's fortune and launches Evelyn's successful writing career.

It is Evelyn who takes the most advantage of the social clubs and lectures that are offered by women like the real Grace Dodge and the fictional Miss McEnders. When she envisions a life for herself in New Orleans, she imagines: "She would first accept one of the tempting situations offered in the daily papers, improving her leisure by attending lectures, studying, observing, cultivating herself in every possible way, and after a time she would try her hand again at writing" (162). Evelyn plans to construct an education for herself based on the free lectures available for working women and hopes to find employment via the local paper. However, when she arrives in New Orleans she finds the reality different than advertised. After three months in New Orleans, to which Mammy adjusted quickly, Evelyn "had found no employment. Advertised positions had proven unsuitable or inaccessible, and indeed, sometimes the most inviting but delusions and snares" (170). Although she sewed decorative items and decorated "palmetto fans and painted easter eggs" which Mammy sold at the market and from door-to-door, the in-

come generated by her upper-class training in ornamental arts was negligible. Tellingly, while Evelyn busies herself seeking work, and manages to stay afloat only through the labors of Mammy, her ailing and dependent father, although content and comfortable, asks repeatedly for her mother. Evelyn is the substitute parent and an orphan at once. Her father's physical comforts have been taken care of, but his complaints voice maternal neglect. Likewise, Evelyn, in her enforced leisure, writes regional sketches of the unique characters and locales she encounters in her wandering. Implicitly, she writes for a Northern audience. She longs for advice, orphaned in the city and in a landscape she cannot navigate, but even if she were alive, one doubts that Evelyn's mother would have been much practical help in this changed economic and cultural world. A stand-in for Evelyn's mother is the Creole woman, an old friend of her mother's, in fact, who finds them the house to let in New Orleans. Although Madame Le Duc is kind and helpful, she cannot mentor Evelyn in any meaningful way: “

Madame Le Due seemed to have forgotten nothing that their comfort required, and in many ways that the Creole gentlewoman understands so well, she was affectionately and unobtrusively kind. And yet, in the life Evelyn was seeking to enter, Madame could give her no aid. About all these new ideas of women — ladies — going out as bread-winners, Madame knew nothing. For twenty years she had gone only to the cathedral, the French Market, the cemetery, and the Chapel of St. Roche. As to all this unconventional American city above Canal Street, it was there and spreading (like the measles and other evils) ; everybody said so ; even her paper, *Isabelle*, referred to it in French — resentfully. She believed in it historically; but for herself, she "never travelled," excepting, as she quaintly put it, in her "acquaintances" — the French streets with which she was familiar (168-69).

In addition to advice, Evelyn also sought criticism of her writing. She thus began reading her stories to Mammy. In Stuart's depictions of African Americans, modern readers can reach their limit of tolerance. However, one can read a sub-text into what Mammy says, although whether Stuart intended such remains doubtful. Just as it has been argued that Twain intended Jim's character to be more nuanced than he seems initially, and that this intention may not have been conscious, that Twain himself, in his telling of Jim, betrays his conflicted racial attitudes. I would rather argue that Stuart's attitudes of benevolent condescension are not conflicted, since they remain fairly consistent throughout her work, nor would I argue that her racial depictions do not mar the reading experience for modern readers. Rather, I would argue that Stuart was a writer deeply engaged in the contemporary feminist and popular literary issues of her time, and that reading her work embodies liberal white, progressive, and middle-class attitudes in the 1890s in a way that Chopin's work does not. Chopin, self-consciously an artist rather than a working writer, works with universal themes in contemporary settings. Stuart's canvas was contemporary issues in contemporary settings. The difference is marked and emblematic of a central split between high and low brow literature that existed throughout the nineteenth century and, indeed, exists today. In a later chapter, I will discuss in more detail the fiction marketplace of the 1890s and how each woman's position in it illustrates these changes. Evelyn herself reads between the lines of Mammy's criticism. Indeed, there is evidence that Mammy, a canny and successful woman in an age that denigrated her success, speaks to Evelyn purposefully. After Evelyn changed the language in a story to use simple words that most could understand, based on Mammy's incomprehension of the story, they have the following critical exchange.

And now for her own improvement she rewrote the "story of big words" in the simplest English she could command, bidding mammy tell her if there was one word she could not understand. In the transition the spirit of the story was necessarily changed, but the exercise was good. Mammy understood every word.

"But, baby," she protested, with a troubled face, " look like *hit don't stan' no mo'*; all its granjer done gone. You better fix it up des like it was befo', honey. Hit 'mines me o' some o' deze heah fine folks what walks de streets. You know *folks what 'ain't got nothin else, dee des nachelly 'bleege ter put on finery.*"

How clever mammy was ! How wholesome the unconscious satire of her criticism ! This story, shorn of its grandeur, could not stand indeed. It was weak and affected.

" You dear old mammy," exclaimed Evelyn, " you don't know how you are helping me." (172-173).

Soon after this exchange, Evelyn writes a new story, based on their experience of moving to New Orleans. Since it is not something most will have read, it is worthwhile to include the passage:

It was the story of their own lives, dating from the sale of the plantation. The names, of course, were changed, excepting Blink's, and, indeed, until he appeared upon the scene, although mammy listened breathless, she did not recognize the characters. Blink, however, was unmistakable, and when he announced himself from the old woman's bosom his identity flashed upon mammy, and she tumbled over on the floor, laughing and crying alternately. Evelyn had written from her heart, and the story, simply told, held all the

wrench of parting with old associations, while the spirit of courage and hope, which animated her, breathed in every line as she described their entrance upon their new life.

"My heart was teched f 'om de fus', baby," said mammy, presently, wiping her eyes ; " b-b-but look heah, honey, I'd — I'd be wuss'n a hycoprite ef I let dat noble ole black 'oman, de way you done specified 'er, stan' fur me. Y- y - yer got ter change all dat, honey. Dey warn't nothin' on top o' dis roun' worl' what fetched me 'long wid y' all but 'cep' 'caze I des *nachelly love yer*, an' all dat book granjer what you done laid on me I *don' know nothin 't all about it*, an' yer got ter teck it orf, an' write me down like I is, des a po' ole nigger wha' done fell in wid de Gord- blessedes' white folks wha' ever lived on dis yearth, an' — an' wha' gwine *foller 'em an' stay by 'em*, don' keer whicherway dee go, so long as 'er ole han's is able ter holp 'em. Yer got ter change all dat, honey.

"But Blink! De laws-o'-mussy ! Maybe hit's 'caze I been hatched 'im an' raised 'im, but look ter me like he ain't no disgrace ter de story, no way. Seem like he sets orf de book. Yer ain't gwine say nothin' 'bout Blink bein' a frizzly, is yer? 'Twouldn't do no good ter tell it on 'im." (173-74).

