



The Awakening and Selected Short Stories

Kate Chopin

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This story of a woman's struggle with oppressive social structures received much public contempt at its first release; put aside because of initial controversy, the novel gained popularity in the 1960s, some six decades after its first publication, and has since remained a favourite of many readers. Chopin's depiction of a married woman, bound to her family and with no way to assert a fulfilling life of her own, has become a foundation for feminism and a classic account of gender crises in the late Victorian era.

The Awakening shocked turn-of-the-century readers with its forthright treatment of sex and suicide. Departing from literary convention, Kate Chopin failed to condemn her heroine's desire for an affair with the son of a Louisiana resort owner whom she meets on vacation. The power of sensuality, the delusion of ecstatic love, and the solitude that accompanies the trappings of middle- and upper-class life are the themes of this now-classic novel. As Kaye Gibbons points out in her Introduction, Chopin "was writing American realism before most Americans could bear to hear that they were living it." This edition includes selected stories from Chopin's Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie.

Readers and scholars have been discussing the novel's themes for a hundred years, and their views vary widely. Early critics condemned the book for its amoral treatment of adultery, and some readers today share that view. But from the 1960s on, most scholars and readers in the USA and abroad have come to think of Kate Chopin as "the first woman writer in her country to accept passion as a legitimate subject for serious, outspoken fiction."

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