

Kate chopin: woman before her time

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Kate Chopin: Woman Before her Time “ Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer; than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life. ” These are some famous words of a woman ahead of her time, Kate Chopin. Kate wrote many stories about women and their sexual appetites and cravings for independence, which made her stories taboo during her time. Her stories focused mainly on the lives of sensitive, intelligent women. She simply wrote life as she saw it. According to her website, she wrote two published novels and over one hundred short stories during the 1890’s. As a young child, Kate experienced many deaths and tragic events. Starting with her fathers death when she was five, great grandmother and brother George when she was twelve, followed by her first teachers death, her brother passing, her best friend moved away and the German soldiers raided their home. No one knows for sure if Kate Chopin was sexual abused by the German soldiers but many believe, because of her withdrawn personality, that she was an adolescent viaticum of abuse. Was Kate Chopin sexually abused as a child? If so, is this why she views relationship and marriage the way she expressed in her stories? Kate Chopin tended to write about topics that were not expressed freely during the 19th century. She would write about things such as; women's search for selfhood, for self-discovery or identity, women's revolt against gender conformity or against social norms that limit women's possibilities in life, women's sexual appetite and appetite for independence. She is one of the earliest examples of modernism in the United States. Kate never intended for her work to be taboo to society during her time but she simply wrote about life as she saw it. She also viewed freedom differently than the rest of society at the time. To her freedom was a matter of spirit,

soul, character of living your life within the constraints that the world makes/ your God offers you. Although Kate was looked down upon for her topics of writing, she is celebrated and acclaimed by the many people around the world today. Kate Chopin was born of an Irish and French descent in St. Louis, Missouri. She was blessed by having many female mentors in her childhood. She grew up primarily raised in a home ran by women, either independently strong widows of her family or the intellectual nuns of her school. These women taught Kate to live a " life of the mind as well as a life of the home". Her father was a very successful businessman and was busy traveling around for work. In 1855, he was one of the founders of the Pacific Railroad and was aboard the inaugural journey over the Gasconade Bridge. The Bridge collapsed and many of the passengers were killed, including Kate's father. Kate's mother, Eliza, was only twenty-seven years old at the news of her fifty-year-old husband's death. Some suggest that this is where Kate's *Story of an Hour* came from. After her father's death Kate became very close with her great grandmother, Madame Charlesville, who was a member of the prominent French-Creole community. Madame Charlesville was very influential in Kate's life. She taught Kate many things such as; Lives of women, how women are torn between duty and desire, not to judge people rashly, but to face truths fearlessly but the great lesson she taught Kate was that a woman had to be independent. She also taught Kate about music, history, speaking French and stressed the need to live life clearly and fearlessly. Not only did Kate live life clearly, she also expressed it clearly in her stories. Kate married Oscar Chopin June 9th, 1870, birthed five boys and one girl. Fourteen years after their marriage Kate experienced yet another

death, her husband Oscar passed on. A lot like her childhood, Kate then took on the responsibilities of the household. After figuring the families finances, Oscar left Kate and the children with \$12, 000 of debt. Kate eventually moved back home with her mother who soon after died. This is about the time that Kate influenced to start writing as a means of releasing her anger and disappointment. She did so in order to support her family. However, Kate never earned enough money from her writing in order to support her family. She was forced to use the real estate that she owned in Louisiana and St. Louis in order to provide income. Kate was successful in get published in various magazines. Kate wrote for many years and was very popular until the publishing of ' The Awakening'. 'The Awakening' is one of her best-known works today, but it caused a lot of controversy back then. The critics called her novel, ' The Awakening', " ...Immoral, pornographic, perverse, morbid, etc. During this time, Kate was a member of a women's community. While the novel was undergoing strong disapproval, primarily by male critics, the women's' community invited Kate to come and do a reading of her novel ' The Awakening' where over 300 women came to praise, applaud and cheer Kate on. In ' The Awakening', Edna Pontellier is and obedient housewife and mother enjoying her annual summer vacation at Grand Isle with her family. While vacationing Edna begins to experience a need for independence and her search for sense of self. During this journey Edna finds herself becoming close with a young man named Robert Lebrun. Edna finds that they share a romantic interest in one another. Robert leaves for Mexico leaving Edna lonely. Edna then finds herself experiencing a sexual awakening with a male mistress. Her husband starts to get concerned with his wife's abandonment

