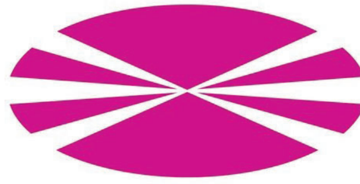

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GRAO EN INGLÉS: ESTUDOS LINGÜÍSTICOS E LITERARIOS

Beyond Gender: Sex, Class, and Ethnicity in Kate Chopin's Short Stories

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Table of contents

Abstract ... ii

Introduction ... 1

Part One: Theoretical Framework ... 4

1.1. Sex, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity ... 4

1.2. Intersectionality ... 7

Part Two: Literary Analyses ... 9

2.1. “At the ‘Cadian Ball” ... 9

2.2. “The Storm” ... 16

2.3. “Désirée’s Baby” ... 21

Conclusion ... 29

Works cited ... 31

Abstract

The object of study of this dissertation are three short stories by one of the most representative writers of nineteenth-century American literature, Kate Chopin. The author is specially appreciated by feminist literary critics for her exploration of the female identity in her novel *The Awakening* (1899). This project aims to demonstrate that gender must be studied alongside other analytic categories such as sex, class, and ethnicity through an analysis of the selected stories: "At the 'Cadian Ball" (1894), "The Storm" (1969), and "Désirée's Baby" (1893). In my studies, I also discuss the stories' form and content—characters, settings, descriptions, etc.—from an intersectional feminism perspective.

This project required the close reading of my object of study and the consultation of specialized dictionaries—such as *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* and *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*—and academic works about intersectionality—e.g., Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color". I also read several publications about Chopin's literary production, as the works of Holtman, Jeffers, and Toth, the latter being recommended by Kate Chopin International Society. Some of the key concepts addressed in the below pages belong to the fields of feminism and critical theory like gender, class, ethnicity, and intersectionality. The latter term is particularly relevant because it offers the possibility to remove the local color label from Chopin's works (Holtman). Therefore, analyzing the stories from an intersectional feminism approach allows the reader to understand the way society pressures individuals to stay within determined identity categories, and so interferes with class mobility and social change.

My dissertation is divided in two parts. In the first part, I explain the theoretical framework of this project. 1.1 consists of an explanation of the concepts of gender, sex, class, race, and ethnicity; it includes a summary of their academic history, as well as brief accounts of some terminological debates around them. 1.2 reviews the concept of intersectionality and

its application to feminist theory. The second part of this project applies the reviewed theoretical concepts to the analysis of “At the ‘Cadian Ball”, “The Storm”, and “Désirée’s Baby”. Each story takes one subsection of this part. The B.A. thesis ends with a conclusion, which gathers some of its key ideas in order to ratify the initial hypothesis: expanding upon previous feminist work, to challenge the traditional classification of Chopin’s short fiction as local color writing through an intersectional feminism perspective. It must be noted that, although the stories are not revolutionary in terms of defying social norms, they do question the analytical categories of gender, class, and ethnicity, as well as explore their boundaries.

Introduction

Kate Chopin was popularly known for her short fiction, while her novels were unnoticed or even condemned. *The Awakening* (1899) fell into oblivion until the 1950s when "scholars and others recognized that the novel is an insightful and moving work of fiction" (KC International Society). Feminism played a fundamental role in her literary revival, as "most of what has been written about Kate Chopin since 1969 is feminist in nature or is focused on women's positions in society" (KC International Society). However, critical attention to her novels rendered Chopin's short fiction uninteresting to the critics. This end-of-degree project attempts to revert this situation by means of studying three of her short pieces from an intersectional feminism perspective. In the following paragraphs, I will explain the aims of my thesis and the methodology through which I attempt to achieve them, as well the main bibliographical references used for this project. This introduction concludes with a description of this thesis's structure.

This project is motivated by a desire to remedy today's unfortunate treatment of Chopin's short fiction in comparison with that of *The Awakening*. In her stories, the coexistence of multiple ethnicities lies over a complex set of social dynamics which can only be understood from an intersectional feminism approach. Single-axis analyses have led to the simplistic classification of Chopin's short stories as local color fiction. Not only does this category misunderstand the complexity of her short fiction, but it is also, as argued by Judith Fetterly, a repressive act (qtd. in Holtman 75). Hence, with this paper, I hope to encourage explorations of Chopin's short works beyond a local-color interpretation.

As Chopin wrote in her review of Émile Zola's *Lourdes*, "truth rests upon a shifting basis and is apt to be kaleidoscopic" (qtd. in KC International Society). Chopin also places the society of her short stories under a kaleidoscopic lens. Hence, my contention is that, to completely appreciate her writing, gender must be studied alongside other analytic categories

such as sex, class, and ethnicity. To prove this hypothesis, I will analyze Kate Chopin's "At the 'Cadian Ball" (1894), "The Storm" (1969), and "Désirée's Baby" (1893) from an intersectional feminism point of view. Not only will I study these pieces thematically, but also stylistically, through a close reading of each one. My project includes an analysis of the characters and of how their social coordinates—i.e., gender, class, and ethnicity—shape both them and their relationships with each other. The elements which enable miscegenation and the consequences the characters must face afterwards are considered as well. Last but not least, I discuss the author's use of rhetorical devices in each story, such as her use of colors, or the symbolism behind natural phenomena.

Several sources of information have been consulted for this project. For instance, Maggie Humm's *Dictionary of Feminist Theory* summarizes the discussion about the terminology mentioned; additionally, Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan's *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies* contains detailed explanations of the academic debates around the concepts considered in these pages. Said works include not only definitions and summaries of academic debates, but also bibliographical references. They have been useful to identify gender, class, and ethnicity issues operating in the pieces analyzed in my paper.

Concerning intersectionality, the critical cornerstone of this BA thesis, Kimberlé Crenshaw must be mentioned as its introducer for feminist studies. Chopin's stories have been read and studied in Per Seyersted's edition of her complete works. Among the resources on Chopin as a writer, Kate Chopin International Society's website is one of the main references for this project. It has articles on each of the author's stories, which include lists of characters, the time and place of each narrative, themes, contextual information, critics' reviews, and bibliographical references.

To achieve my aims in an organized manner, this dissertation is divided in two parts. The first part includes two subsections in which I explain the theoretical framework. In 1.1.,

three concepts relevant for my analysis are discussed: gender, class, and ethnicity. This part expects to enlighten the reader about the differences between sex and gender and about the terminological debate between race and ethnicity.[1] 1.2. includes a review of intersectionality. As we will see, intersectionality may be used to combine methodologies of different disciplines or to introduce new perspectives in a particular field of study, such as feminism. The second part of this project applies the theoretical concepts reviewed before to the analyses of "At the 'Cadian Ball", "The Storm", and "Désirée's Baby". Therein, each story is studied in one subsection of this part.

