Maternal Ambivalences in Kate Chopin's Selected Works

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Abstract:

The question of motherhood seems to haunt the works of Kate Chopin, a nineteenth century American writer. Though a mother-woman herself, Chopin gives a paradoxical portrait of motherhood in her works. She implies that motherhood might be a liberating experience for some women as it is constricting for others. This paper tackles the paradoxical nature of motherhood in Chopin's novel, *The Awakening* and other four short stories. In *The Awakening, A Pair of Silk Stockings* and *Desiree's Baby*, motherhood is depicted as a tool of self-destruction, while in *Athénaise* and *Regret*, it is a source of life-giving.

A theme which Kate Chopin (1851-1904), a nineteenth century American writer, presents throughout her career is the dilemma of desire versus duty, self-realization versus socially sanctioned self-sacrifice. Motherhood often serves to emphasize a woman's self-deprivation, but there are also cases where a woman can achieve self-realization through motherhood and caring for children. In her own life, Chopin was a mother-woman. She loved her children and was deeply devoted to them. Linda Byrd writes that "Kate Chopin's genuine feelings about motherhood and children are best illuminated in her comments about her own six children. Loving her children immensely, she never wanted to shut them out or turn them away, even when she was very busy"[1]. In her work, Chopin depicts children as affecting the lives of adults in many ways: they may pacify, heal, enlighten and comfort[2]. Despite her own feelings about children, Chopin is aware that motherhood is, sometimes, not the role all women seek or find fulfillment in. Some of Chopin's most famous works illustrate the writer's preoccupation with this paradoxical nature of motherhood. Chopin consistently presents motherhood as a "form of ideological entrapment that some women accept, along with the loss of self, and some do not"[3], but she always successfully depicts the female strength granted to mothers. In her work, Chopin implies that motherhood may be as "freeing, generative experience"[4] for some women as it is constricting for others. This idea is most evident in her novel *The Awakening* and other four short stories. In *The Awakening*, *A Pair of Silk Stockings* and *Desiree's Baby*, the darker side of motherhood is explored, while *Athénaise* and *Regret* demonstrate the rewards of maternity.

The Awakening (1899) challenges the ideology of motherhood. It follows the journey of Edna Pontellier, a woman who must face the hardships of social standards, motherhood being one of them. Edna refuses to define herself in terms

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of her husband and children. She wants to be treated as a separate individual, not an "Other"- a creature without "self" and desire. She is determined to obtain her selfhood and refuses to be a selfless mother. *The Awakening* is attacked for its devastating portrait of motherhood. Most reprehensible to the reading public is the idea that a mother could abandon her children. Edna is a female character who shatters the typical mold and challenges the mother archetype through her self-centered way of life. By looking at the author's own life, it is clear that Chopin's intention is not to undermine the role of motherhood, but to show that it is not the equivalent of female self-fulfillment. Yet, Chopin's assertion is threatening to the patriarchal society. Motherhood is an essential part of patriarchy. Adrienne Rich says that "patriarchy could not survive without motherhood… [it] [has] to be treated as axiom[s], as 'nature' itself, not open to question"[5]. That's why the novel is banned and Chopin's literary career is ruined.

In the novel, Edna is considered extremely fortunate for having a successful, generous husband, Léonce,as well as two smart, beautiful young sons, Raoul and Etienne. To the outside world, her life is considered perfect and her husband irreproachable. Her friends tell her that Léonce is "the best husband in the world"[6]. To this comment, "Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better" (*A*, 7). Edna is unable to effectively articulate to herself, her husband or her friends why she is not satisfied with her life. Although she realizes that many women with a family, money and security are more than content with their lot in life, Edna experiences a dull void in her existence.

Edna's relationship with her husband is rather problematic. Mr. Pontellier is aware that Edna does not return his devotion and passion for her. In fact, Edna often pays little attention to her husband: "He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him and valued so little his conversation" (*A*, 6). Edna has married Léonce out of a sense of social obligation and wish for security. On her part passionless, "[h]er marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of fate" (*A*, 15). At the beginning of the story, Edna views her lack of romantic love for her husband as a benefit. Her marriage is not based on love that could be transient: "She grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution" (*A*, 15). Edna also experiences ambivalence towards her children: "She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them" (*A*, 15). In this respect, Edna is regarded as strange, even unnatural. Mr. Pontellier wonders if Edna is "unbalanced mentally" (*A*, 43) as she tries to escape her role as a mother. He reproaches Edna for "her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children", thinking that "[i]f it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" (*A*, 6). Edna, in return, feels "an

indescribable oppression [that] filled her whole being with a vague anguish" (*A*, 7). Mr. Pontellier is a good husband only if he meets "a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife" (*A*, 43). Otherwise, he will be "devilishly uncomfortable" as long as "she's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women" (*A*, 49). Edna realizes that her lack of love for her husband and irregular affinity for her children are not socially acceptable. In fact, Edna always knows that she is different and learns to hide her true personality or else be scorned: "At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life-that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (*A*, 12). However, Edna's world changes irrevocably during her summer at Grand Isle when she is awakened to her true self and forced to confront the part of her that she has kept hidden her whole life.

Edna's unhappiness is clear from the onset of the novel where the Pontellier family is vacationing on Grand Isle, a mostly Creole community off the coast of Louisiana. Edna sees herself as being unlike other women at the resort. Elizabeth Leblanc suggests that Grand Isle "is an intensely patriarchal, intensely heterosexual community where the 'mother-women' dominate because they so perfectly represent the male construction of female sexuality…The women are valued according to how well they reflect, respond and submit to masculine ideals"[7]. Edna never fits into this community. As the narrator notes, "In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman" (*A*, 8). In the novel, the mother-women are somewhat ironically characterized as "women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (*A*, 8). The epitome of the mother-women is Adele Ratignolle, Edna's friend. Adele is an ideal mother of three children and pregnant with her fourth during the summer at Grand Isle. Unlike Edna, she is completely devoted to her husband and children, devoid of freedom or independence outside the social constraints of her wife/mother role. Adele, although very fond of Edna, simply can not grasp Edna's need for more than a husband and children. Edna, in return, attempts to explain to Adele that she is more than her prescriptive roles dictate: "Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children, or for anyone" (*A*, 36). She attempts to elaborate, although she is unsure that her explanation is adequate: "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (*A*, 36). It is clear that Edna is not one of these women who are trapped in motherhood. She does not busy herself with her maternal role. For Edna, this is not a fulfilling role and although she does seem to love her children, she feels free and peace in their absence: "…a radiant peace settled upon her when she at last found herself alone. Even the children were gone" (*A*, 54). Edna feels that she belongs to herself only when her

husband and children leave her alone. Cynthia G. Wolff writes that "Edna loves her children, however, she refuses to define her sexuality in terms of them"[8].