The passage is remarkable in several ways. First, it engages in a metanarrative, based on the advice from Mammy to write a natural story, free of pretense, the writer in the story writes an autobiographical account of the experience that is being relayed by the narrator. The narration, then transforms into non-fiction, and writing about writing. The genre, indeed, is transformed into a Roman a clef. Also, the italics are Stuart's and could emphasize either emphasized speech by Mammy or speech that Stuart deemed important. Either way, the language of subjugation is italicized. Indeed, Mammy speaks as a slave to her mistress. She denies the power given her by

Evelyn, denies, even, the centrality of her position in the family--by this time, Mammy is the only means of support for the Bruce's. Mammy instead opts for the language of natural love, of filial devotion to Evelyn and her father, and maternal devotion to Blink, the rooster. Through the neutral, race-less character of the chicken, Mammy expresses actual pride and love, unfiltered by the complicated and changing racial, familial, and economic relationships she has with Evelyn and the other white people she encounters in New Orleans.

After this renegotiation of their relationship and Evelyn's tacit acknowledgment of it, Mammy's possibly canny but disingenuous repudiation of it, with implied acceptance of it on behalf of Blink, only, the relationship between the two women continues on its equalizing path. In fact, since they are running out of money, which is a major concern to Mammy, if not to Evelyn, Mammy comes up with a plan to take in laundry. Evelyn opposes it, but, departing from the language of subjugation and becoming maternal, switching roles with Evelyn, she threatens to whip her if she tries to stop her. Mammy markets herself knowledgably and helps Evelyn market herself as well. When Evelyn insists on helping her, Mammy physically picks her up and moves her, and repeats the threat of whipping. She agreed that if Evelyn would write enough that day, she could help her later. Mammy has become the mother in the house, the provider, and the father. Evelyn responds in kind: "Rising from her seat, she put her arms around mammy's neck and kissed her old face, and as she turned away a tear rolled down her cheek." (179). This is a marked contrast to the position of dependency Mammy assumed at the opening of the story. Yet, clearly, this is not Mammy's story, and perhaps this is what remains troubling, even given a generous subtextual reading and contextualizing Stuart's racial attitudes historically. There is so much that remains unsaid about Mammy. For example, the friends and colleagues from the plan-

tation, about whom she was concerned in the beginning of the story never reappear in the narrative, although certainly a realistic Mammy character would have thought about them and more than likely encountered news. This odd passage is notable for the information left out as well as for the continued shift in power language.

" Hush, mammy !"

"I'm a-talkin 'bout de book, baby, an' don't you interup' me no mo' ! An' I say ef dis ole 'oman wha' stan' fur me, ef-ef-ef she got a weak spot in 'er, dey won't be no story to it. She de one wha' got ter stan' by de battlemints an' hol' de fort."

" That's just what you are doing, mammy. There isn't a grain in her that is finer than you."

" 'Sh ! dis ain't no time fur foolishness, baby. Yer 'ain't said nothin' 'bout yo' ma an' de ole black 'oman's baby bein' borned de same day, is yer ? An' how de ole 'oman nussed 'em bofe des like twins? An' — an' how folks 'cused 'er o' starvin' 'er own baby on de 'count o' yo' ma bein' puny ? (*But dat warn't true.*) Maybe yer better leave all dat out, 'caze hit mought spile de story."

" Don't yer see, ef folks knowed dat dem white folks an' dat ole black 'oman was *dat close-t*, dey wouldn't be no principle in it ! Dey ain't nothin' but love in dat, an' de ole 'oman *couldn't he'p 'erse'f, no mo'n I could he'p it!* No right-minded pusson is gwine ter deny dey own heart. Yer better leave all dat out, honey. B-b-but deys some'h'n' else wha' been lef out, wha' b'long in de book. Yer ain't named de way de little mistus sot up all nights an' nussed de ole 'oman time she was sick, an' — an' — an' de way she sew all de ole 'oman's cloze ; an' — an' — an' yer done lef out a heap o' de purtiness an' de sweet-

ness o' de yo'ng missis ! Dis is a book, baby, an' — an' — yer boun' ter do jestic !" In this fashion the story was written." (181-82).

This selection shows Mammy's continued language of power, but also her insistence on the love she feels for Evelyn and her family as the glue that holds her to them, rather than an ideology or economy. What ideology would that be, I wonder? Is it reducing the complicated postbellum racial relationships in the South to a rehashed version of the benevolence of slavery? Or is it insisting on the inclusion of love to this equation of postbellum racial relationships? Perhaps this tension is what makes the reading of this so uncomfortable. It is both the racial overtones, the obvious rationalization of slavery, the reference to familial love in this unbalanced, inherently unequal relationship between owner and owned.

4.3: Little Women, Revised: "The Frey's Christmas Party"

Stuart's "The Frey's Christmas Party" is about a poor New Orleans family of six children headed by a widowed mother who earns a small salary as a newspaper journalist. The narrative owes much to Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, with certain key changes. It is not the children who struggle to overcome their faults, but the mother. Also, there is no father. Although he makes scant physical appearance in *Little Women*, Mr. March is omnipresent. In contrast, the late Mr. Frey is not just physically absent, he is only mentioned once, in passing ("Papa's old gray soldier blanket" is offered up for use as a curtain). In many ways, the story is an anomaly for Stuart. The characters are flat, there is no sensational twist, no pointed social commentary, and no unraveling of sentimental tropes. When hard-working Mrs. Frey comes home from a long morning working at the paper to find that her children have prepared a surprise Christmas party in their small and shabby apartment for a group of eccentric neighbors, Stuart quickly elides this conflict.

Within minutes, Mrs. Frey dons party clothes, swallows her embarrassment at her dwelling and poverty, revives her tired body, and effectively hides her dismay from the children. The party delights: the poverty-stricken and eccentric neighbors reveal noble and surprisingly varied characteristics, the Frey children behave obediently and respectfully, and formerly strange neighbors form life-long friendships. By 1896, *Little Women* was a canonized treasure of domestic fiction. The clear and direct references to *Little Women*, the stylistic divergence of this tale from her other work, Mrs. Frey's writing career, and the impoverished but thriving family imply that in "The Freys Christmas Party" McEnery Stuart refuted slum stories, such as those by Jacob Riis, of working women who do not take care of their children, and the wild immoral rabble that these children become, and that she resisted the cultural backlash against working women in general, and working mothers in particular.

Mrs. Frey is a widow with six children. They are poor. She is a "beginner in newspaper work." The narrator begins by outlining how the Frey children have all marketed traditional skills: "Didn't the Frey children do every bit of the housework and not to mention the little outside industries by which the older ones earned small incomes?" The place is New Orleans, in a boarding house, sometime between 1870 and 1890. The father was a Confederate soldier, although it is not clear if he died in the Civil War or afterwards. What is clear, however, is that although the Frey children have suffered a fall in their fortune, they have not abdicated the middle-class industry and ethics with which they were raised. Equally significant, although all of the Freys must find some money-making industry, none of them engages in anything transgressive. Mrs. Frey is a writer, one of the few decent professions deemed acceptable for women, and the girls engage in domestic tasks that they sell for religious events or charities. For example, Meg,

the oldest, makes “soft gingerbread for sale to the Christian Woman’s Exchange” and Conrad, 13, gathers Christmas trees, palmetto leaves and decorative gray moss from the woods to sell.