[1] Considering not only the racist history behind the category "race", but also the scientific arguments against it, the word "race" will only be used in relation to the debate around this concept. In any other situation, the term "ethnicity" is preferred.

Part One: Theoretical Framework

1.1. Sex, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity

In this section, I approach the categories of sex, gender, class, and ethnicity by means of a succinct overview of feminist studies across time. Firstly, the non-biological nature of gendered behaviors is pointed out by feminist theory as early as in *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935), in which Margaret Mead already notices the social nature of gendered behaviors (Humm 106). The distinction between sex and gender was conceptualized to argue that "the actual physical or mental effects of biological difference had been exaggerated to maintain a patriarchal system of power and to create a consciousness among women that they were naturally better suited to 'domestic' roles" (Pilcher and Whelehan 56).

Building on Margaret Mead's work, later feminist scholars have contributed to a more in-depth study of gender. In *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972), Anne Oakley characterizes sex as a biological term, and gender as a psychological and cultural one. The author explains that gender systems may vary depending on society and culture precisely because of the social nature of gender; furthermore, binary gender systems are challenged through the existence of intersexed people, which leads certain cultures to admit "the failure of any simple dual classification by recognising not two but three sexual categories" (Oakley 158). In *The Second Sex* (1972), Simone de Beauvoir points out that gender differences are socially organized in a hierarchical opposition (qtd. in Pilcher and Welehan 56–7). The male gender is considered the norm in this structure, whereas the female one is understood as the otherness or the absence of masculinity. By considering the masculine as the norm, Beauvoir is stating masculinity's privilege over femininity in patriarchal societies.

Radical feminism goes beyond analytical work to make patriarchy responsible for gender systems and sexist societies. In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Shulamith Firestone argues that gender differences enable inequality between genders. Firestone claims that patriarchy is

exploiting women's capacity to reproduce (Pilcher and Whelehan 57). Similarly, Judith Butler conceives analytical categories, including gender, as the "*effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (qtd. in Pilcher and Whelehan 58); thus, she introduces the concept of performativity to explain how gender is displayed in society. Butler argues that gender conventions can only be annulled with subversive performances such as drag, a creative way of challenging institutional discourses later embraced by queer theory and third-wave feminism.

The task of defining the category of class presents considerable difficulties. Despite the apparent agreement on class based on "the differential distribution of economic resources" (Pilcher and Whelehan 13), the criteria to determine social classes are still in debate. While Marxist theories establish classes according to their relation to the means of production, contemporary analyses pay attention to the relationship between a person's level of occupation and their level of pay. Moreover, Bourdieu's model sees class "as being comprised of varying forms of 'capital', including economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital" (Pilcher and Whelehan 16). What most of these modes have in common is the consideration of class as the root of social inequalities.

Several social and economic developments conditioned the shift from conventional class analysis. Some of them are the restructuring of the labor market, feminist criticism of its failure to notice other categories, and post-modern or post-structuralist perspectives' concern with the local and the specific (Pilcher and Whelehan 14). Hence, class analysis has been criticized from several perspectives. The inclusion of other analytical categories for an accurate explanation of social inequalities led to numerous attempts at redefining class, most of which permeated the need for a social analysis mindful of the relation between class and said categories. Nowadays, it is agreed that the criteria used to determine a person's social class are inevitably entangled with other analytical categories such as gender or ethnicity (Pilcher and

Whelehan 15). As a result of this criticism, a more nuanced understanding of class has been consolidated. Recent definitions of class are rooted on the consideration that a person's identity in society is conditioned by more than just one category. Some proposals use Bourdieu's model of class because of its capacity to reflect the interaction between class and other analytic categories.

Likewise, race and ethnicity are closely related concepts in social studies. The biological concept of race was the basis of the nineteenth century's racial segregation of humankind based on physical features such as skin color (Pilcher and Welehan 132). This organization of humanity determined a hierarchical structure of human races in which non-white people—Asians, Blacks, Latinos etc.—were considered inferior to white people. During the twentieth century, development on genetics enabled biology to demonstrate the absence of biological evidence to sustain the existence of more than one human race. At this point, scientific knowledge and common sense separated due to the generalized use of the word race: "large sections of the population, and indeed whole societies, continued to conduct themselves as though they [races in the biological sense] did [exist]" (Mason 7). Despite the general acceptance of the biological arguments against the concept of race, some sociologists still defended its use by arguing that this idea is still present in society and affects its structure; thus, the term should not be abandoned. Other scholars pointed out that its use perpetuated racism (Fenton, qtd. in Pilcher and Welehan 132–3), as it refers to a category which has been proved not to exist and which has enabled a system of social inequalities. From this perspective, it became necessary to coin a different analytical tool.

The concept of ethnicity emerged to define minority groups in terms of social and cultural differences instead of physical ones, despite race still being generalized in non-academic contexts. Ethnicity is an anthropological category used to characterize "the culture of a distinctive, sometimes racially distinct, group" (Humm 82). Other definitions highlight the

importance of ethnic "belonging to a particular group and sharing its conditions of existence" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 8); however, physical appearance is still considered a possible determinant of ethnicity by some scholars. For example, Modood et al. list skin color as an example of a potential factor to determine ethnicity, although they warn about the relational, context-dependent, and non-essential nature of ethnic credentials to avoid misinterpretations (Pilcher and Whelehan 133).

1.2. Intersectionality

Intersectionality in feminist studies was introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. This "provisional concept linking contemporary politics with postmodern theory" (Crenshaw 1245) is used to challenge the assumption that identity categories are separate and the consequent tendency to oversee how they interact. According to this author, both feminism and identity politics challenge the idea that social differences are based on power and dominance and argue that they could be conceptualized as the foundation for social empowerment and reconstruction. However, contemporary politics and postmodern theory also overlook intragroup differences, causing the limitation of women's identities to just the dimension of gender and the reduction of ethnic groups' identities to their ethnicities. Crenshaw explains that non-intersectional feminism in the context of violence against women is problematic "because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class" (1242).

The author illustrates the importance of intersectional approaches to feminism by analyzing violence against Black women from intersectionality. According to her studies, government institutions and organizations of civil rights neglect ethnic minority women's situation under the argument that the debate about the oppression they are subjected to might be detrimental to the antiracist and feminist fights. As a result, non-intersectional feminist

approaches are proved incapable of comprehending the brutal subjugation of ethnic minority women to more than one system of power.