The alternative to the "soul's slavery" (*A*, 85) of the mother-woman is represented by Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna's other friend, "a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost everyone, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others" (*A*,20). Both Edna and Reisz become friends as neither fits into their community. Reisz supports herself by giving piano lessons. She is marginalized by her unwillingness to give up her music and become a wife and a mother. Unlike Adele, Reisz is not feminine and maternal. While Adele loves children very much, Reisz never hides her dislike of them: "She was dragging a chair in and out of her room, and at intervals objecting to the crying of a baby, which a nurse in the adjoining cottage was endeavoring to put to sleep" (*A*, 20). Reisz chooses to be a single woman without children to get rid of the bondage of family and develop her own career. Adrienne Rich says that women without children are regarded as "freaks of nature"[9]. Childless, Reisz fails to contribute to the continuity of the race. She is treated as a freak as she rejects motherhood. Both men and women hate her and keep saying that she is "partially demented" (*A,* 20). Edna alone is able to understand Reisz's wishes to live by and for herself.

As for Edna, she is beyond the two women. She is neither like Adele who is caught in motherhood, nor is she like Reisz who escapes from motherhood for her independence. Edna is not a mother-woman because she is determined to achieve self-realization. She is also not an independent woman as she is a mother with two children. Her struggle and suffering in drifting between the two models is the significance of the novel. Edna attempts to find a balance between the two women. She is a mother, yet she wants the independence and artistic freedom that Reisz enjoys. Thomas Bonner says that "[the] woman caught between the needs of motherhood and self becomes a symbolic concern in *The Awakening*"[10]. Edna tries to bridge motherhood and selfhood as implied in her married name "Pontellier" which means the one who bridges[11]. Later, she realizes that her struggle for autonomous selfhood entails a rejection of her responsibilities as a mother

In an attempt to be a mother-woman, Edna tries to model herself on Adele. We see that in her symbolic intention to paint Adéle: "Never had that lady[Adele] seemed a more tempting subject than at that moment, seated there like some sensuous Madonna, with the gleam of the fading day enriching her splendid color" (*A*, 10). Though Edna's painting is "a fair enough piece of work, and in many respects satisfying" (*A*, 10), she destroys it because it bears no resemblance to Adele. Deborah E. Barker illustrates that "[Edna] does not wish just 'to try her hand' at 'painting' but to 'try herself on Madame Ratignolle'"[12]. Through Edna's action of destroying the painting, Chopin indicates that Edna can not be a conventional mother-woman. Seeing Adele's doing night garments for her children, Edna "couldn't see the use of anticipating and making winter night garments the

subject of her summer meditations" (*A*, 8). No wonder Barker says that Adele "has given herself to her children 'body and soul'"[13]. When Edna tells her that she would give up everything for her children, but not herself, Adele replies, "but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that- your Bible tells you so. I am sure I couldn't do more than that" (*A*, 36).Barbara C. Ewell illustrates that "[Adele], who epitomizes female selflessness, can not even imagine having a self or anything other than her physical life to give up, so absorbed is she by the desires of others"[14]. No wonder Edna pities Adele for her "colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment" (*A*, 42). Adele will never know or seek to know life outside of motherhood. The fact is that "the two women didn't appear to understand each other or to be talking the same language" (*A*, 36). They certainly do not talk the same language as they are not the same kind of women. Thus, Edna's friendship with Adele, who rejoices in the identifying title of mother, only further punctuates her difference from others. In fact, through Edna's eyes, Chopin shows that woman has more needs, ambitions and wants than to simply be a mother. She clearly states that not all women are the motherly type.

Some critics blame Edna as a selfish mother who neglects her children. In fact, Edna does not neglect her children. She neglects her mother-woman image. Edna is a good mother, but not a full-time mother. Institutionalized by motherhood, women are supposed to be full-time mothers. Though Edna loves her children, she is not willing to be a selfless mother. When she stays with the children, she gives them "all of herself, and gathering and filling herself with their young existence" (*A*, 70). However, she still wishes to have her own time and her own self. She desires to be left alone: "[The children's] absence was a sort of relief, though she didn't admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed" (*A*, 15). The main aspect that sets Edna apart from other mothers is the fact that she does not see her children as a priority. She struggles with the fact that as she steps into motherhood, she will have to sacrifice part of herself to her children. Edna's dilemma comes from the fact that she wants to be a good mother for her kids, but at the same time she wants to protect her own identity: "I don't want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others-but no matter-still I shouldn't want to trample upon the little lives" (*A*,82). This preoccupation with wanting her own way is considered as selfishness because it belongs to a mother and mothers are generally expected to be self-sacrificing martyrs. Yet that Edna is still concerned with the "little lives", that is her children, demonstrates her maternal motivation in choosing, later, suicide and the fact that no other alternative exists for her self-actualized life. In so doing, Edna does, indeed, give her life for her children's sake to spare them the stigma of having a mother who abandons them. One critic says that "less stigma is attached to the children of a mother who literally takes her own life than to those whose mother figuratively

takes possession of her life"[15]. Rather than disregarding them in her decision to end her life, Edna "comes to acknowledge a responsibility towards her children to spare them the stigma her kind of life would attach to them"[16].