The other occupants in the boarding house all inhabit similar lives of lost fortunes and promise. For example, there is an old professor, an elderly woman who cares for birds, a Mlle. Guyosa, also from one of the former “first families” of the confederacy, and who makes paper flowers for sale in the market—another traditional skill set, in addition to writing and baking, that women could engage in without loss of femininity. There is also a “mysterious little woman of the last, worst room in the house--a tiny figure whose face none of her neighbors had ever seen, but who had given her name to the baker and milkman as ‘Mamzelle St. John’”, who seems to be a reference to Chopin’s “A Lady of Bayou St. John,” in which a beautiful young woman forsakes a living lover for her dead Confederate husband (and whom we also meet as an older woman in “La Belle Zoraïde”). There is also a fortune-teller, of unknown origin.

The story rests on a Frey Christmas tradition. “It had been the habit of the Frey children, since they could remember, to save up spare coins all the year for a special fund which they called ‘Christmas money.’ The old fashion of spending these small amounts in presents for one another had long ago given place to the better one--more in the Christmas spirit--of using it to brighten the day for someone less blessed than themselves.” (41).

The March sisters from *Little Women* also live in a fatherless home, although their mother does not work, and is not a widow. Their father, a Union soldier, eventually returns home from the war and reestablishes the traditional family structure. This cannot happen in the South. Through this comparison, Stuart clarifies that the Freys have suffered and given more than the Marches and, by proxy, that Southerners have suffered and reformed more than Northerners. The

March sisters also collect money for presents, but they grumble about it. Their mother, Mrs. March, is the moral center of their world and herds them from their essentially selfish positions to charity. Mrs. Frey does not, cannot, because she is at work earning money. In absentia, the children spontaneously donate their money. It is difficult for the March sisters, born into a genteel background but impoverished by the war, to sacrifice their earnings. They do eventually give Christmas breakfast to the Hummels.

The Freys try to honor Southern hospitality and Christian virtues but rather than confronting their existential selfishness or desires, they confront which societal rules or expectations or codes of etiquette are necessary in this new world and which are not. Again, no guidance is given from the mother. The children, independently, must decide on their own and vote as a polis. Essentially, while Alcott shows the March sisters' struggles with their nature, their material wants, Stuart shows the Freys' confrontation with their culture and upbringing. The values they brought up to honor are contradictory now, in this shattered world (represented by the boarding house that has been fragmented from one into many). As in many of Stuart's stories although the most superior characters are those who would have been "first families," the societies these characters will inhabit, must inhabit, are multicultural. The Frey children clean, decorate, cook, and shop all on their own. Indeed, Meg relates a multicultural environment when convincing her sister that the party need not be traditional to be successful.

Well, now, listen, Sisty, dear. The dinner that's in my mind isn't a society-column dinner like those Mommy writes about and those we are going to invite don't wear out much table-linen at home. And they cook their own dinners, too, most of 'em--exceptin' when they

eat ‘em in the French Market, with a Chinaman on one side of ‘em and an Indian on the other.

I’m goin to cook ours, and as for eatin’ in the kitchen, why we don’t need to. Just see how warm it is! The frost hasn’t even nipped the banana leaves over there in the square. And Buddy can pull the table out on the big back gallery, an’ we’ll hang Papa’s old gray soldier blanket from lookin’ in . . .

And, indeed, the extraordinary party is a “great sensation”. Miss Penny described the event as “like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky.” The Frey children are behaving as they would have been taught to behave in previous decades, as hosts and hostesses, and are reestablishing customs of hospitality in a new, changed world. The successful party creates an ongoing community that remains close even as the inhabitants’ fortunes change for the better. Through this highly sentimental Christmas tale, Stuart creates a narrative in which not only do all the white, American-born characters cook, clean, shop, and provide for themselves independently, a newspaperwoman has a successful career, is a kind and effective mother, and in which former plantation owners and heirs to legions of slaves happily reside with multiethnic characters from across socioeconomic strata. It is sentimental and idealistic, but the conclusion Stuart advocates for is a radical one, in many ways.

As Chopin does in *Miss McEnders*, Stuart also disparages women’s associations in the 1890s--associations that were composed mostly of middle and upper class women for the benefit of working women. In neither “Blink” nor “Mrs. Frey’s Christmas Party,” do working women’s societies benefit working women.

Reading these three stories together pieces an interesting analysis together about class and labor and marriage. Miss McEnders is a financially solvent heroine whose ultimate conflict resides in a confrontation between her assumed position of moral superiority over working women and the actual corruption that her prosperity involves her in. Notably, she is the only character among the three protagonists who has a love interest--albeit one who is muddied by the end. Not that this presents a comprehensive view, either in terms of fiction or culture, but I find it intriguing nonetheless that marriage is not a consideration for financial stability for any of these women: Georgie, Evelyn, and Mrs. Frey.

On the other hand, both Chopin and Stuart take serious issue with this assumption in some of their fiction. In addition to including women who enjoy working in their fiction, Chopin and Stuart both participate in the contemporary debate about labor in the late nineteenth century. What some of the fiction by these women has in common, and what remains controversial and worthwhile about their fiction, is that they create female characters who find rewards in working that they do not find in motherhood and that they are unapologetic about it. In many cases, economic circumstances do necessitate work, but the downtrodden factory girl is simply not an iconic character for these women. Much of their fiction features women in difficult situations, either imposed upon them or created by them (fault does not necessarily matter), making pragmatic, effective decisions about their sexuality, their economy, and even their maternity. When the language of sentiment is involved in these tales, it is often used as a verbal bridge to subversive or controversial ideas about motherhood.

Chapter 5: Teaching Kate Chopin and Ruth Stuart Using MultiMedia

5.1. The Digital Humanities and Teaching Literature

Over a decade ago, when I decided to apply to graduate programs in English literature, I had to take the GRE English subject test. Studying for this test proved problematic. A cursory afternoon of research confirmed that the canon of Western Literature had exploded sometime in the mid-twentieth century. I eventually stumbled upon a battered reprint of William J. Long's 1909 tome, *English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the Life of the English-Speaking World*. I purchased it, read it, took notes on index cards, and, given my own familiarity with works of American and English literature published after 1900, did reasonably well on the subject test. By the end of my first year in graduate school, however, shortly after I passed the first comprehensive exam, I forgot most of it. I no longer needed immediate recall of this information. The works of literature themselves had not diminished in importance, but the type of studying I performed to get into graduate school and pass its first exam ultimately had about as much relevance in twenty-first century graduate studies in the humanities as inkwells and vellum. There were so many other works to read and discover—forgotten authors, suppressed journals, recently discovered letters, exciting theories, radical philosophies, alternative histories, voices from oppressed or ignored groups. Indeed, if I had followed the subject test's lead, I never would have studied Kate Chopin or Ruth Stuart. Nobody would have. Chopin's name showed up just once on the test: as a possible multiple choice answer, and it wasn't even the right one (correct answer: Virginia Woolf). And Stuart, of course, was not present at all.