Cho et al. defend intersectionality to "have been posed more as a nodal point than as a closed system" (788). This means that there more than one intersectional methodology. Intersectional studies consider the complexity of an object by means of approaching it from different perspectives; however, the methodology followed may vary depending on the object and the perspectives from which it is studied. Many research projects related to intersectionality emerge differently from this perspective. For MacKinnon, identity categories may be conceptualized as a byproduct of social hierarchies and, subsequently, a source for social inequality (qtd. in Cho et. al 798). For its part, Black feminism emphasizes power structures' role in setting the life conditions in which black women are racially and economically marginalized, constituting "multi-layered and routinized forms of domination" (Crenshaw 1245). Moreover, intersectional studies have been concerned with how to resist patriarchy's systemic forces and reshape the modes of resistance beyond single-axis approaches.

In what follows, I will examine Chopin's "At the 'Cadian Ball" (1894), "The Storm" (1969), and "Désirée's Baby" (1893) from an intersectional perspective. Paying attention to the social configuration of the stories' characters—i.e., their gender, class, and ethnicity—, I analyze the intersectional dynamics which condition their existence and their relationship with other characters.

Part Two: Literary Analyses

Literary critics seem to agree on the proto-feminist nature of Kate Chopin's production, as her main characters are often women who struggle to break free from oppression. However, most studies of the writer's construction of Southern identities are centered in *The Awakening*, leaving her short fiction aside. Pryse thus questions the unequal treatment of her short stories from its very classification as local color writing—a category characterized for the white middle-class lens from which regional ethnicities are presented (Holtman 75). Holtman argues that Chopin's short fiction has been unfairly classified due to the incapacity of single-axis feminist readings to understand the complex entanglement of gender with class and ethnicity. In order to complete this intellectual vacuum, the second part of this project brings attention to Chopin's short pieces through an intersectional reading of "At the 'Cadian Ball", "The Storm", and "Desirée's Baby."

2.1. "At the 'Cadian Ball"

This section of my thesis starts with some general information about of "At the 'Cadian Ball". It is followed by an analysis of the interactions between the protagonists which reviews several aspects about their characterization—especially, their intersectional coordinates in Cajun society. Next, I include a brief note on the language use of some of them. Finally, three symbolic events of the story are discussed: the meeting in Assumption, the cyclone, and the Cajun Ball.

"At the 'Cadian Ball" was first published in *Two Tales* in 1892 and later included in Chopin's collection of short stories *Bayou Folk* (1894). The story begins with Bôbinot's reluctance to attend the upcoming Cajun ball, as he fears meeting Calixta, with whom he is painfully in love. However, he changes his mind after learning that Alcée Laballière will attend the ball too. Alcée is an impulsive Creole planter whose plantation has been spoiled due to a cyclone; besides, he had an affair with Calixta in Assumption before. His presence at the ball

is ominous because he is deeply affected by the loss of his plantation: not only does Bôbinot fear what he might do to Calixta, but so does Clarisse, Alcée's cousin—thus, also a Creole. "At the 'Cadian Ball" ends with the establishment of two couples: Calixta and Bôbinot's, and Clarisse and Alcée's.

The protagonists of "At the 'Cadian Ball" belong to different ethnicities and social classes. The Laballière family—Madame Laballière, Alcée, and Clarisse—is a Creole family who owns plantations. Therefore, they belong to the middle class. Oppositely, Bôbinot belongs to the Cajun community. Not only in terms of ethnicity, but also in terms of class, his position is inferior to that of the Laballière family. Calixta shares Bôbinot's economic class; however, her mixed ethnicity complicates her social standing, as I will explain below—it can be advanced that she is closer to Bôbinot than to Alcée in the ethnic hierarchy. This situation conditions the characters' interactions and the story's ending: because of miscegenation ideas,[2] people from different groups did not marry at the time in America. In fact, in the twentieth century, "marriages across the color line were rendered explicitly illegal in the South, as well as in parts of the North and West. The consequences of intersectional marriages ranged from simply declaring such unions null and void to imposing fines or imprisonment" (Hodes 371).

It is necessary to study the characters from an intersectional lens to understand their interactions. Bobinôt a is a "big, brown, good-natured" (Chopin 219) Cajun farmer who is painfully in love with Calixta. Sympathy for this character is achieved through his gentle characterization at the beginning of the story: his dull looks, the appreciative adjective "poor" (Chopin 223), and the manifestation of his suffering from his unrequited feelings for Calixta: "For what came of those balls but heartache, and a sickening disinclination for work the whole

[2] The word miscegenation was coined by the Democrats during the 1864 campaign of the United States presidency. It is a pejorative term used to refer to "sexual liaisons that cross the color line" (Hodes 370), which existed since "the time of earliest contact in the colonial South, where white indentured servants and Black slaves labored in the same households". The first anti-miscegenation laws were passed in the late seventeenth century to "prevent the growth of a free African American population" and lasted until the twentieth century.

week through, till Saturday night came again and his tortures began afresh? Why could he not love Ozéina, who would marry him tomorrow; or Fronie, or any one of a dozen others, rather than that little Spanish vixen?" (Chopin 219). The result is a character of low social, economic, and ethnic standing, and unimpressive physical appearance. Bobinôt's name enhances this dull impression due to its reminiscences to the French word for cattle (i.e., *bovin*). His name may cause sympathy, but it also indicates his position in the economic hierarchy of society.

Alcée Laballière occupies a more privileged position than Bobinôt in the story's picture of Southern society because he is a Creole planter, while Bobinôt is a Cajun farmer. This difference is manifested in terms of color, as the young planter is associated with grey. Alcée is a middle-class Creole also romantically interested in Calixta, despite his feelings for Clarisse, with whom he flirts while being dirty from work. His dirtiness not only contrasts with Clarisse's propriety, but also seems to hint at his prior scandalous encounter with Calixta as a stain on his name—an encounter I will discuss below. In addition, the greyish colors associated with him after the disaster of the cyclone further emphasize that, while he is more privileged than Bobinôt, he does not belong to the top of the social ladder. Alcée's characterization as an elegant gentleman is also supported by the passage in which Bobinôt and him are compared—Alcée's beauty and elegance contrast with Bobinôt's clumsiness and dullness. Moreover, his surname is a French word related to dancing—according to Kelley, "'one who dances' is a fitting description for this man who oscillates between two loves, his wife and Calixta" (351).

