

Public Controversy

The Awakening, written by Kate Chopin, was a book that was truly ahead of its time. The author of the book was truly a genius in her right, but yet she was seen as a scoundrel. At the time, it was "a world that values only her performance as a mother, whose highest expectations for women are self sacrifice and self-effacement." (?) The people of that era were not ready to admit or accept the simple but hidden feelings of intimacy or sexuality and the true nature of womanhood. Kate Chopin's book portrayed a woman of that time in a quite unorthodox way. In fact, [When she wrote the book in 1899, she] "achieved what was to prove her literary masterpiece and her ultimate break with popular taste" (Cully, Intro.)

That book was written in 1899. During this era women were seen as very proper and sophisticated individuals who were considered caretakers of the home. They wore an excessive amount of clothing and never exposed themselves in public or otherwise. If a woman was caught exposing herself in public, would be shunned and looked down upon. Loyalty and commitment to the family was very important during this time. Regardless of their family problems, they were expected to endure and stay faithful. [In fact,] " the nineteenth century's message of the supremacy of motherhood was so strong and so intense that it was absorbed into the systems of it's women - even women like Edna [, a character in Chopin's book,] who were not maternally inclined." (?) You could almost say that women were considered symbols of everything that is pure in the society in which they lived. Anything short of that was considered unacceptable.

Because of the time that Chopin lived in: " The Appearance in print of her most recent work had brought her harsh criticism and condemnation, as well as ostracism from many of those who had always formed a close-knit world of St. Louis society" (Cully , vii). Her book was seen as a vile and disgusting piece of literature. One critic of that time stated : "One cannot refrain from regret that so

beautiful a style and so much refinement of taste have been spent by Miss Chopin on an essentially vulgar story."(?). Most critics and readers of that era felt the same way as this critic did. People were not willing to put up with what they felt was a trashy novel. Thusly, it was banned for approximately 50 years. All of her colleagues shunned her and put her on a black list of sorts for writers. Her friends did not acknowledge her existence and she became an outcast in society. In 1904, Chopin died a lonely death. The only thing that survived to keep her memory alive was her writings.

Not only did her writings survive, but as time passed on, people began to see Chopin's true Genius. The appreciation for the novel grew and it became one of the more well known, and well loved novels of the time. Why did this happen? Well maybe it was because of the controversy it introduced. To tell the truth, " the misunderstanding that surrounds Edna's personal history, as well as the history of Chopin's novel itself, attests to the greatness of both Edna and her creator." (?)

Chopin went from being known as an outcast of society to a pioneer of the feminist movement. She was one of the first women to express herself fully without conformity to societies pressures. All of this happened because of her book. This book was named The Awakening.