Edna is not able to try herself on Reisz either. Though Reisz has a secure sense of her own individuality, her life lacks love, friendship and warmth without which Edna can not live. Reisz's house is "cheerless and dingy" (*A*, 59). When Edna enters the room, she feels "chilled and pinched" (*A*, 59). Reisz is very lonely and has few friends. She exclaims: "Here comes the sunlight" (*A*, 59) when Edna comes into her room. Ivy Schweitzer says that "Edna rejects the masculine autonomy achieved by Mademoiselle Reisz because it is disconnected from the body. The misanthropic, self-possessed little musician makes music which shakes her audience but seems to leave her untouched. She is cold and sexless, even unnatural"[17]. Though Edna is captivated by the self-assurance and independence that Reisz possesses, she is not ready to give up her romantic aspiration. She enjoys her time at Reisz's house, but she wants more than the chaste existence that Reisz lives.

Unlike Reisz, Edna can not bear the lonely solitude and lack of romance in her life. It is through her relationship with Robert Lebrun that Edna fulfills her desires. Through her relationship with Robert, Edna's entire outlook begins to change: "In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" *(A*, 11). Filled with empowerment at this new sensation, Edna begins to change her life and her perception. She realizes that

> [t]he sentiment which she has entertained for Robert in way resemble that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel. She had all her life been accustomed to harbor thoughts and emotions which never voiced themselves. They had never taken the form of struggles (*A*, 36)

Unwilling to thrust aside the social conventions through his inappropriate relationship with a married woman, Robert leaves Grand Isle. During Robert's absence, Edna feels miserable, having this "biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied, that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded"(A, 35). Although returned to her status in the beginning of summer, Edna has transformed herself both with and without Robert. Edna's "fictitious self" (*A*, 43) that has been superficial and restrictive is now gone. Her true self finally emerges from the protective layers of societal conformity that she had spent her life hiding under. She becomes more obsessed with her own freedom of the soul, "resolv[ing] never again to belong to another than herself" (*A*, 60).

Moving to New Orleans, Edna is unwilling to perform her previously accepted duties as the matriarch of the Pontellier family. She effectively rejects her pre-Robert life to begin an autonomous existence. Once Edna experiences the

possibilities of a new life, she is unable to revert to her automatic acceptance of her prescribed obligations as a wife and a mother. She determines to lead a "new and unexpected line of conduct…resolv[ing] never to take another step backward" *(A*, 43). Hugh J. Dawson contends that Edna abandons her obligations towards her husband and children for shallow, capricious reasons: "Quite simply, Edna's mood has changed as she wants to be rid of cares she willfully committed herself to but no longer finds congenial"[18]. However, it is clear that Edna's awakening stems not only from spite or boredom, but from an overwhelming, persistent desire to be free. Ivy Schweitzer points out:

> As the gap narrows between her outer conformity and her inner rebellion, she begins not only to demand her rights as an individual and give voice to her thoughts and emotions, but to act upon them-as a romantic hero must, but a mother in this world can not[19]

Indeed, it is unacceptable for a woman, especially a mother to live for herself. Whether or not Edna is involved in her children's care, the fact of her being a mother entails the sacrifice of her freedom and desire to them.

Edna continues to experience every opportunity in hope of finding happiness and a sense of belonging. Although still desperately in love with Robert, Edna begins to find another man, Alcee Arobin, with whom she experiences sexual independence. Kissing Alcee is her choice, a decision based on attraction and not obligation: "It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire" *(A*, 62). Dorothy Goldman notes that Edna's sexual awakening is "the catalyst to self-knowledge, the medium through which Edna discovers her identity"[20]. This relationship awakens in Edna the realization that she has control over her sexual being. It demonstrates that sexuality is not confined to duty and procreation, but it can exist for her as a satisfying experience. Yet, Edna is blamed for having a sexual desire. Schweitzer points out that "[mothers'] desire should not be directed towards themselves, but towards others, children [and] husbands"[21]. Being a mother, Edna is supposed to have no desires and if she has, she must confine her desires to childbearing and motherhood without question.

Though Edna realizes that she should be overcome with guilt for abandoning her husband and children, she refuses to consider herself as a bad mother for following her needs and desires. She tells Alcee: "By all the codes I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But someway I can't convince myself I am" (*A*, 61). Edna thinks that wanting more out of life does not make her a bad mother. However, Edna is aware that she will be shunned for her decision:

> There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual (*A*, 70)

For Edna, the tradeoff of an autonomous life is worth the social stigma she willingly incurs upon herself.

In New Orleans, Edna keeps in touch with Adele and Reisz. Mrs. Reisz inspires Edna to cultivate her interest in painting. Edna likes painting because it gives her not only a sense of achievement, but also a chance for self-realization. Painting is a means through which Edna finds herself. Chopin says that "[Edna] went up to her atelier-a bright room in the top of the house. She was working with great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything, however, which satisfied her even in the smallest degree" (*A*, 43). However, Edna is not allowed to regard painting as her self-actualization. Her husband blames her: "It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family" (*A*, 43). Once again, Edna should not defy the convention while she has to remember her children at the same time. As a mother, she has to give up herself for the sake of her children. She is not free and is not permitted to have a full development of her creation. Patricia Lattin says that "[Edna] can not in her society discharge her responsibility towards her children and still live in complete freedom, experiencing self-actualization"[22]. Edna understands that "her role of a mother makes impossible her continuing development as an autonomous individual"[23]. Between her self-realization and her children, Edna can only choose one.

No doubt Edna's attempt at reinventing herself contradicts with her motherhood. While she feels committed towards her children, she begins to see them as usurpers of her identity, of her individuality. In recalling her own labor pains, when she attends Adele's labor, "Edna began to feel uneasy, she was seized with a vague dread […] With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene [of Adele's] torture" (*A*, 81). In her labor, Adele suffers so much that she "set her teeth hard into her under lip, and Edna saw the sweat gather in beads on her white forehead. After a moment or two she uttered a profound sigh and wiped her face with the handkerchief rolled in a ball. She appeared exhausted" (*A*, 81). At this moment, Edna feels "agony" at the violence of motherhood and seeks to "revolt" against what is perceived as the normal, natural and expected role of woman. Seeing Adele's agony reminds Edna of her maternal duties towards her children and she realizes that her dream of obtaining her selfhood can never come true. Even Adele, though exhausted, still

reminds Edna of her obligation towards her family, particularly her children: "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!" (*A*, 82). Yet, Edna feels that "to think of them [children]…had driven into her soul like a death wound" (*A*, 83). While Edna may be able to escape from societal expectations, she can not escape the fact that she has two children with all the accompanying responsibilities. As Schweitzer notes, "[Edna] is confronted with the stark reminder of that part of her physical nature she has tried to ignore in her flight to freedom-motherhood. Her children are a responsibility she can not evade"[24]. Therefore, one might question why Edna commits suicide after her return from Adele's house. Helen Taylor says that "[it] is her response to another woman's childbirth that makes her recognize the strong ties of woman to reproduction and motherhood leading to a sense of defeat and finally suicide"[25]. For Edna, the children represent "the danger and temptation of belonging to the procession of mothers"[26]. Hence the danger of losing her selfhood. This recognition forces her to take her life as she understands that there is no way for a mother to live for herself.