of household matters and new interest in painting. She then decided to be independent financially and leaves her husband to live on her own. Robert then returns expressing his love for Edna and his hopes to marry her. At this point in Edna's life, she can no longer stand societal strictures, especially marriage. Robert leaves Edna. Edna returns to Grand Isle, heartbroken. She returns to the ocean seawaters, where she once found her sense of self, and swims far out into the sea and presumably drown. In this novel, Kate uses the character Edna to express her attitude toward the social constraints of marriage and relationships. The role of wife and mother in a family during that time period is portrayed in such a suffocating way. A way that would make any one feel a strong urge for freedom. I agree with Kate's view on this subject. I think many women even today feel this way. As the pressures of being a mother and a good wife tend to weigh heavy on women, the women of the household then begins to lose her sense of self. For many years now, it has always been the women's role to tend to the house and the children, as well as her husband. In the novel Edna is trying to learn how to swim. This symbolizes her desire to have control over her own body. Once Edna realizes this after her first swim in the ocean, she is then able to stand up to her husband and not obey his every command. Also, Kate refers to the sea as being a sensuous and enfolding the body, it is soft embrace. This is where Kate is awakened to the love of herself, her new sense of independence and control. On the contrary, this is where Edna goes to drown. I believe that the sea, the place she found freedom and independence, is where she feels the most love, alone and with herself. When taking a deeper look into Kate's views of being mother, this one quote in particular comes to mind. Edna

says, " I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself". Many of the women in Kate Chopin's stories express this crucial issue of recognizing oneself and not losing it. I think this is a very important point and there is a lesson to be learned here. Still to this day, I think all women and even men, need to, before marriage, have this sense of self and be able to own and not lose it during love, family and life. It is key in order to live a happy life. Some may say it is selfish but I firmly believe that in order to love, you must first love yourself. Many characters in the novel viewed Edna as being a poor mother, but how better to raise your children than to show them by example that to love ones self is one of the most important lessons in life. Edna loved her children, but did not live solely for them. She to had a life to live and experience. Just because you become a mother does not mean that you are done growing spiritually. Edna was tired of being controlled and living the way society wanted women to live. She wanted more, she wanted step out of those chains and do what her heart and soul was telling her to do. LIVE! In chapter 23, Mr. Pontellier, says that according to his wife..."a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. " As a husband I would assume that this is punch to the stomach. Edna is inferring that weddings are one of the most unfortunate events. This is a strong view Kate is expressing in her novel. It is clear that Kate finds marriages during her time to be a joke. I assume that she thinks people, during her time, were getting married for the wrong reasons and that women would conform to the needs and wants of the family. Women would fail to find themselves and live life for their own wants and needs. In *The Storm* and *The Story of an Hour*, Kate expresses her

attitudes toward marriage. For instance, First, *The Storm* is about a wife who cheats on her husband while her husband and son are in town waiting for a storm to pass. She cheats on him with one of her ex boyfriends prior to marriage. When her husband and son return, Calixta, the wife greets them with good humor and acts as if nothing had ever happened. The ex-boyfriend, whom is also married, writes a letter to his wife who is out of town visiting friends. He tells her that she need not hurry back, that he getting along fine. His wife, Clarisse, is delighted in this news and it seems as if she is enjoying her free space away from her husband and marriage. The message I think Kate is trying to imply is that couples need breaks. They need that time apart. Women need space away from their husbands to breath, for freedom. Maybe, Kate found men during her time to be smothering and demanding and this is why she felt women acted in such manner. Secondly, *The Story of an Hour* is about a woman with a heart condition. Her husband dies in a train wreck and everyone is afraid to tell her the news due to her condition and the scare of it causing her shock and then death. After mourning the thought of her husbands' death, she begins to experience a moment of ecstasy. A feeling of freedom and life come to her. She realizes that she no longer wishing for a short life, as she did prior to her husbands' death. Mrs. Mallard, the wife, now wishes for a long life full of joy and freedom. In the story Kate mentions that Mrs. Mallard loves her husband: sometimes. Mrs. Mallard shares her joy and newfound way of life with the others waiting down stairs for her when suddenly her husband appears in the door, untouched by trauma. Mrs. Mallard immediately drops dead at the sight of him. Many could view this as a traumatic side effect of

her heart condition. She died of shock, but it is interesting how the shocking news of her husbands' death didn't cause her death, like the others thought it might. Mrs. Mallard was set free upon the news of her husbands' death, feeling weightless and free. Many could view Mrs. Mallard's excitement as selfish and crude, but the deeper underlying meaning is there, if you look for it. In many of Kate's stories you have to read between the lines in order to comprehend exactly what attitude she is trying to express. Although, for those who aren't seeking a deep message, her stories still provide you with entertainment. Kate had a way of developing stories with great endings for both audiences. I think the reason she did this was to become an author of her time without making society mad. Her views on marriage were not accepted during the 1890's. Society rejected many of her stories, especially, *The Awakening*. The brilliantly talented Kate Chopin was able to undermine those of society, by not verbalizing her views outright. Had she done so, many of her stories would not have been published in her time. There are many lessons to be learned here in Kate Chopin's novel and short stories. Still to this day many women are conforming to what they believe to be the 'role' of a wife/mother and not living out their lives for themselves.

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