Calixta is a woman of Cuban ancestry brought up in the Cajun society. Her description under Bobinôt's perspective succeeds in portraying an outstandingly beautiful young woman of mixed features, charming voice, and enticing personality. The combination of her blue eyes, blonde hair, voice, and personality result in something close to a fetishizing characterization of the different as exotic. Looking at the description of her voice, "with cadences in it that must have been taught by Satan" (Chopin 219), it does not seem farfetched to add that this character

is influenced by the archetype of the temptress. Calixta is thus portrayed as a deceiving, devilish character, the counterpart of Clarisse's angel-like characterization (Núñez Puente)—which I will discuss later. The scene of her rendezvous with Alcée reinforces this idea.

The name "Calixta" emphasizes the character's sexuality, in contrast with Clarisse's purity, through flower imagery as well as through allusions to Greek mythology. Some scholars see in Calixta's name an extension of Chopin's flower imagery. Her name "underscores her sexuality by enhancing a structural metaphor at the heart of the story, in which her sexual receptivity to Alcée parallels the opening of a flower" (Baker 225). Moreover, her name is a variant of the name "Caliste", a nymph of Arcadia loved by Zeus (see Kelley 350).

Alcée Laballière's behavior at the ball is the result of his strong frustration caused by the cyclone that destroyed his plantation. According to what Bruce—Alcée's Black slave—tells Clarisse right after his leaving towards the Cajun ball, "he [Alcée] go to de chimbly an' jerk up de quinine bottle an po' a gre't hoss-dose on to he han'. An' he swalla dat mess in a wink, an' wash hit down wid a big dram o' w'iskey w'at he keep in he room, aginst he come all soppin' wet outen de fiel'" (Chopin 222). Once inebriated, Alcée leaves his house in the middle of the night to attend the Cajun ball, where Calixta's mind-altering presence aggravates his condition. This leads to their romantic scene at the bench. His reaction after Clarisse's arrival enhances the above-mentioned contrast between Calixta and Clarisse. Just as her name is associated with the word "clarity", Clarisse's appearance in the scene returns Alcée to his senses. According to the narration, "For an instant confusion reigned in Alcée's thoughts, as with one who awakes suddenly from a dream" (225).

The narration subtly reveals details of Calixta's life as a person of mixed ethnicity. She is treated with more flexibility under the premise that her Cuban ancestry is an obstacle for her to fit completely in the Cajun society; therein, "For that reason the prairie people forgave her much that they would not have overlooked in their own daughters or sisters" (219). In other

words, Calixta is reduced to her Cuban ancestry and consequently outcasted as a foreigner to the community, despite her upbringing as a Cajun, which is symbolized in her capability of speaking "fine 'Cadian French" (219).

Calixta's position as a foreigner in the Cajun community changes when she accepts Bobinôt's marriage proposal. The sentence "She turned her face, that was almost ugly after the night's dissipation" (226) suggests that her earlier portrait as an unattainable, exotic creature transforms into that of the future wife of a lower-class Cajun man. Paradoxically, the fall of the romanticizing, fetishizing lens under which she had been previously described confirms not only that Calixta had been viewed as a stranger to the Cajun community, but also that she is considered a trophy by her suitors.

During the ball, Calixta appears in a white dress, symbolizing a purity which contrasts with her image after her encounter with Alcée Laballière in Assumption (see Chopin 219). Their scene at the bench during the narration constitutes the repetition of their "liaison across the line of color" (Hodes 370). In addition, the fact that her white dress is stained during her walk with Bobinôt seems an indication that she is finally acquiring the colors of her future husband, who, as said before, is described on several occasions as a brown man.

Clarisse's description clashes with that of Calixta at several levels. While Calixta had been introduced as an eye-catching, exotic woman with a strong first impression due to her Cuban ancestry, Clarisse's beauty is delicate and sophisticated. Chopin continues using flower imagery in her description of Clarisse: "Dainty as a lily; hardy as a sunflower; slim, tall, graceful, like one of the reeds that grew in the marsh" (Chopin 220). Even her name suggests more finesse than Calixta's—it fits the "picture of shimmering clarity implied by her name, in both her high-minded conduct and in her purposeful distancing from the seamier side of life" (Kelley 351). Her sense of propriety and decorum, manifested in her rejection of Alcée's "hot, blistering love-words" (220) and in her later disapproval of Alcée's participation in the ball,

clashes with Calixta's tolerance of Alcée's advances, not only at the ball, but also in Assumption.

Besides the four protagonists, other characters mentioned in the story enrich Chopin's picture of Southern society. Among them, Alcée's slave, Bruce, is a key character for intersectional analyses. Allusions of Alcée's plantation hint at the presence of slavery in the community; however, it is Bruce who completes the image of a social woven made up by Creoles, Cajuns, and Black people. This representation is complicated by Calixta, who is regarded as neither a Cajun nor a foreigner by the community, and whose only chance to integrate is abandoning her foreign ancestry to marry a Cajun.

Nevertheless, while Calixta has the possibility to be included, Black people are directly confined to the margins of the community, and of the story. Alcée being a planter and having a Black slave are the only direct mentions of Black people. Additionally, when the narration introduces Alcée's arrival at the ball, the existence of Black people is implicitly acknowledged in the sentence "Any one who is white may go to a 'Cadian ball, but he must pay for his lemonade, his coffee and chicken gumbo" (Chopin 223).

Another formal aspect which enhances the verisimilitude of Chopin's culturally diverse community is the management of the characters' language. The influence of the French language is present throughout the entire story as it circles around Cajuns and Creoles. The better positioned a character, the less frequent their use of French lexicon—despite other linguistic features being undeniably affected by this language. Besides, Bruce's speech illustrates the way Black people talked, which differs from those of Creoles and Cajuns. This is especially present in his only long dialog with Clarisse (see Chopin 222). Moreover, the scene of Alcée and Calixta's rendezvous at the ball includes a brief comment about their language choice: "They belonged to the younger generation, so they preferred to speak English" (Chopin 224). This sentence summarizes the functioning of structural dynamics

aiming to absorb the Creole and Cajun ethnic particularities into an English-speaking American norm. These dynamics are most likely rooted in class hierarchy and economic aspirations.

The rendezvous in Assumption is a strongly symbolic event which affects social relations in the story and exposes structural issues. Although it is an incident prior to the beginning of the story, the rumor's impact affects the characters in a rather analogous way. Assumption is first mentioned at the beginning of the story when the narration projects Bobinôt's inner worries. Despite the superficial treatment of this memory, the event's erotic impact is illustrated in the rumors mentioned to have circulated and in Fronie's quarrel with Calixta; most importantly, it shows in the fact that Alcée's presence at the ball triggers Bobinôt to attend it too for fear of what might happen between Calixta and the Creole.