Although Edna regards her children as "part of her life [,] [b]ut they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul" (*A*, 85). That is the very reason that drives her to drown herself. Edna's search for an identity extends beyond that of the mother-woman role to which she is assigned and that ultimately, as Joyce Dyer says, "forces [her] into the sea. She sees no way for a mother to keep the freedom of her soul except to dissolve her attachment to her children"[27]. Before her death, "the children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them" (*A*, 85). In other words, she regards the children as her enemies, as a burden of responsibility which must be thrown off if her individual female self is to survive. Kathleen Lant says that "there is one role, one requirement Edna can not relinquish, and that is biological motherhood. Edna can reject the social role of 'mother-woman', but she can never escape her biological connection to her sons; they are always with her demanding"[28]. That is why she gives up her body to renounce the biological ties to her children.

Edna gives up her life for her children precisely because she refuses to give up her "self". According to Margit Strange, "Withholding herself from motherhood, insisting on her right to 'sacrifice' herself for her children, Edna owns herself"[29]. Edna does not want to be a self-denied person. She loves her children, but she does not want to be a mother first and an individual second. She refuses to lose her newly-awakened self for the sake of her children. In the end of the novel, Edna "cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air" (*A*, 85). Casting off the garment, Edna symbolically repudiates her duty as a mother.

Although the novel takes for granted that the bond between a mother and her children is the most profound love a woman can feel, Chopin, strikingly, depicts that bond as the most profound obstacle to female self- fulfillment. For Edna, motherhood acts as the catalyst to kill herself, and consequently decides her tragic end.

That the care of children can be not only a great joy but also a great limitation on a woman's freedom is obvious in Chopin's short story, *A Pair of Silk Stockings* (1896).Given a glimpse into the life of an impoverished mother whose life consists of struggling for the survival of her children without thinking of herself, the reader recognizes one of the paradoxes of human existence. Mrs. Sommers's permanent obligation and duty towards her children contrast with her momentary freedom when she spends money on herself. Genteel but poor, seemingly without support and alone except for her children, Mrs. Sommers experiences an awakening of her selfhood during her shopping spree. The yearning towards selfhood, while paradoxically trying to hold on to her responsibilities as a mother is the main struggle that Mrs. Sommers undergoes.

Finding herself "the unexpected possessor" (*PSS*,103) of fifteen dollars, Mrs. Sommers calculates for days about how to spend the money, initially thinking only of her children as is her habit. A previously well-off woman, Mrs. Sommers has become poor after marriage: "the neighbors sometimes talked of certain 'better days' that the little Mrs. Sommers had known before she had ever thought of being Mrs. Sommers" (*PSS,* 103). In fact she was born into a better class than the one into which she married. Yet, she herself never indulges in "morbid retrospection" (*PSS*, 104) of the "better days" before her marriage. She is a woman who makes her own way in a difficult world with "persistence and determination" (*PSS*, 104). As Linda Byrd states, "she is a genuine woman who neither shirks sacrifice for her family nor thinks of anything beyond her immediate life as a mother and martyr"[30]. Having "no time…to devote to the past", Mrs. Sommers is "absorbed" by the "needs of the present" (*PSS*. 104). Her "future [,] like some dim, gaunt monster [,] appalled her, but luckily [she thinks] tomorrow never comes" (*PSS*, 104). Far from the safety and comfort of her maiden life, Mrs. Sommers must fight for the mere survival of her children. Now she relishes "…the way in which [money] stuffed and bulged her worn old porte-monnaie giv[ing] her a feeling of importance such as she had not enjoyed for years" (*PSS*, 103).She, once again, experiences the pleasure that pocket money has given her as a young woman.

A woman's duty of raising a family is, sometimes, conflicted with her personal desires and needs. Mrs. Sommers has greatly sacrificed for her children. She always places the needs of her children above her own: "…between getting the children fed and the place righted, and preparing herself for the shopping bout, she had actually forgotten to eat any luncheon at all!" (*PSS*, 104). Never thinking of herself and her own needs, Mrs. Sommers browses through a busy store, feeling "a little faint and tired" *(PSS*, 104) from lack of nourishment. She, suddenly, finds

herself tempted by a pair of "soft, sheeny luxurious" (*PSS*, 104) stockings. She is unable to resist "holding them up to see them glisten, and to feel them glide serpent-like through her fingers" (*PSS*, 104). That "two hectic blotches came suddenly into her pale cheeks" *(PSS*, 104), as she purchases the stockings, indicates that she has been seized by a yearning more powerful than her commitment to her children. It is "the esthetic, sensitive self which has been dormant within her for so long, [that] suddenly springs alive…and leads Mrs. Sommers to spend more and more of the money on herself"[31].According to Barbara Ewell, "Literally weakened by devotion to others, Mrs. Sommers is unprepared for the real battle about to engage her": the "struggles with self-indulgence"[32]. Indeed, Mrs. Sommers is not in control of herself, but instead is intoxicated by the pleasure of meeting her needs and desires for one afternoon. She does not even chide herself for spending precious money on a frivolous purchase. In fact, "[s]he seemed for the first time to be taking a rest from that laborious and fatiguing function and to have abandoned herself to some mechanical impulse that directed her actions and freed her of responsibility" (*PSS*, 104). Ewell suggests that at this moment, "Mrs. Sommers relinquishes the strenuous exercise of self-discipline"[33]. This freedom allows her to spend the rest of her money free of guilt.