I use this example to prove a point—two points, rather. The first is that for English as a discipline, there are no more absolutely authoritative texts, which complicates the traditional role

of professor as master of knowledge. Critical trends in twentieth-century literary studies broadened the field in provocative ways. Indeed, the complete omission of works by politically problematic writers such as Stuart from the undergraduate literature curriculum troubles me. Kate Chopin, with her expansive views on race and gender, was the exception in the 1890s. Her stance on these issues, as I have discussed, in many ways contributed to her difficulty in publishing in the most popular and highly regarded literary journals in New York. These modern views also facilitated her widespread revival. Stuart, as I have previously explained, was the more representative writer of their time. She was lauded and feted by the leading New York literati of the 1890s, and published in the journals that denied Chopin. She was a white supremacist who through her popular fiction sought to portray an antebellum and postbellum world in which whites are naturally more intelligent and rational, and blacks are their loving, childlike, willing subordinates. Yet her fiction reveals contradictions in this ideology that are also emblematic of the complexity of the American race relations, even now. For example, her repeated advocacy of black on white violence in certain situations, and her insistence on a multiracial and multicultural diverse lifestyle for southern women and families in a decade in which white separatism not only rose in popularity but was brutally enforced with violence and legislation. Now, in the twenty-first century, digital humanities and technology have further expanded the field of literature, especially in terms of methodology. However, until recently, much of the focus in digital humanities remained on scholarship, not pedagogy. Emily Toth has emphasized the cultural and political variability of student responses to Edna Pontellier over the decades. Toth relays that young women in 2014 think that Edna is not radical enough, while Edna's independence inspired women in earlier decades ("The 'I Hate Edna Club'"). Readers and their relationships to texts

matter. Moreover, as scholars and teachers of literature, our students as readers matter; most of us would probably agree that we want our undergraduates to develop enduring relationships with the texts we assign them.

In 2002, around the time I was filling in bubbles on the GRE subject test, Shari Stenberg and Amy Lee argued for new approaches in graduate teacher training. In “Developing Pedagogies: Learning the Teaching of English,” the authors acknowledge that “we assume that professors develop in isolation, or in relationship to the scholarship we engage, but not as a result of collaboration with our students or with other teachers” (327). Stenberg and Lee find this stance troubling in the twenty-first century humanities classroom, and join their voices with other scholars who advocate for more examined and interactive pedagogies. “We agree with James Slevin that . . . we need to question hegemonic conceptions of disciplinarity, where bodies of knowledge take precedence over activities of engaging knowledge with others” (327). Slevin implies that direct instruction of content in the humanities classroom, wherein the instructor tells the students what to read and how to read it, will never result in more institutional value being placed on teaching. This type of knowledge dissemination encourages the traditional role of professor as producer and master of knowledge, which emphasizes individual faculty research and publication, instead of teaching and collaboration. Furthermore, Slevin also indicates, this practice implicitly privileges certain types of disciplinary information over others—in this mode, professors inevitably teach students to mimic their own thoughts (Stenberg and Lee 327).

The debate about how to impart knowledge to students most effectively harkens back to Socrates, perhaps even earlier. But technology complicates it. Even in the realm of digital humanities, this debate has been ongoing. Cathy Davidson, way back in 1999, asked readers of *The*

Chronicle of Higher Education to “[i]magine if ideas in the humanities evolved in . . . the equivalent of a science laboratory . . . [where] discovery of one sort or another is the shared, overt goal (“What if Scholars in the Humanities Worked Together in a Lab?”).” Yet, in his 2010 article, “What Is Digital Humanities and What’s It Doing in English Departments?”, Matthew Kirschenbaum still felt the need to emphasize that “digital humanities is also a social undertaking” (3). The idea of collaboration in the humanities, and using computers to foster such, has been knocked around for decades. As scholar and educator Brett D. Hirsch points out in an introduction to the 2012 collection *Digital Humanities Pedagogy: Practices, Principles and Politics*, digital humanities “can trace its roots to research undertaken in the 1940s and boasts specialization in areas of humanities data archiving, preservation, and management” (13). The collaborative potential of the digital humanities, however, has not been fully tapped, despite the existence of organizations like Davidson’s HASTAC, centers like MITH at the University of Maryland, or the New Media Lab at the CUNY Graduate Center.

In “Reclaiming Innovation,” Jim Groom and Brian Lamb make the case that although early web communities and internet activity centered in universities, the advent and current widespread use of learning management systems implies that institutions of higher education limit the interactive and collaborative potential of the web.

Even after years of hype and widespread posturing about ‘openness’ and ‘21st-century skills’ as key values of contemporary higher education, most LMS implementations still lack elementary capacities to publish to and interact with the wider web and the public. By restricting online teaching and learning activity to these closed systems, colleges and universities make a mockery of oft-stated values such as social engagement, public

knowledge, and the mission of promoting enlightenment and critical inquiry in society.
 (“Reclaiming Innovation”).

The hierarchies of the learning management systems that Groom and Lamb refer to support the traditional knowledge dissemination modes in higher education assailed by Slevin, Stenberg, and Lee and reflect profoundly conservative political ideologies about teaching and learning.

Hirsch believes that by examining the ways they teach, and conflating the traditionally separated relationship between research and teaching, instructors in higher education can substantially enrich the field of the humanities, and place digital humanities in a continuum that assures its permanence. Hirsch quotes the renowned educational and cultural scholar Roger I. Simon, on the ideologies that undergird any teaching praxis:

‘[P]edagogy’ is a more complex and extensive term than ‘teaching,’ referring to the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, a time and space for the practice of those strategies and techniques, and evaluation purposes and methods. [...] [I]n other words, talk about pedagogy is simultaneously talk about the details of what students and others might do together and the cultural politics such practices support. To propose a pedagogy is to propose a political vision. In this perspective, we cannot talk about teaching practice without talking about politics (qtd in Hirsch 13-14).

Like Slevin, Stenberg, and Lee, Hirsch and Simon uncover the often unexamined politics and assumed ideologies beneath discussions of pedagogy and teaching practices. Research and pedagogy still remain separate entities in higher education: with one acting as manor lord and the other as serf. Recently, however, Hirsch has noted a revived interest in the pedagogy of digital hu-

manities, after a decade in which research seemed to take precedence over pedagogy. Pedagogy, Hirsch argues, “stabilizes” the field, and therefore, “it is prudent for us, as a field, to start thinking critically not only about what we teach under the banner of ‘digital humanities’ and how we teach it, but also to consider the broader institutional implications and political consequences for doing so” (13-14).

Hirsch’s words affirm what Slevin, Stenberg, Lee, and Simon point out: that to change the way we teach the humanities means a reexamination of our ideologies about information. Throughout the twentieth century, the proliferation of what the discipline of literature encompasses radically enriched and altered the discipline of English. Matthew Kirschenbaum affirms another major change in the discipline for the twenty-first century in the increasingly expansive institutional nurturance of digital computing for the humanities, often featuring English departments. “Digital humanities,” Kirschenbaum writes, “is now backed on a growing number of campuses by a level of funding, infrastructure, and administrative commitments that would have been unthinkable even a decade ago” (6).