Assumption is next mentioned during Alcée and Calixta's rendezvous at the ball. This time, the reason behind the uproar among the Cajuns and the Creoles is revealed: Alcée and Calixta had met previously in Assumption, which equally outraged Cajuns and Creoles. Clarisse mentions this event a third time returning from the ball with Alcée. She claims to be incapable of standing the idea of him repeating the story again because a love affair with a lower-class, (half-)Cajun young woman like Calixta would create another situation that would further tarnish his name.

Critical observation of the Assumption story's treatment reveals a subtle, but loud pressure for individuals to remain within their own social groups. It is not coincidental that the story is silenced and buried into oblivion by members of each social group yet talked about by the people involved. Having Bobinôt and Clarisse reminisce it helps disguise this structural force as fear and jealousy of two lovesick youngsters; however, the Assumption event is more than just a love affair: it exposes the fact that miscegenation ideas operating in society render the relationship between Alcée and Calixta impossible. This structural force works towards maintaining the status quo of the Southern societal fabric.

Another symbolic event is the cyclone which spoils Alcée's rice plantation and ruins his prospective class rise. The incident is of common knowledge to the Cajun community. Curiously enough, the story centers on the consequences of the disaster upon Alcée's plantation; although Cajuns and Black people must have suffered from it as well, their situation is not even considered in Kate Chopin's narration. By silencing the suffering of other ethnic communities, Alcée's frustration gains enough importance to make his presence at the Cajun ball problematic—judging from the attendants' whispers. Not only is it dangerous for Calixta, reason why Bobinôt had decided to participate; it is also detrimental for the Creole, for whom Clarisse intervened at the ball.

From an intersectional perspective, it may be said that "At the 'Cadian Ball" reflects key issues of nineteenth century Southern society. The rivalry forced upon women in terms of marriage prospects is reflected in the quarrel between Calixta and Fronie narrated in Chopin (219–20), as well as in the contrast between the characters of Calixta and Clarisse. The cyclone brings to our attention not only the difficulty of class rise, but also—as it has been commented on before—the silencing of unprivileged groups. The story's conclusion acknowledges societal worries about preventing miscegenation, as the author sets her characters in socially acceptable couples—neither ethnically nor economically mixed.

2.2. "The Storm"

In this chapter, I will provide a few introductory details on "The Storm", followed by an analysis of the characters' social and economic standing, the formal devices used in the story's climax scene, Chopin's use of colors, and the symbolism of natural phenomena. "The Storm" is the sequel to "At the 'Cadian Ball" which Chopin never submitted for its publication. It takes place five years later and is structured into five sections. In the first one, Bôbinot and Bibi are at Friedheimer's store when it starts to rain. In the second one, Alcée Laballière finds shelter from the downpour at Calixta's place. While waiting for the storm to pass, Calixta and

Alcée make love. Next, Bôbinot and Bibi's return home for dinner after the rain is over. In the fourth section, Alcée writes a letter to Clarisse, his wife, who is out of town. Finally, Clarisse reads of her husband's letter and summarizes her stay at Biloxi with their babies.

Regarding its characters, "The Storm" may be said to begin more peacefully than "At the 'Cadian Ball". The main characters are married within their social, ethnic, and economic classes: Alcée Laballière has married Clarisse, while Calixta has accepted Bôbinot's marriage proposal. Both couples have children and live apparently uneventful lives. This may partially explain some of the characters' changes. For instance, Alcée Laballière does not behave impulsively or violently; he might be considered "a well-behaved, charming gentleman" (Toth 206). Likewise, Calixta's Cuban ancestry disappears in "The Storm"; since she has become the "over-scrupulous housewife" (Chopin 595) of a Cajun farmer, she shares his social, economic, and ethnic standing.

In addition, Bôbinot is characterized in contrast with his four-year-old son named Bibi. In the first section of "The Storm", Bibi is described as a wise-looking boy with whom Bôbinot can communicate "on terms of perfect equality" (Chopin 592). This introduces a subversion in the father-and-son hierarchy, therefore undermining Bôbinot's figure (Núñez Puente). Adults are supposed to be guiding figures for children. When he and Bibi get stuck in the store because of the storm, the child comments that Calixta must be afraid. Bibi does not seem to particularly need reassurance during this scene; nevertheless, Bôbinot tries to reassure him like any parent would do. He tells his son that Calixta will shut the house and that she may not be alone that evening. He fails because Bibi points out that, in fact, Calixta will be alone during the storm. In the third section, Bibi becomes the "picture of pathetic resignation" (Chopin 595) as his father cleans the mud off him. There seems to be another subversion of their father-and-son's relationship in this scene. Finally, Clarisse, who only appears briefly in the fifth section, is a middle-class Creole housewife who has recently had children. She is absent from the events of

“The Storm” as she is with her babies at Biloxi. Her vacation is allowing her to “restore the pleasant liberty of her maiden days” (596) as she is exempt from her “intimate conjugal life” (596) with Alcée.

Two elements lead to the consummation of Calixta and Alcée’s affair in the climax of “The Storm”. On one hand, several allusions to the past increase sexual tension between the characters. Calixta’s beauty is rescued from “At the ‘Cadian Ball”. In the prequel, Calixta’s description placed her almost as a stranger to the Cajun community: she was reduced to her Caribbean ethnicity when her behavior estranged from the norm; insulted, when the community could not tolerate her actions; and objectified, as Alcée’s attraction to her was closely related to her ethnicity. As advanced in my comment of “At the Cadian Ball”, Calixta has acquired Bôbinot’s social standing through marriage. While her beauty remains unchanged, not once is her ethnicity mentioned in “The Storm”. Thus, she is now the “over-scrupulous housewife” of a Cajun farmer (Chopin 595).

In “The Storm”, Calixta “had lost nothing of her vivacity. Her blue eyes still retained her melting quality; and her yellow hair, dishevelled by the wind and rain, kinked more stubbornly than ever about her ears and temples” (Chopin 593). Such a vibrant image resuscitates Alcée’s “old-time infatuation and desire for her flesh” (594). Calixta’s portrait as a woman with blue eyes, yellow hair, red lips, and white neck and bosom is not only reiterated as the distance between both characters disappears, but also completed by several elements which increase this moment’s eroticism. Calixta’s lips are “as red and moist as pomegranate seed” (594) and contrast with her white neck and bosom (Núñez Puente). The juxtaposition of the purity of white and the eroticism of red—a literary symbol for passion—further disturbs Alcée. Lastly, the “drowsy gleam” (Chopin 594) of her melting eyes “betrayed a sensuous desire” (594). Chopin uses this to reveal that Alcée's desire is mutual as well as to introduce

the daydream-like atmosphere which frames their affair, as I will discuss below. At this point, Calixta and Alcée are too enticed with each other to stop.