For a brief afternoon, Mrs. Sommers frees herself of her children and their needs. In doing so, she "experiences a sensuous moment that reawakens her female self"[34]. As she puts on her new black silk stockings, Mrs. Sommers relishes "the touch of the raw silk to her flesh! She felt like lying back in the cushioned chair and reveling for a while in the luxury of it" (*PSS*, 104). Mrs. Sommers possesses "inner delicacy of taste and quiet distinction about her"[35], but in her current life, no space or time for this exists due to the demands of mothering and financial responsibilities. Feeling free, she now senses her own beauty, when she replaces her shoes, but can hardly recognize her foot and ankle as belonging to her (*PSS*, 105) since it was so long ago that she observed her body. The ease of her former life, before she married and had children, is reiterated when she buys two high priced magazines like the ones "she had been accustomed to read in the days when she had been accustomed to other pleasant things" (*PSS*, 105). Now, wearing her stockings and boots with well fitting gloves give her "a feeling of assurance, a sense of belonging to the well-dressed multitude" (*PSS*, 105). Then, remembering her hunger and feeling weak, she decides to stop and have lunch at an elegant restaurant. For Mrs. Sommers, there will be no self-sacrificing, no getting busy with the needs of her children. She savors every bite of her delicious lunch. Mrs. Sommers's stateliness emerges when, as she leaves the restaurant, the waiter "bowed before her as before a princess of royal blood" (*PSS*, 105). She, actually, enjoys the unfamiliar experience of being served rather than serving others. Putting the finishing touch on her shopping day, she attends the theatre, an exalting experience only made by Mrs, Sommers's forgetting about her responsibilities towards her children for one day. At the theatre, she finds herself among

"brilliantly dressed women who had gone there to kill time and eat candy and display their gaudy attire" (*PSS*, 106). The world that she has entered for the day is the world of pleasure and luxury from which her place as a poor widow and mother excludes her.

On her way home, Mrs. Sommers has "a poignant wish, a powerful longing that the cable car would never stop anywhere, but go on and on with her forever" (*PSS*, 106). However, the cable car will stop and Mrs. Sommers will return to her dull, endless round of duty. Emily Toth suggests that Mrs. Sommers's shopping trip does not bring her happiness, but affliction:

> That Mrs. Sommers is filled with regret is clear. But regret for what? for the self-indulgence of a day with the money of a windfall? for the dissipation of an illusion of well-being? For the impossibility of freedom? for the life she has chosen? for the hungry, clamoring children who await her? Chopin lets us guess.[36]

Peggy Skaggs, however, notes that "no hint of censure for selfishness colors the picture of this young mother. Indeed, the reader feels deep compassion for her"[37]. Chopin carefully describes her as a selfless, loving mother who experiences one day of freedom. She has experienced an isolated excursion that allows her to regain her autonomy as a woman. Her only regret is that this experience is short-lived and that she must return to a way of life that does not allow her autonomy and freedom of expression. Motherhood has, once again, deprived Mrs. Sommers of her true self, her identity.

In another story dealing with race, motherhood again deprives a woman of something, but this time it is more than the luxuries Mrs. Sommers misses, it is her life. In *Desiree's Baby* (1892), the birth of a child causes hardship, then tragedy. From the beginning of the story, Chopin portrays Desiree as lacking a personal identity, rendering her as a tabula rasa upon which others project their "desires". Abandoned as a toddler, Desiree has no origin, background or stature when Monsieur Valmonde finds her one day at the gate of his plantation. Madame Valmonde enthusiastically welcomes Desiree as God's fulfillment of her fervent wish for a child. In fact, Chopin does not describe Desiree's personality, instead characterizing her by others' treatment of her as a possession. Her parents objectify her as "the idol of Valmonde" *(DB*, 95). Now, "beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere" (*DB*, 95), the grown Desiree is married to Armand Aubigny, a highly respected and wealthy heir. He claims her for his wife like new property and then pridefully brands her with"one of the oldest and proudest names in Louisiana" (*DB*, 96), thereby giving her a place of honor and providing her an identity within a highly regulated Creole society. Armand has an "imperious and exacting nature" (*DB*, 96). He imposes strict rules on his household that bring misery to his Negro employees. Yet, Desiree loves him in spite of his rough and harsh ways. The

narrator states that "[w]hen he frowned she trembled, but loved him. When he smiled, she asked no greater blessing of God" (*DB*, 96-7). But, later, marriage and the birth of his child transform Armand. Fatherhood softens the husband/master. Desiree tells her mother that "he hasn't punished one of them [Negroes] - not one of them-since the baby is born" (*DB*, 96).

When the baby is about three months old, things change. Desiree notices that "there [is] something in the air menacing her peace", and she detects "a strange, an awful change in her husband's manner" (*DB*, 97). Armand seems to be possessed by "the very spirit of Satan…in his dealings with the slaves" (*DB*, 97). Puzzled and miserable, the young mother realizes that the problem lies with her son whose skin develops darker, suggesting that one of his parents has a black ancestor. Within their pre-civil war plantation and community, such a child disgraces the Aubigny name and indicates a breach of social decorum. Being frightened, Desiree asks her husband about the meaning of the child's skin color and he tells her, "it means… that the child is not white; it means that you are not white" (*DB*, 97). In a frenzy of despair to prove her whiteness, Desiree hysterically shouts, "Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand" (*DB*, 97). Brash and prideful, Armand blames Desiree for the racial transgression and casts her out. No longer, loved, wanted or "desired", Desiree leaves with the baby in her arms, disappears into the bayou and never comes back. Armand's shocking discovery occurs several weeks later, while he is burning the belongings of his ex-wife, when he reads a letter written by his mother to his father: "I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery" (*DB*, 98). This means that Armand descends from a black heritage and, therefore, bears the responsibility of the child's dark skin.