While the actual body of knowledge university professors should apprehend in order to achieve so-called mastery abounds like mint in an untamed garden, technology and digital tools have become ubiquitous in the higher education environment. Even in classrooms not equipped with technology, computing presents itself as an important element of higher education and learning in the twenty-first century. For example, at City University’s Baruch College, the majority of our students live in households with very limited financial resources (“2012 Student Experience Survey”). Yet in a survey conducted by Baruch’s Center for Teaching and Learning in Spring 2014 to gauge student access to technology, most students indicated that they owned lap-

top or desktop computers (O'Donoghue and Waltzer). Students deem round-the-clock computer access as essential to success in their studies; even those from financially strapped households sacrifice, when they can, to purchase computers. This also confirms what any contemporary teacher already knows: students (and, let's be honest, instructors, administrators, and everyone in between) fervently and avidly "Google" anything and everything. This ready access to information further complicates the "most traditional model of professing at work, which holds that 'good teaching' . . . has more to do with the relationship one has to knowledge than to students" (Lee and Stenberg 330).

The second point I would like to make is that while this blossoming of what the discipline of literature and humanities encompasses has changed the practice of teaching, it also offers multiple paths for instructors to become producers of knowledge; however, simultaneously, students have increasingly become passive consumers of other people's knowledge. The ways many college students use digital tools mimics the way I studied for the English subject test. College instructors frequently complain about their students using the web primarily as a shortcut to knowledge. Yet this is not always a bad thing—even in this age of innovation and experimentation college instructors tend to assign certain texts, such as *The Awakening*, and expect students to find certain elements, like Edna's discontentedness. After all, I needed the information in William Long's book for two very specific tasks: a standardized test and a comprehensive exam. Without memorizing portions of this information, I never would have succeeded in a graduate program that ultimately taught me think critically and question the very information I had learned to gain entry to it.

While we gripe about the loss of original research, we need to reflect on our own teaching practices. Students seek rote, internet-ready answers if these answers are rewarded. If an instructor wants students to come up with a widely accepted interpretation of a work of literature, then the internet is the best place for the student to find this information. If an instructor positions herself as a master of knowledge, and her students as passive recipients, then it makes perfect sense to use the internet in this superficial way. However, using this information as a jumping off point, as a beginning, changes the dynamic and makes the web act not as a replacement of original thought, but a tool that leads to original research. As Groom and Lamb put it, “the choice of technology does not itself make teaching good or bad. Good teaching can happen in spite of bad tools, and good tools do not guarantee a good outcome. But it is facile to think that the technology makes no difference” (“Reclaiming Innovation”). Using a learning management system to post selected and instructor-vetted information online has its uses and conveniences, but it replicates a hegemony of knowledge and, as Groom and Lamb warn, it isolates students and learning from a larger, more exciting, context.

As Randy Bass articulates in “Engines of Inquiry,” “teaching and learning is not about perfect information, but often about imperfect information; indeed, learning is often about indirection, ambiguity, complexity, and multiplicity . . . Sometimes knowledge is too complex to be perfect” (10). Many educators in the humanities, when disparaging their students’ of technology, mourn this loss of complexity and subtlety. Ultimately, most professors of literature do not want their students to parrot a “correct” answer about a text based on someone else’s summary from a blog post or internet guide. Literature and its study in higher education belies correct answers; indeed, the whole explosion of the traditional canon emphasizes this point.

Hirsch refers to Shari Stenberg's position advocating for “ ‘a reevaluation of the function of the English professor as ‘more than one who transmits particular knowledge’ . . . expanding the role to include that of ‘a facilitator of student projects, a co-inquirer, a learner’ “ (qtd in Hirsch 14). Using technology and digital tools to encourage students to become creators of knowledge creates an interactive and collaborative pedagogical practice, counteracts the passive consumption of knowledge, and conflates research and teaching in exciting ways.

Teaching students how to use digital tools to produce content radically alters pedagogy— instructional roles in the classroom become collaborative and less hierarchical. In my experience, as someone who considers herself technologically savvy but not expert, assigning multimedia projects means that I cannot position myself as a master of knowledge. However, the implications of incorporating technology in this way are complex and far-reaching. Instructors will have to challenge themselves to learn new technologies and materials. This brings up difficult labor issues. The learning and implementation of technology takes time; time that is at this point, largely unpaid. Contingent and full-time faculty already have overburdened schedules and workloads. Yet in many ways, the changes have already happened. Our students misuse technology because they think that's what we want.

After a decade spent teaching diverse groups of students at the City University of New York, I have distilled a few objectives for all of my literature courses that transcend the specific goals of each individual class. Students should:

- learn some computer skills that they can bring with them into the professional world,
- experience the thrill of discovery through research,
- sustain their intellect through reading,

- realize the political and cultural implications of the production and dissemination of texts.

This chapter details an assignment series that seeks to provide a free and user-friendly way to make things with technology relevant to an undergraduate literature course, while attempting to target each of the goals listed above. In this assignment series, I use the works of both Ruth Stuart and Kate Chopin to expose students to who was really reading what in the 1890s and to the important contexts of these texts. Ruth Stuart's works have been digitized and are not only widely available online in facsimiles of their original formats—complete with illustrations—but they are free. In the first assignment I detail I anticipate assigning students a project of creating a digital critical edition for one of Ruth Stuart's stories. In the second assignment series, we map a short story of Kate Chopin to discover more about how the setting of a story can add nuances that enrich its meaning.

5.1. Ruth Stuart, Digital Edition

Using the website and blogging platform WordPress as a publishing platform with a CommentPress plug-in that allows for group annotations of a PDF, I have been developing a proposal for an assignment sequence in which students choose a story written by Ruth Stuart that is available online and create a critical digital edition of it, with annotations, analyses, and explanations. This assignment would introduce students to the possibilities of original research in literature as undergraduates. It would be a high stakes graded task that would take the place of a final paper in a nineteenth century American literature class. The skills that students need in order to accomplish this task are ones that most literature classes list as learning objectives: students need to read closely and critically, they need to develop their own original analyses of texts

and place their arguments in context with other critics, and they need to take into account the social, cultural and historical contexts in which the text was produced. These are skills we will work on developing all semester, by reading canonical and non-canonical texts, critical interpretations, and historical analyses.

We will also spend time looking at existing critical digital editions of literary texts, which brings the study of literature into the 21st century. The concerns faced by authors in the late nineteenth century about the changing nature of publication offer an interesting comparison to the increasing digitization of texts today. On one hand, many worry that the digital editions publishers increasingly choose because of their immense cost savings are more ephemeral than print publications. On the other hand, writers such as Ruth Stuart can now be easily recovered online. Anyone with basic web skills and literary training can produce and publish a digital edition. This democratizes the critical process in an exciting way.