The tension between the characters finally explodes thanks to Alcée's allusion to their meeting in Assumption:

> He had kissed her and kissed and kissed her; until his senses would well nigh fail, and to save her he would resort to a desperate flight. If she was not an immaculate dove in those days, she was still inviolate; a passionate creature whose very defenselessness had made her defense, against which his honor forbade him to prevail. Now well, now her lips seemed in a manner free to be tasted, as well as her round, white throat and her whiter breasts. (Chopin 594)

This passage compares the image of Calixta from the past with her present figure. Chopin reiterates the contrast between purity and sexuality in Calixta's character. Alcée used to see her as a vulnerable, innocent being, but also as an ardent one. Although he is almost uncontrollably attracted to her, he managed to leave her before going further than kissing Calixta. Their meeting became known to the public and caused an uproar in the Cajun community because of society's belief in the fault of women, a concept which I will explain in my analysis of "Désirée's Baby". The author's insistence on Calixta's purity contrasts with her characterization as a temptress or as the devil from "At the 'Cadian Ball".

The storm is the second element that enables the affair between Calixta and Alcée. Chopin's choice to set this element as the story's title evidences its importance. It delays Bôbinot and Bibi's return from the store and makes Alcée seek shelter at Calixta's house. Because of the rain, none of the characters can move from where they are; to a certain extent, the two settings of this story—Calixta's house and Friendheimer's store— become isolated. In Calixta's house, "The rain was coming down in sheets obscuring the view of far-off cabins and

enveloping the distant wood in a gray mist" (Chopin 594). Under the fog's influence, colors[3] are neutralized; subsequently, so are ethnicities. In other words, it functions as a color-canceling film which suspends the very category of ethnicity and enables the sexual encounter between the characters.

This colorless setting contrasts with Calixta's vibrant portrait. As discussed before, her white skin and red lips create a contrast between purity and sexuality which enhances the characters' passionate union. The chamber where they make love is characterized for its whiteness: it is a "dim, mysterious chamber, as white as the couch she lay upon" (Chopin 595) and against which she looks like a "creamy lily" (595). In this room, their union is expressed in a metaphor with which Chopin expresses Calixta's sexual liberation: "the sun invites [the creamy lily] to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world" (595). Chopin reutilizes the flower imagery of "At the 'Cadian Ball". Although she had assigned the lily to Clarisse in "At the 'Cadian Ball" as a symbol of purity, she associates it with Calixta in "The Storm". This confirms the author's intention to exonerate Calixta from her previous characterization as an evil temptress.

The scene's daydream-like atmosphere increases the symbolic distance between the events that occurred during the storm and those that took place in so-called reality. When Alcée Laballière takes shelter at Calixta's house, "His voice and her own startled her as if from a trance" (Chopin 594); then, in the "drowsy gleam" (595) of Calixta's eyes. These allusions also revive Alcée's inebriation from "At the 'Cadian Ball"—here, the characters' intoxication does not come from a disaster or from alcohol, but from the immediate possibility to surrender to their instincts.

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[3] As explained in Part One, the association of ethnicity with skin color originates in the nineteenth-century belief that humans with different skin color belonged to biologically distinct races. This belief was used to justify slavery systems based on white supremacy—the whiter a person was, the higher they were in the social hierarchy.

Bôbinot and Bibi are not affected by the storm because it is natural for a father and his son to spend time together. As both characters belong to the lower class and to the Cajun community, being caught in Friedheimer's store does not enable any relationship that would be otherwise prohibited—they are just a Cajun farmer and his child running errands. The only consequence that the storm has upon the characters is that Bibi dirties his clothes with mud when they return home, as Calixta had gotten her dress stained in "At the 'Cadian Ball". With this, Chopin adds a point of irony in her story: although it was the mother who has had the affair, it is her son who gets dirty (Núñez Puente).

When the storm is over, all the characters return to their usual lives. Alcée goes back to his place to write a letter to Clarisse, who is on a vacation with their babies. He encourages his wife to stay a month longer, which she seems glad to accept. Bôbinot and Bibi go home, where Calixta is waiting with dinner ready. She does not pay any attention to their dirty clothes; rather, she happily receives his small gift. Social dynamics resume working. The differences between Calixta and Alcée in terms of class and ethnicity recover their importance. Had they continued their affair, they would have been condemned for miscegenation; however, they part ways without any regrets nor a hint of guilt, judging by Calixta's loud laughter while seeing Alcée off.

2.3. "Désirée's Baby"

This section is introduced by a brief plot summary and some general information about Chopin's "Désirée's Baby". It contains an intersectional analysis of the story's most relevant features. To carry out this study, I pay attention to the characterization of the protagonist and her husband, to several structural elements of the story, and to some formal aspects that contribute to the narration's social dynamics.

"Désirée's Baby" was first published in the magazine *Vogue* in 1893 and included in the anthology *Bayou Folk* (1894). It narrates the events leading to the end of Désirée's

marriage. The protagonist is the adopted daughter of the Valmondé family and wife of Armand Aubigny, the only heir of a renowned family of slaveholders. They live a normal married life until their first baby is born. Since the child is not white, Armand assumes Désirée not to be white and disowns both her and the baby. Désirée disappears with her child instead of heeding her mother's advice to return to the Valmondé's house—an event into which I will go further below. Later on, Armand decides to burn Désirée and the baby's belongings in order to destroy his memories of them. During this process, he finds an old letter written by his mother to his father in which it is revealed that she was Black.

Désirée and Armand Aubigny can be studied as opposites from one another. Désirée is a young girl whose mysterious arrival at the Valmondé household causes intense speculation about her origins. The most popular hypothesis is that "she had been purposely left by a party of Texans" (Chopin 240). Regardless of her ethnicity, "Madame Valmondé abandoned every speculation but the one that Désirée had been sent to her by a beneficent Providence to be the child of her affection, seeing that she was without child of the flesh. For the girl grew to be beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere,—[*sic*] the idol of Valmondé." (240) The word "icon" and the name "Désirée" symbolize the character's significance for the story: not only is she the child for whom the Valmondé family has longed, but she also represents the ideal woman in the nineteenth-century society. Chopin' describes Désirée as a devoted wife who loves his husband as much as she is afraid of him: "When he frowned she trembled, but loved him. When he smiled, she asked no greater blessing of God" (242). Her submissiveness towards her husband is a manifestation of the gender hierarchy existing within marriage: women are often afraid of their husbands' anger, as it may lead to violence. Hence, Désirée's reaction towards Armand's frowning reveals that he becomes aggressive when he is in a bad mood. Moreover, Désirée is a doting mother blind to any faults of her baby. Her incapacity to realize

that her baby's skin is dark confirms the fulfillment of her role as a mother—she loves her baby so much that she cannot see his skin color.