In Desiree's suicide, Chopin conflates birth and death, exposing the threat of motherhood to a woman's aspirations. The child becomes the catalyst for Desiree's displacement and death. Although she wants nothing more than to please her husband and live happily with him, her child prevents the fulfillment of her desire. Motherhood, once again, proves inimical to a woman's individual wishes and undermines her limited power. In fact, *Desiree's Baby* expresses not only complicated racial discrimination, but also a woman's oppression and particularly a woman's lack of legitimate and recognized identity within her culture. Desiree's identity stems totally from her role as Armand's wife and mother of his child. Once he denies both her and the child, she loses personhood and, therefore, commits suicide and infanticide. Her only source of potential power-motherhood- works against her in this patriarchal culture, becoming a tool for her denunciation rather than her emancipation. Motherhood has destroyed everything in her life.

Chopin also gives examples of motherhood as creative and reparative. Just as the birth of Desiree's son at first serves as a healing purpose for Armand's harsh ways, in another story, *Athénaise* (1895), a young wife's pregnancy serves as a

binder in the relationship between husband and wife. The story explores a woman's enslavement by marriage, then her submission and celebration in motherhood. It emphasizes the power of motherhood over a woman's life, but this time in a positive manner.

The story begins with the free- spirited young wife, Athénaise, who has run away to her parents and refuses her husband's order to return back. Early in the story, Cazeau, Athénaise's husband, is described as "severe looking" with "coarse and stiff" hands and a manner that commands respect "and even fear sometimes"[38]. Chopin connects him with slave-owners by mentioning "his spur, which he had not removed upon entering the house, jangl[ing] at every step" (*A*,1,2). One may conclude that this domination has driven Athénaise away. However, Cazeau is considered to be a kind and generous husband. He never scolds or mistreats her. Athénaise herself admits that her grievance is not against Cazeau-the disciplined, practical, but caring husband-but rather against married life for which she feels "a constitutional disinclination" (*A*,2,3) because she considers it "a trap set for the feet of unwary and unsuspecting girls" (*A*,3,1). Cazeau also realizes his wife's discontent in their marriage: "The 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" (*A*, 1,2). Even though Cazeau recognizes a problem in his marriage, he still insists on keeping his wife and making her happy.

Feeling Athénaise's absence "like a dull, insistent pain", Cazeau decides to "find means to keep her at home hereafter" (*A*,1,2). Meanwhile, he continues to work very hard, while Athénaise, staying with her parents, enjoys her mother's cooking and the dancing parties her parents often host. Still somewhat immature, Athénaise wants life to be more fun, one without commitment and responsibility, whereas Cazeau, "a serious soul", "despised or neglected such pleasures" (*A*, 2,1). He is a mature, responsible man living in the real world. On the third day of Athénaise's absence, Cazeau goes to retrieve her from her parents' house, to "bring her back to a sense of her duty" (*A*,2,1). However, Athénaise will not feel any hint of duty or responsibility until she is carrying a child. Now, she just hates being married and the sight of such unpleasant things as her "[husband's] coats an' pantaloons hanging in [her] room; his ugly bare feet-washing them in [her] tub, befo' [her] very eyes" (*A*,2,3). As Linda Byrd points out, "[s]he wants the pretty, easy side of life, not the side that involves the realities of facing the less agreeable aspects of one's mate and partner"[39]. However, she married Cazeau "because she supposed it was customary for girls to marry when the right opportunity came" *(A*,2,2).

For all of Athénaise's fickleness, Chopin attributes her overwhelming unhappiness to the limited options available to her and few, if any, supporters of an unconventional life for a woman. Athénaise garners little sympathy for her unhappiness: "Her friends laughed at her, and refused to take seriously the hints which she threw out, feeling her way to discover if marriage were as distasteful to

other women as to herself" (*A*,4,1). Even her free-spirited parents insist that marriage is the best thing for her, the "wonderful and powerful agent in the development and formation of a woman's character..." and that Cazeau can be the "master hand", the "strong will that compels obedience" (*A*,3,1) in Athénaise. Both friends and family fail to allow Athénaise the self-possession she desires, and she flees again, this time to her last available alternative- the life of an urban, independent woman.

Athénaise's continued misery culminates in her plan to escape with her brother. After retrieving from her parents' house, Cazeau wakes up in the morning to discover that she has left during the night "as if she had been a prisoner and he the keeper of the dungeon" (*A*,5,1). This master/slave relationship does not appeal to either husband or wife. Cazeau does not want to play the part of the slave-owner and have Athénaise as slave. He wants an equal, someone with whom he can share his life. Though he loves her, Cazeau decides that Athénaise's choice to return back to him must be hers and made of her own free will.

After deserting her husband and now living in New Orleans at a boarding house, Athénaise first enjoys her freedom and life away from Cazeau. Once she has become acquainted with Gouvernail, "a liberal-minded fellow", since he requires nothing of her, Athénaise enjoys the "comforting, comfortable sense of not being married" (*A*,7,2). After spending few days in New Orleans, Athénaise gradually feels lonely and begins to "crave human sympathy and companionship" (*A*,8,1) and even Gouvernail "suspected that she adored Cazeau without being herself aware of it" (*A*,8,2). Athénaise seeks the attention of Gouvernail as Cazeau can not give her his full concentration for he must work hard to provide for their household. But she can't "fancy him loving anyone passionately, rudely, offensively, as Cazeau loved her" (*A*,9,7).