In my assignment, I will limit my students to work by Ruth Stuart because I have knowledge about the critical reception and historical contexts of her work. I am familiar with all her stories and can guide my students towards resources that will help them. I also think it will be interesting to have an entire class working on one author—this project potentially creates a new way of approaching criticism: from a group perspective, as a cohort-based project, and as an open-source, dialogic, and discursive process rather than an authoritative, expert-driven, individualized endeavor. My hope is that students will not only begin to think of themselves as producers of knowledge but also that their relationship to literary studies will become more dynamic.

5.3. Mapping “Miss McEnders”

In the spring semester of 2013, I began work on a project (which I plan to roll out in the classroom in spring 2015) with funding from the New Media Lab at the CUNY Graduate Center. I wanted to develop a simple but sophisticated way to introduce students to digital mapping techniques. Mapping fiction offers historical and contemporary foci to narratives and provides motive to students who may wonder why they read literature from decades and centuries before they were born, when the world around them seems more dynamic. The necessary geographical research that accompanies the actual mapping provides original and overlooked contexts that enrich the interpretations, analyses, and meanings of narratives. Mapping a story, when possible, also encourages students to use historical tools in a very specific way and thus breaks the common habit many students have of reductive generalization when analyzing a work of literature through a historical lens (i.e., “since the beginning of time, humans have . . .”). I also created a site through Wikispaces (kodigital.wikispaces.com) to use first as a drawing board during the project, but which will ultimately serve as an archive of the research process and a website to showcase students’ work. When students place their work on the web, the possibility of others seeing it emphasizes audience and sharpens their motivation. Moreover, wikis offer opportunities for students to execute group projects while developing a sense of process and to recognize the differences between collaboration and plagiarism.

Certain works of literature lend themselves more readily to mapping than others. Kate Chopin’s 1892 short story “Miss McEnders” is ideal. As I discuss in Chapter 4, in “Miss McEnders,” Chopin highlights regional changes resulting from the social and economic inequality that developed in St. Louis after the Civil War. When I initially conceived this idea, Occupy Wall Street occupied the nation’s news. In the months I’ve spent editing this chapter for my disserta-

tion, a St. Louis suburb, Ferguson, has made national headlines for the civil unrest there after a white police officer fatally shot an unarmed black teenager. In a *New York Times* Op-Ed piece from August 17th, Jeff Smith indicts the exclusionary and polarizing urban planning of St. Louis that began in the late nineteenth century for creating the template for the current racial and economic dichotomies in the region:

Back in 1876, the city of St. Louis made a fateful decision. Tired of providing services to the outlying areas, the city cordoned itself off, separating from St. Louis County. It's a decision the city came to regret. Most Rust Belt cities have bled population since the 1960s, but few have been as badly damaged as St. Louis City, which since 1970 has lost almost as much of its population as Detroit. This exodus has left a ring of mostly middle-class suburbs around an urban core plagued by entrenched poverty (Smith).

In "Miss McEnders," Chopin also indicts the urban structure of St. Louis for exacerbating class and economic tensions; mapping the story clarifies this critique and provides further evidence for the human toll that long-standing economic disparities enact, and how architecture, geography, and zoning all cement corrupt and unfair political structures.

While mapping fiction can highlight issues of enduring relevance for students, it helps when the narrative symbolically uses specific geographies to undergird its themes. Chopin built the narrative of "Miss McEnders" around a particular journey undertaken by its main character. As I detail in Chapter 4, "Miss McEnders" references the true story of newspaper magnate James McKee, who went to jail for a Reconstruction-era corruption scandal known as the Whiskey Ring. Chopin uses the fictional tale of Miss McEnders to satirize McKee's daughter, Ellen, a contemporary of Chopin and a publisher, writer, and reformer in St. Louis. As Emily Toth con-

firms, Ellen McKee's activities would likely have rankled Chopin (198-199). Since I analyze this story in detail in Chapter 4, I will only quickly summarize it. The bourgeois Miss Georgie McEnders takes a journey to a poor part of town to visit her seamstress. When this visit reveals that the unmarried Mlle. Salambre is the mother of a young girl, Miss McEnders is morally outraged and withdraws all her work from Mlle. Salambre, who actually works as a contractor for an outsourcing firm run by businessmen. In revenge, Mlle. Salambre tells Georgie about the moral and financial corruption of both her father and her fiancé. Georgie's hypocrisy represents the double standards of the elite class. Moreover, this information shows that Georgie and her seamstress are in the same tenuous moral positions: they both need to acquiesce to the questionable ethics of the businessmen of St. Louis in order to survive.

The first hurdle to clear for my project involved deciding which software to use. I wanted free, user-friendly applications that we could share and learn quickly; I envision just one week spent teaching skills for this assignment. I eventually decided to use two Google products: Earth and MapEngine. These applications use the familiar Google Maps interface but allow for more customized mapping. Next, I had to decide whether to use archival or contemporary maps. In the end, I used archival maps of St. Louis from the late nineteenth century as reference points to plot Miss McEnders's journey on a contemporary map. Jennifer Moore, the GIS/Outreach/Anthropology librarian at Washington University in St. Louis, generously shared their digital trove of Whipple fire insurance maps from nineteenth century St. Louis with me. Libraries and historical organizations increasingly digitize and store maps such as these, made in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by insurance companies for thousands of towns and cities in the United States. They offer rich opportunities for interested students to begin examining the social and po-

litical contexts of literature and to understand the importance and relevance of these contexts. Once I made a list of all the places that Georgie McEnders visits in the story, I plotted them on Google Earth and MapEngine. Then I researched each specific place, using a mix of internet searches and library resources that would be widely accessible for student use.