This characterization puts Désirée in a position similar to that of Clarisse in "At the 'Cadian Ball". Désirée is associated with the Virgin Mary in the image described during Madame Valmondé's visit in the beginning of the story. Her adoptive mother finds her laying "in her soft white muslins and laces, upon a couch. The baby was beside her, upon her arm, where he had fallen asleep, at her breast" (Chopin 241). The immaculateness of this image, enhanced through its contrast with yellow nurse sitting next to the window, is a reminiscence of the Virgin Mary and Jesus.

While Désirée's ethnicity is unknown due to her circumstances, Armand's is known and hidden intentionally by Monsieur Aubigny. The official story is that "his father brought him home from Paris, a boy of eight, after his mother died there" (Chopin 240). Nobody in the community knows Armand's mother, "Monsieur Aubigny having married and buried his wife in France, and she having loved her own land too well ever to leave it" (240). The identity of Armand's mother, a Black woman, is not revealed until the end of the narration.

At the beginning of the story, Armand appears as a passionate young man driven by his desire. His enthusiastic argument[4] against his father's objections to his marriage with Désirée makes him seem willing to sacrifice his privileges to be with her. At the same time, it clashes with his attitude during his argument with his wife, into which I will delve later. By reasoning about the bride's ethnic an economic standing, Monsieur Aubigny suggests that Désirée's societal coordinates—especially her economic position and her ethnicity—differ from Armand's; thus, they should not marry. To this, his son argues that neither Désirée's origin nor her surname matter, as the Aubigny name's renown will make them irrelevant.

[4] "Monsieur Valmondé grew practical and wanted things well considered: that is, the girl's obscure origin. Armand looked into her eyes and did not care. He was reminded that she was nameless. What did it matter about a name when he could give her one of the oldest and proudest in Louisiana? He ordered the corbeille from Paris, and contained himself with what patience he could until it arrived; then they were married" (Chopin 240–41).

The writer even creates the illusion that Armand matures thanks to Désirée and the baby. Not only does she state that "Marriage, and later the birth of his son had softened Armand Aubigny's imperious and exacting nature greatly" (Chopin 242), but also that "Armand's dark, handsome face had not often been disfigured by frowns since the day he fell in love with her" (242). However, the impression of the devoted husband dissipates three months after the baby's birth: he grows cold towards his wife and child and resumes the violence against his slaves.

Additionally, the celebration of Armand's change ironically reveals that he is just

> a classic battering husband. He isolates Désirée in a home with a black roof coming down like a cowl, and he is cruel to everyone dependent on him. When he is madly in love with Désirée, he is kind to his slaves; when he turns against her, he beats them unmercifully. He makes everyone into his victim, including the silent slave, La Blanche, who is his mistress and the mother of quadroon boys (presumably his) (Toth 145).

By making him part of the community he despises, Chopin introduces subtle criticism against slavery. By naming his mistress La Blanche—"white" in French—the narrator gives her the whiteness Armand presumes to have. This makes Armand's statement that Désirée's skin is "as white as La Blanche's" (Chopin 243) ironic. Later, he is punished for unjustly disowning his wife and his baby when his ethnicity is revealed.

Armand's cruelty towards Désirée intensifies when he admits that he "no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name" (Chopin 244). In this sentence, the narrator exposes not only the belief in the fault of women, but also Armand's priorities. The young planter realizes that it was not his wife's intention to bring shame to the family nor did she know that a Black child might have been born; however, he acts as if Désirée had intentionally hidden her identity: he puts the blame on her and eventually repudiates her and the baby.

Désirée faces her husband's accusations when the threat is identified in the narration, i.e., when she finally realizes her baby is Black. The author introduces the nineteenth-century societal belief in the fault of women through their argument, as Armand automatically puts the blame on his wife: "'It means,' he answered lightly, 'that the child is not white; it means that you are not white'" (Chopin 243). He is using Désirée's past—which he had claimed not to care about—against her. In other words, Désirée becomes an "escape route" (Jeffers 5) for Armand.

Knowledge and ignorance contribute to structure the events of "Désirée's Baby". Ignorance about the character's origins leads to an inter-ethnic marriage. The birth of the baby is the evidence of miscegenation, since his dark skin reveals his Black ancestry. The characters react differently to this situation. Désirée's realization is contextualized in a similar setting to the one which allowed Calixta and Alcée to make love in "The Storm". Désirée's intuition makes her wake up one day "to the conviction that there was something in the air menacing her peace" (Chopin 242). The writer reiterates her use of the mist in Désirée's realization of the baby's skin color: she was "striving to penetrate the threatening mist that she felt closing about her" (242). As argued previously, the mist functions as a color-canceling filter in "The Storm"; however, its role is altered in "Désirée's Baby". This veil estranges Désirée from reality, keeping her in the dark about what is happening; on the other one, it does not fully suspend analytic categories. As a result, when the mist fades away, the characters face the consequences of the baby's dark skin.

Madame Valmondé's examines the child's skin next to the window and asks about the father's reaction in disbelief. Although she is, indeed, surprised, she does not show any judgment against her daughter. In fact, she is willing to take both Désirée and the baby when they are expelled. Oppositely, Armand Aubigny's attitude changes dramatically. Three months after the baby's birth, "When he spoke to her, it was with averted eyes, from which the old

love-light seemed to have gone out. He absented himself from home; and when there, avoided her presence and that of her child, without excuse. And the very spirit of Satan seemed suddenly to take hold of him in his dealings with the slaves" (Chopin 242). Margaret D. Bauer argues that Armand Aubigny is aware of his own ancestry from the beginning of the story and has been "passing" as white ("Désirée's Baby, Kate Chopin"). Following this reasoning, Armand's violence against the slaves of his plantation may be read as the byproduct of his fear of being found out, or even as the result of his frustration because of the truth being revealed.