In the midst of her happiness for being free, Athénaise decides to go back to Cazeau and the life she used to detest after discovering that she is pregnant. Chopin's description of Athénaise's reaction to this news reveals the transformation she undergoes: "Her whole being was steeped in a wave of ecstasy. When she …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" (*A*,10,1). Learning to view herself as a mother seems easier than seeing herself as a wife. Athénaise can not wait to go home and resume her marriage. With a "a sensuous tremor", she thinks of Cazeau and whispers his name, feeling, suddenly, "impatient to be with him" (*A*,10,1). Unlike Edna, Athénaise's sensual awakening is caused by the discovery of her pregnancy. Arriving home and now ready to accept the responsibility that is required of her, she thinks of nothing but Cazeau and their union. As Cazeau "clasped her in his arms, he felt the yielding of her whole body against him. He felt her lips for the first time respond to the passion of his own" (*A*,11,1). He has always felt this passion, but she has had to discover hers. As Peggy Skaggs points out, Athénaise finds that perspective motherhood not only

offers a role in which she feels comfortable, but also releases her pent-up love for Cazeau[40]. But Skaggs further argues that Athénaise pays a price for attainting wifehood and motherhood: "She has sacrificed her name and more; she has also sacrificed her autonomy, her right to live as a discrete individual. Athénaise Miche exists no longer"[41]. Perhaps many years later, this young wife and mother will resemble Mrs. Sommers in giving up all her longings and desires to meet the needs of her family. As Athénaise and Cazeau embrace each other, they hear "[a] little Negro baby…crying somewhere" (*A*,11,1), just as at the beginning Cazeau has heard a baby "crying lustily" (*A*,1,2). This device is used at the beginning and end of the story, offering a glimpse of harmony achieved through motherhood.

Motherhood as a prerequisite for a rich, full life also emerges as a prominent theme in another short story, *Regret* (1894). Unlike Mrs. Sommers who discovers the great limitation her children put on her freedom, Mamzelle Aurélie of *Regret* realizes that her life lacks the great joy induced by loving and caring for children. Aurélie feels no remorse for her decision many years ago to remain single until she realizes that her maternal instincts have been alive under the surface all along. A woman's need to feel maternal love, even if she is without a child, is a common theme in Chopin's work. In *Polydore* (1895), another short story, a spinster finds her only pleasure in life by caring for an orphaned boy. Unlike Aurélie, she is able to devote her whole life to this task. Aurélie has only two weeks to experience motherhood.

Chopin begins the story with a description of Mamzelle Aurélie. She is a strong, independent woman who has never found the need for a relationship or marriage. She has never been in love and does not regret declining the only marriage proposal she received when she was young. She, therefore, lives "quite alone in the world, except for her dog Ponto"[42]. Aurélie possesses a shrewd business sense which has allowed her to be a land owner and a successful farmer. Aurélie's character embraces masculine traits and a somewhat military demeanor. Her "good strong figure", dressed in "a man's hat about the farm, and an old blue army overcoat when it was cold, and sometimes topboots" (*R*, 1) contribute to her masculine image. Like a man, she manages her own farm and keeps a gun "with which she shot chicken-hawks" (*R*, 1). Aurélie's masculine traits influence her lifestyle. She is not exactly the epitome of a female in regard to her feminine side and maternal instincts. These are areas that Aurélie has ignored and allowed to remain dormant.

Children are so foreign to Aurélie that when she sees a group of them, along with their mother, approaching, it seems as if they "might have fallen from the clouds, so unexpected and bewildering was their coming, and so unwelcome" (*R*, 1). They are the children of her nearest neighbor Odile. The desperation of Odile's situation caused by the illness of her mother convinces Aurélie to take care of the children for her. Even though they are "unwelcome", Chopin's description of the children's arrival suggests their angelic nature. Once alone with the four children,

Aurélie contemplates them with a "critical eye" and a "calculating air" (*R*, 2), planning to have no feelings for them. She first thinks of performing her obligations towards them. Chopin writes that the course of action Aurélie determines is "identical with a line of duty"(*R*, 2) which, from her point of view, means feeding them. Yet, she soon discovers that "children are not little pigs; they require and demand attentions which were wholly unexpected…and which she was ill-prepared to give" (*R*, 2). Therefore, for the first few days, Aurélie lacks the experience and the necessary skills to care for the children.

Confronted with the unfamiliar experience task of dealing with children, Aurélie has to learn all the responsibilities that go with children such as providing nightgowns, baths, bedtime stories and songs in the rocking chair. Influenced by her experience on the farm, she first tries ordering the children to bed "as she would have shooed the chickens into the hen-house" (*R*, 2), attempting to treat them like animals. In a fit of frustration, Aurélie tells Aunt Ruby, the cook, "I'd rather manage a dozen plantation than fo' chil'ren" (*R*, 2). During the course of the children's two-week stay, Aurélie grows accustomed to "Ti Nomme's sticky fingers" and his "moist kisses", mending "torn slips and buttonless waists", "the laughing, crying, the chattering that echo through the house and around it all day long", "sleeping with little Elodie's hot, plump body pressed close against her, and the little one's warm breath beating her cheek like the fanning of a bird's wing" (*R*, 2). Living with children, Aurélie finds herself compel to "unearth white aprons that she had not worn for years" and to take down "her sewing-basket which she seldom used" (*R*, 2). The presence of children awakens the feminine and maternal aspects of her nature that have been long buried inside her and are only "unearthed" when she has to care for the children. She finally comes to terms with the part of her that she thinks she has lost. No longer does she complain, Aurélie now experiences the warm feelings of a close connection to children.

Unfortunately, these warm feelings quickly fade when Odile returns "unannounced and unexpected" and Aurélie is thrown "into a flutter that was almost agitation" (*R*, 3). After the departure of the children, Aurélie observes "[h]ow still it was when they were gone!...But she could still faintly hear the shrill, glad voices of the children" (*R*, 3). Entering the house, she notices all the work that needs to be done since "the children had left a sad disorder behind them" (*R*, 3). But she is not in a hurry to correct the mess as it is a "sad", gentle reminder of the children's presence. Not her usual strong self, Aurélie glances around the room "into which the evening shadows were creeping and deepening around her solitary figure" (*R*, 3). Her loneliness and emptiness are emphasized when she bursts out crying, "[n]ot softly as women often do. She cried like a man, with sobs that seemed to tear her very soul" (*R*, 3). Only now is this strong, "determined" woman weakened as her maternal instinct is awakened. Aurélie is consumed by anguish and sadness over allowing herself to be deprived of a life she thought she could exist without. For the first time. She begins to realize all the joy that life brings.

Then, when the joy-induced by having children- is taken away, she realizes how empty her life is. She feels "regret" that she does not live life to its fullest degree and that, now, she is too old to try doing so. Odile's children have, indeed, illustrated to Aurélie the tragedy of an unlived life.