Figure 2

5.4 The McEnders' Home

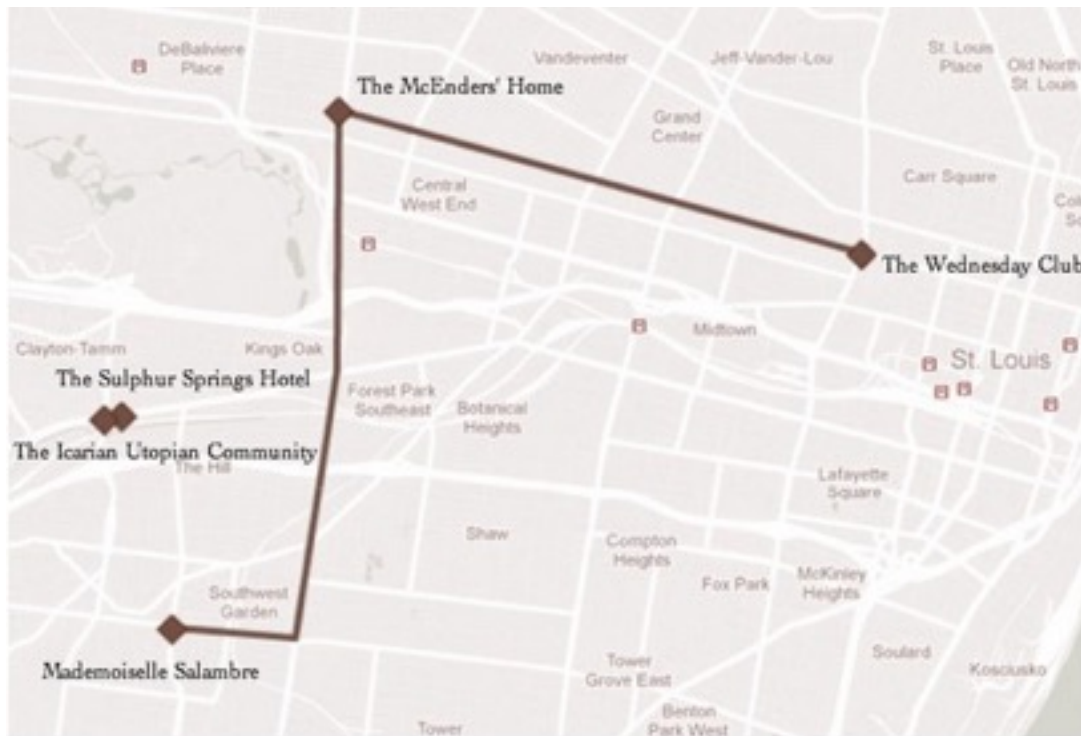


Figure 3

The opening lines of the story establish the trajectory of Miss Georgie McEnders's journey, as well as her wealth.

When Miss Georgie McEnders had finished an elaborately simple toilet of gray and black, she divested herself completely of rings, bangles, brooches- everything to suggest that she stood in friendly relation with fortune. For Georgie was going to read a paper upon "The Dignity of Labor" before the Woman's Reform Club; and if she was blessed with an abundance of wealth, she possessed a no less amount of good taste.

Before entering the neat victoria that stood at her father's too-sumptuous door- and that was her special property- she turned to give certain directions to the coachman. First upon the list from which she read was inscribed: 'Look up Mademoiselle Salambre.'

'James,' said Georgie, flushing a pretty pink, as she always did with the slightest effort of speech, 'we want to look up a person named Mademoiselle Salambre, in the southern part of town, on Arsenal street,' indicating a certain number and locality (Chopin 204).

Georgie's exclusive control of a private carriage symbolizes the ease of access and movement afforded by her wealth—geographically, but also socially, politically and economically. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, St. Louis did not have mass transport, making it difficult for the working class residents to leave their neighborhoods. "For the wealthy, private carriages did a wonderful job of supplying transport from home. If you were a clerk or factory hand, however, your options were more limited. So most people chose homes within easy walking distance of work" (Sandweiss 3). This insularity of work and home also means that, to Georgie and the contemporary readers of this tale, Mlle. Salambre's residence offers important clues about her moral character and occupation, which I detail in later in this chapter.

The wealth of the McEnders family and their ostentatious residence in the northern end of the city, as well as Chopin's sardonic stance towards Georgie's wealth, establishes the Central West End as their likely location. A late-nineteenth-century enclave near Forest Park, Central West End developed as a respite from the increasingly industrializing city and its poor, working class residents. Although anachronistic to the setting of the story, this address punctuates both Chopin's contemporary jab at bourgeois reformers and her larger point about the postbellum stratification of St. Louis. Chopin critic Pamela Knights elaborates on the significance of textual clues that establish location in a critical edition of Chopin's fiction.

Arsenal Street: a long street running west from the vast Anheuser-Busch brewery in downtown St. Louis: ethnically diverse, with a mixture of lodging houses, small business, and saloons, it represented in the 1890s an extreme contrast to the 'too-sumptuous' McEnders home. Georgie, presumably, would have been pictured as living in one of the exclusive 'private streets', the preserve of the St. Louis elite (Knights 382).

Historian Tim Fox confirms that this neighborhood and Forest Park, directly to its west, symbolized the economic and social changes in St. Louis, in which newly affluent industrialists and manufacturers sought to distance themselves from poorer sections of the city; residents of this exclusive neighborhood paid fees to maintain streets and amenities, and politically influenced zoning.

By the late nineteenth century, the city's final western edge had become St. Louis' last setting for an upper-class enclave . . . those who had made their fortunes in distilling, flour milling, chemicals, iron and steel, textiles, utilities, tobacco, and shoe manufacturing built

palatial mansions in the most extensive cluster of private places in St. Louis . . . [and] formed the original core of the Central West End (Fox 134).

Forest Park itself has an interesting relationship to social class. Created in 1876, its inception and subsequent changes throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century highlight public debates about accessibility of public lands, types of appropriate recreation, and class hierarchies, all of which are reflected in “Miss McEnders.” Georgie’s assumptions about what poor women should do, her self-conscious yet complacent identification of her privilege (she realizes that she should remove her jewelry when speaking about working women, yet still assumes she possesses relevant information about these women’s lives), and the leisure of having a carriage to bring her around the city underscore the debates about Forest Park, built in the late 1870s in a location which remained largely inaccessible to the working class neighborhoods in the southern part of the city until the construction of a new railroad route in 1885. The disjuncture between the setting of the story in the late 1870s and its publication date in 1891 emphasizes the park debate. The park had changed from a pastoral invention of leisurely pursuits and recreational events such as horse racing or winding carriage paths that were used primarily by wealthy citizens to its more plebeian and democratic accessibility in the early 1890s (Fox 122-127).

5.4 The Wednesday Club

The last stop of Miss McEnders’s day, detailed in the opening lines but never reached in the narrative itself, is the Woman’s Reform Club. Quite likely, this club stood in for the actual Wednesday Club in St. Louis, an intellectual and reform-minded group of women with whom Chopin involved herself for a time. In the map, blue squares represent places Kate Chopin lived. Clicking on the squares reveals information about each place. This geocoding exists in a separate

layer that can be turned on or off. This type of visual information can help students identify a relationship between biography and content that goes beyond the superficial information that beginning students struggle to integrate into their literary analysis by offering opportunities to see and hypothesize about interesting connections.