Class and ethnicity privileges also condition the development of the plot. Since the Aubigny is a renowned family in Louisiana, Monsieur Aubigny and his son refuse accountability for their actions. For instance, Monsieur Aubigny's objects to her becoming his daughter-in-law because of her "obscure origin" (Chopin 241); however, he lies about his son's own ethnicity. Since the Aubigny surname grants them respectability, no one questions Armand's sudden arrival at Louisiana or his mother's identity; however, as seen before, Désirée's appearance had been subjected to speculation by the community.

Three months after the baby's birth, Armand reproduces her father's suspicions by placing the responsibility for the child's skin on Désirée. Miscegenation is a dishonor for the remarkable Aubigny family to societal standards. Armand's pride in his surname makes him unable to consider other possibilities than his wife's unknown ancestry. During their argument about the child, he implicitly uses Désirée's past against her, despite having claimed that he did not care about it. Neither does he care about his own skin color—according to Désirée, she is whiter than him: "'It is a lie; it is not true, I am white! Look at my hair, it is brown; and my eyes are gray, Armand, you know they are gray. And my skin is fair,' seizing his wrist. 'Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand,' she laughed hysterically" (Chopin 243). His comparison of her wife with La Blanche constitutes his way of deflecting his fault. As said before, his statement becomes ironic after the narration reveals his true ethnicity. Moreover,

his silence at this point of the discussion might be read as shock from being caught. Eventually, Armand disowns his wife knowing that "he stabbed thus into his wife's soul" (Chopin 244) by doing so. Not only is Armand consciously "forcing her to bare his blame, ultimately causing her to disappear into the bayou" (Jeffers 3), but he is also evading his own responsibilities as a father and as a husband. Furthermore, he "thought Almighty God had dealt cruelly and unjustly with him; and felt, somehow, that he was paying Him back in kind when he stabbed thus into his wife's soul" (Chopin 244). That is, he believes to be returning the blow he had received from fate. Armand's privileges as a man, as an Aubigny, and as a slaveowner make him feel entitled to exert violence against his wife, to repudiate her and their baby, and to mistreat the slaves of his plantation.

The fact that nobody can refute Armand Aubigny's claim renders Désirée defenceless before her husband's accusations. Not even Madame Valmondé mother can stand against Armand Aubigny's: When Désirée desperately asks her mother to "tell them it is not true. You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die. I cannot be so unhappy, and live" (Chopin 243), the only aid she can offer is shelter for her daughter and grandson. After all, it is true that Désirée's ancestry is unknown; additionally, the Valmondé surname is not as prestigious as the Aubigny is. Were Madame Valmondé to object Désirée's expulsion, the family would have suffered under Aubigny's class superiority. With this, Chopin introduces the economic hierarchy into her construction of the society of Louisiana. Thus, Désirée's powerlessness comes from her unknown ethnicity, her adoptive family's inferior economic standing, and her gender identity as a woman.

Despite her mother's plea, Désirée does not return with the Valmondé's. Instead, she "disappeared among the reeds and willows that grew thick along the banks of the deep, sluggish bayou; and she did not come back again" (Chopin 244). Assigning such ending to this character, the author seems insinuate that "Désirée would have been better off had she been

more independent, more concerned with her own needs and wants" (Jeffers 4). This can be read as Chopin's "direct critique of the society which allowed Armand to remove blame from himself and his conscious, placing it instead on his wife" (Jeffers 6).

Afterwards, Armand burns everything she and the baby had left behind and finds an old letter from her mother to her father. The letter reveals the last hidden piece of the truth: Armand's mother "belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery" (Chopin 245). This is the last strike from fate of this story and the first one directed to Armand's sexism: although the consequences of the child's birth had fallen upon Désirée, the cause had always been Armand.

Conclusion

Numerous publications on *The Awakening* after the literary revival of Kate Chopin prove that her production is an excellent object of study for academic feminism. However, the tendency to analyze her long and short fiction under the same light has negatively affected the latter. Hence, single-axis approaches to her short works led to incomplete analyses and, eventually, to inaccurate categorizations such as local color (Holtman). As I have argued above, an intersectional feminist perspective is necessary to fully appreciate the stories' complexity. Only paying attention to how the characters are conditioned by their genders, sexes, classes, and ethnicities, will the reader understand the artistry of Chopin's short works. Not only did she reflect nineteenth-century multi-ethnic Louisiana, but she also explored the transgression of the boundaries of gender, sex, class, and ethnicity; this is why these categories must be examined in an intersectional manner.

To conclude this thesis, I will briefly reflect about my findings during the writing process. First, it was surprising to realize that nothing is exempt from intersectional examination in Chopin's stories. The characters' social coordinates condition their interactions with each other and with their surroundings. Chopin's writings are built to manifest these coordinates in many different forms. For instance, not only do the characters' names, descriptions, and words contribute to their representation, but they also define their position in society in terms of gender, sex, class, and ethnicity. Comparing Bôbinot with Alcée and Calixta with Clarisse may serve as an example.

To continue with formal issues, style intersects crucially with content as nature plays an important role in enabling miscegenation and articulating its consequences; that is, meteorological phenomena condition the stories' settings both structurally and symbolically. For instance, the cyclone of "At the 'Cadian Ball" is what makes Alcée transgress his social boundaries; the sexual encounter in "The Storm" is only possible thanks to the storm itself.

Likewise, colors and lighting alter the narrations' environments, making inter-ethnic and inter-class relationships possible. This is easily perceivable in the vibrant description of Calixta in both "At the 'Cadian Ball" and "The Storm"; in the mentioned sexual scene of "The Storm" and in the description of the environment in "Désirée's Baby". Chopin also explores how distance can be used to hide miscegenation and its fruits: in "At the 'Cadian Ball", distance allows Calixta and Alcée to have a romantic meeting; likewise, Armand Aubigny's ethnicity is kept a secret thanks to his growing up in France.

Nonetheless, the characters always return to their assigned places within society. Therefore, "At the 'Cadian Ball" ends with the establishment of two couples of equal social standing: Alcée and Clarisse, on one hand, and Bôbinot and Calixta, on the other. The same happens in the story's sequel: the affair between the rich Creole planter and the working-class Cajun housewife is framed as an anecdotic encounter after which the characters return to their ordinary lives. "Désirée's Baby" ends differently than the other stories: after her expulsion, Désirée loses her class and ethnic standings. She and her child become unidentifiable beings whose presence in the story is supposed to endanger society; to prevent turn-of-nineteenth-century readers from breaking apart, the author resorts to making Désirée and her baby disappear. As a result, I can conclude that, despite Kate Chopin's exploration of the boundaries between ethnicities, classes, sexes, and genders, her challenge to social norms is not radical but subtle.

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