The question of motherhood seems to haunt most of Chopin's works with contradictions as if it is at once a source of life-giving and a tool of self-destruction. In fact, Chopin enjoys motherhood tremendously, but her own maternal experience teaches her that being a mother involves many contradictory feelings. As seen in her works, children are indeed a blessing and fulfill a basic need for many women, on the other hand they are extremely demanding and limiting for others.

Note

[1.] Linda J. Byrd, "Maternal Influence and Children in Kate Chopin's Short Fiction" (November 28, 2000. URL: http://www.womenwriters.net/ domesticgoddess/pdf/Byrd/pdf) December 1, 2010.

[2.] Ibid.

[3.] Quoted in ibid.

[4.] Quoted in Andrea O' Reilly, "Maternal Conceptions in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Tar Baby*", *This giving Birth: Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Women's Writing*", eds. Julie Tharp and Susan MacCallum (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 2000), p.83.

[5.] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), p.43.

[6.] Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1999), p. 7. Subsequent references to *The Awakening*, *A Pair of Silk Stockings* and *Desiree's Baby* are to this edition and will be incorporated within the text respectively by the abbreviations *A*, *PSS* and *DB* with page number as follows: (*A*, page no.), (*PSS*, page no.) and (*DB*, page no.).

[7.] Elizabeth Leblanc, "The Metaphorical Lesbian: Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*", *Tulsan Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 15 (1996).

[8.] Cynthia G. Wolff, "Un-Utterable Longing: The Discourse of Feminine Sexuality in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*", *Studies in American Fiction*, vol.24, no.1 (1996).

[9.] Rich, p. 70.

[10.] Thomas Bonner, "Kate Chopin: Tradition and the Moment", *Southern Literature in Transition: Heritage and Promise*, eds. Philip Castille and William Osborne (Memphis: Memphis Up, 1983), p. 146.

[11.] Ivy Schweitzer, "Maternal Discourse and the Romance of Self-Possession in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*", *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*, ed. Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 182.

[12.] Deborah E. Barker, "The Awakening of Female Artistry", *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*, eds. Lynda S. Boren and Sara deSaussure Davis (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Up, 1992), p.63.

[13.] Ibid., p.72.

[14.] Barbara C. Ewell, "Kate Chopin and the Dream of Female Selfhood", *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*, p. 164.

[15.] "Margaret Fuller's Influence on Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Feminist Reading" (URL: http//www.wus.edu/fuller-influence-kate chopin-Awakening.htm.) October 11, 2010.

[16.] Per. Seyersted, *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Up, 1969), p. 28.

[17.] Schweitzer, p. 182.

[18.] Hugh J. Dawson, "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Dissenting Opinion", *American Literary Realism*, vol.26 (1994).

[19.] Schweitzer, p. 168.

[2o.] Dorothy Goldman, "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: Casting Aside that 'Fictitious self'", *The Modern American Novella*, ed. A. Robert Lee (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), p. 48.

[21.] Schweitzer, p. 169.

[22.] Patricia Hopkins Lattin, "Childbirth and Motherhood in *The Awakening* and in 'Athénaise'", *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's The Awakening*, ed. Bernard Koloski (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1988), p. 43.

[23.] Peggy Skaggs, "*The Awakening*'s Relationship with American Regionalism, Realism and Naturalism", *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's The Awakening*, p.111.

[24.] Schweitzer, p. 183.

[25.] Helen Taylor, *Gender, Race and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Up, 1992), p. 190.

[26.] Quoted in "Kate Chopin's 'female' View in *The Awakening*" URL:http://hubpages.com/hub/female-view-in-wakening.htmNovember(.)26,2010.

[27.] Quoted in David J. Caude, *Kate Chopin: An Annotated Bibliography of Critical Works* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.20.

[28.] Kathleen Margaret Lant, "The Siren of Grand Isle: Adele's Role in *The Awakening*", *Kate Chopin*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 123.

[29.] Margit Strange, *Personal Property*: *Wives, White Slaves and the Market in Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Up, 1998), pp.34-35.

[30.] Byrd.

[31.] Quoted in ibid.

[32.] Quoted in Bernard Koloski, *Kate Chopin: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1996), p.142.

[33.] Ibid.

[34.] Quoted in Allen Stein, "Kate Chopin's 'A Pair of Silk Stockings': The Marital Burden and the Lure of Consumerism", *The Mississippi Quarterly,* vol.57, no.3 (2004).

[35.] Quoted in Byrd.

[36.] Quoted in Koloski, p.142.

[37.] Quoted in Stein.

[38.] Kate Chopin, *Athénaise* (URL:http://classiclit.about.com/library/ bletexts/kchopin/bl-kchopin- athe-3.htm.) December 26, 2010, p.1,1. Subsequent references to *Athénaise* are to this net edition and will be incorporated within the text by the abbreviation (*A*) with chapter number plus page number as follows: (*A*, chapter no., page no.).

[39.] Byrd.

[40.] Cited in ibid.

[41.] Quoted in ibid.

[42.] Kate Chopin, *Regret* (URL:http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/kchopin/bl-kchopin/regret.htm.) December 26, 2010, p. 1.Subsequent references to *Regret* are to this net edition and will be incorporated within the text by the abbreviation(R) with page number as follows: (*R*, page no.).

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7. _____ *Regret URL:http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/kchopin/bl-kchopin/regret.htm. Retrieved December 26,2010.*
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الازدواجية في فكرة الامومة في اعمال مختارة لكيت شوبان

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الخلاصة:
ان قضية الامومة تلازم اعمال كاتبة القرن التاسع عشر الامريكية كيت شوبان. على الرغم من كونها امّاً, فإن شوبان اعطت صورة متناقضة للامومة في اعمالها حيث اشارت الى ان الأمومة مثلما هي تجربة محررة لبعض النساء فإنها مقيدة للبعض الاخر. هذا البحث يعالج الطبيعة المتناقضة للامومة في رواية اليقظة واربعة قصص قصيرة اخرى للكاتبة. لقد صورت الامومة أداةً لتدمير الذات في رواية اليقظة وقصتي زوج من الجوارب الحريرية وطفل ديزايري أما في قصتي الندم وأثينيز فأن الامومة مصدر مبعث للحياة.