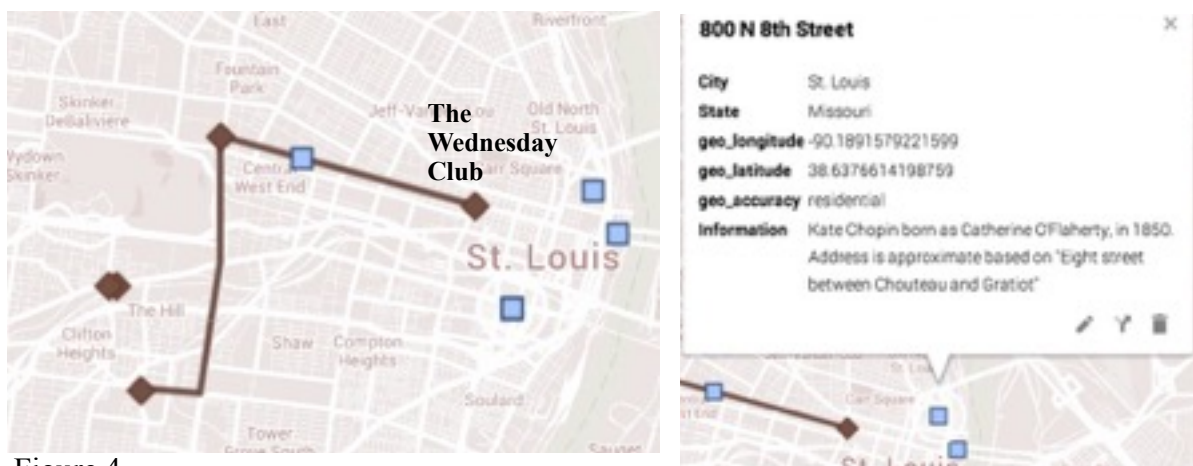


Figure 4

In “Miss McEnders,” for example, Chopin’s personal involvement and proximity to the club seems to have earned it her enmity, or at least her ridicule, as I detail in Chapter 4. The fact that Georgie gets her comeuppance from Mlle. Salambre before she delivers her hypocritical and uninformed lecture on the dignity of labor to this reform-minded group emphasizes Chopin’s satirical take on such groups’ often dubious agenda.

As Katharine Corbett explains in her book about women’s history in St. Louis, the wide acceptance of distinct red light districts in St. Louis in the nineteenth century meant that working women living in or near those districts became suspected of prostitution by default and risked losing both employment and charity: “employers often required moral certification in letters of reference . . . [and] women suspected of immorality could not expect to receive private charity in times of need” (126). Combined with the lack of geographic mobility suffered by the working poor, and wages kept ruthlessly low by firms like the fictitious Push and Prodem in “Miss

McEnders” that outsourced jobs such as Georgie’s wedding trousseau to individual seamstresses, Mlle. Salambre resides in a geographic space that breeds economic instability. Even more unfair, labor historian Alice Kessler Harris reports that in the nineteenth century imagination, low wages were blamed for inducing working-class women to prostitution. “If women could not earn enough by dint of strenuous effort to support themselves, investigators thought, they would inevitably turn to prostitution” (Harris 104). Indeed, Georgie’s journey downtown to Mlle. Salambre proves that the seamstress, at the very least, has had sex without being married. Yet Chopin presents Georgie’s disapprobation of this woman as further evidence of her hypocrisy and silliness.

5.5 Mademoiselle Salambre’s Residence

Since we know that Mlle. Salambre lives on Arsenal Street, and we meet her German landlady “redding bricks” in front of her boarding house, the Hill and Cheltenham neighborhoods are likely locations for Mlle. Salambre. Both featured German immigrants in the nineteenth century and nearby brick factories that employed residents (Fox 110-118). Redding bricks seems to be some type of brick post-production task, which could entail adding a decorative glaze to the bricks (which may not have been naturally red) or cleaning soot from the bricks accrued in the kiln firing process (“General History of Brick Making,” Sopko and Feister, “The History of Bricks and Brickmaking”). While her actions help to place the geographic location, the emphasis on the color red also suggests sexual digression and the sprucing up of the bricks implies that appearances can deceive. She also labors at the task, which emphasizes that these two elements—sex and attractiveness—mean work, not pleasure.

The southern edge of the Hill, at the corner of Arsenal and Sublette Park, further stands out as a plausible and interesting home residence for Mlle. Salambre. Between 1870 and 1874, St. Louis legalized prostitution with the Social Evil Ordinance; in 1873, the Hospital for Social Evil, on a tract of land that also contained the insane asylum and the women’s House of Industry, opened at the corner of Arsenal and Sublette. This institution housed prostitutes who tested positive for sexually transmitted infections, and “reformers attempted to ‘save’ prostitutes in the House of Industry” although local news sources apparently reported that “[p]rostitutes resented being patronized and penalized by reformers (Corbett 126-127).



Figure 5



Figure 6

The Hill and Cheltenham neighborhoods have a further transgressive history. In the 1850s, a French utopian socialist group called the Icarians purchased a tract of land in this region shortly after the death of their leader, Etienne Cabot, and an exodus from Iowa. The group believed in “the principals of peace and justice” (“Etienne Cabot and the Icarians”) and, to echo the title of Georgie McEnders’ pending lecture for the women’s group, also in the “dignity of labor”:

the Icarians occupied themselves in skilled trades such as tailors, cobblers, and mechanics (Shaw 82-83). This context becomes interesting when one considers that Chopin distinctly emphasizes Mlle. Salambre's French origins, during a time period in which most recent immigrants to St. Louis were Irish, German, or Italian (“Peopling St. Louis: the Immigration Experience”). Moreover, the seamstress’s final speech to Miss McEnders specifically indicts Georgie’s bourgeois existence as immoral and dishonest:

Very small, indeed, were her worldly possessions, she informed the young lady; but as Heaven was her witness- not a mouthful of bread that she had not earned. And her parents over yonder in France! As honest as the sunlight! Poor, ah! for that- poor as rats. God only knew how poor; and God only knew how honest. Her eyes remained fixed upon the picture of Horace McEnders. Some people might like fine houses, and servants, and horses, and all the luxury which dishonest wealth brings. Some people might enjoy such surroundings. As for her!- and she drew up her skirts ever so carefully and daintily, as though she feared contamination to her petticoats from the touch of the rich rug upon which she stood (Chopin 209).

Mlle. Salambre’s disgust at Georgie stems not only from her wealth but also the young woman’s unexamined ideology of morality and upward mobility and her lack of empathy for the working class—essentially, a Marxist rejection of capitalism’s disregard for the destruction it wreaks and its privileging of consumer goods as measures of virtue and power.

5.5. Final Thoughts on Mapping

When I began this project, I was not sure of how relevant this exercise would be in a classroom. However, I found that the mix of materials I needed to use to find information—spe-

cific uses of the internet, libraries, archival resources, how-to manuals on brick construction, and fire insurance maps, opened up the field of literary analysis in a way that I believe will engage students. Moreover, I find the possibilities of original discovery exciting, and since students learn how to geocode, build a wiki, and customize maps they gain valuable practical skills. In a classroom, the students would be divided into groups. A sharable Google map of St. Louis would serve as the base map on which multiple people could work simultaneously. Individuals within groups have specific roles, initially, then groups must work together to make sure their information is cohesive. Student groups are assigned a portion of the story, and each must make annotated points on a map and have an accompanying Wiki page with more information, written analyses, and a Works Cited page.

Matthew Kirschenbaum argues that “the digital humanities today is about . . . a scholarship and pedagogy that are collaborative and depend on networks of people and that live an active 24/7 life online. Isn’t that something you want in your English department? (6).” I would add that the separation of scholarship from pedagogy has for too long defined college-level teaching, and that asking ourselves and our students to begin experimenting together with the digital tools at hand has the potential to invigorate literary studies for the twenty-first century.

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