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From Song to Silence: The Coding of Music in Kate Chopin's "The Awakening"

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FROM SONG TO SILENCE:

THE CODING OF MUSIC IN KATE CHOPIN'S THE AWAKENING

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
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Melanie V. Dawson

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ABSTRACT

In *The Awakening* Kate Chopin codes music, or uses allusions to music to signify various feelings, attitudes, and thematic associations. Her uses of music are very different from typical nineteenth-century allusions to music as part of moralistic views of society’s degeneracy.

In the novel Edna begins to perceive herself in relation to artistic traditions and artistic means of expression. She is initiated into the world of musical artistry by the playing of Mlle. Reisz, a pianist. Chopin carefully refrains from explaining the meaning of the musical experience; neither do her characters discuss their musical experiences. Thus music is not decoded; its meaning is not reduced to a single and concrete meaning through language, for Chopin is trying to express something through allusions to music that is not translatable to the idiom of language. The ambiguity associated with music’s many and suggestive meanings in *The Awakening* prevents it from being considered in relation to moralistic attitudes, for music is capable of indicating a moral end only when a concrete meaning is attached to it.

During the nineteenth-century music was often considered dangerous and able to destroy moral actions. It was especially believed to overwhelm female listeners. Descriptions of them in turn-of-the-century novels highlight their passivity during the listening experience, which is often described in terms of water imagery and metaphoric drowning. Thus Chopin’s descriptions of Edna seem part of this tradition. But Edna is much more active than other female characters of the period. She bursts into passionate tears during the performance and is motivated to swim, to speak out, to paint after listening to music. Edna’s death cannot be attributed to music’s creation of a passive victim in Edna.

Mlle. Reisz, like Edna, at first seems to embody a nineteenth-century stereotype—that of the malignant artist. But she is also an anomaly. She is affectionate toward Edna and Robert. She warns Edna that she must not expect too much of herself—she must have "strong wings" if she expects to reach the lofty heights of artistry.

As a listener Edna is tremendously changed by music because she learns to experience it in a new way. She had been accustomed to visualizing to music; she now begins to understand a non-representational mode of art. When Edna related concrete meanings to music she
misunderstood the art form. This is what Edna grows to understand under Mlle. Reisz's tutelage. Ultimately, however, Edna is frustrated by her own artistic limitations and the moral censure that even Robert applies to her actions. Chopin presents Edna as a character who grows in her understanding of artistic expression, but who is frustrated by society's interpretation of art. Thus Chopin's novel, which at first seemed to be part of a moralizing tradition in its depiction of music as destructive, subverts this traditional view. Instead Chopin indicates that the moralists in society are the cause of Edna's frustrations, for they do not understand artistic expression and limit artistic growth.
FROM SONG TO SILENCE:

THE CODING OF MUSIC IN KATE CHOPIN'S THE AWAKENING
INTRODUCTION

Critics of The Awakening often discuss the improbability of Edna's sensual awakening at the age of twenty-eight, after years of marriage and the birth of two children. Edna's equally problematic spiritual awakening to artistry and artistic ambitions has received only passing attention from scholars. But the fact remains that Edna's emotional reactions to Mlle. Reisz's music are unlike any previous reactions Edna has ever experienced. The reader is told explicitly by the narrator that "It was not the first time she [Edna] had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth" (TA 27). Thus Edna's violently emotional reactions to music (the first of which takes place near the beginning of the novel) indicate her readiness to pursue an avenue of personal growth that is, at the outset, shocking even to herself. Likewise, Edna's passionate reaction to music is intended to shock the reader as it occurs in the midst of a musical recital that Chopin presents.

By coding music (using musical allusions to signify a variety of feelings, attitudes, and thematic associations), Chopin makes use of nineteenth-century traditions in which certain types of music were deemed more socially acceptable than other ones, music was considered potentially dangerous in its sway over the passions, and music was an indicator of
wealth, leisure, and tastefulness. But Chopin expands the traditional associations of music—for it is more than ornamental in her novel. Chopin's coding subverts traditional preoccupations with morality and musical influences as Chopin portrays music as an art that is abstract and thus morally ambiguous. Depicted musical experiences in *The Awakening* lead to questions about Edna's personal expectations and the expectations placed upon her by society. Moreover, Chopin's treatment of music points toward an artistic integrity where the acceptance of artistry is unconditional and beyond moral censure.

The abundance and variety of music in *The Awakening* attests to its importance in various capacities: mentions of the New Orleans French Opera, the performing Farival twins, Adele's piano playing, the Ratignolle musical soirees, music wafting to Grand Isle from Klein's Hotel, Robert's singing, Victor's song in the tableau scene at Edna's dinner party, Edna's humming, Mlle. Reisz's Chopin and Wagner, Miss Highcamp's Grieg, and the mandolin music at Edna's sumptuous dinner are some of the varied references to music in the novel. In these passages music functions as a primary focus, a background enhancement, and a basis of social interaction for the characters depicted.

Music is also deeply entrenched in the narrative voice as musical metaphors permeate Chopin's language. Most musical metaphors occur in conjunction with Edna and her perceptions, indicating her affinity with music and ability to think in terms of music. For instance, Edna glimpses a "domestic harmony" at the Ratignolle home that leaves her "depressed rather than soothed" after leaving her friends (56). Later Edna perceives the end of her dinner party and her departure from her children in
Iberville in terms of harmony and discord. The likening of sounds and experiences to music is hardly accidental, especially when the Ratignolle home is filled with real musical harmonies, the mandolin players have recently supplied music at Edna's party, and Edna herself exhibits a growing sense of the progenies of art forms. Such deliberate references to music are anything but hackneyed descriptions; they are indicators of Edna's changing perceptions.

In essence The Awakening can be viewed as Edna's awakening to music. And as interesting as studying music for its own sake may be, music, as a generally acknowledged product of a culture's expression, is linked to constructs of social acceptance and propriety. It is representative of the states of other arts such as painting and narration. As Edna relates music to pictures and is prompted to pursue painting seriously after hearing Mlle. Reisz, her interest in storytelling is also awakened. Thus music serves as a means for understanding Edna's growing sense of self in relation to social and artistic traditions. And, like Edna, the reader of The Awakening must recognize the importance of established artistic traditions (musical traditions, in this case) before he or she can grasp the meaning of Chopin's uses and questionings of them.

For my own purposes I have elected to discuss music in The Awakening on five different levels: 1) Tradition and the Coding of Music, where music functions as a cultural language; 2) Morality and Music, relating to nineteenth-century distrust of the passion aroused by music; 3) The Ambiguity of Listening, for listening is both passive and active; 4) Mlle. Reisz and the Gift of Music, dealing with Mlle. Reisz's role in Edna's artistic growth; and 5) Edna as a Listener. My discussion treats the
novel within the context of nineteenth-century music history and fictional depictions of music, musicians, and listeners. In regard to both contexts, Chopin's treatment of music points to her eventual questioning of conventions surrounding music and other arts.
TRADITION AND THE CODING OF MUSIC

It is inevitable that Kate Chopin's associations with music should be very different from those of the modern reader. But this should not negate the significance of Chopin's love for music and her deliberate allusions to the musical conventions of her lifetime. Alex Aronson, author of *Music and the Novel*, says that the discrepancy in reaction between character, novelist, and reader is not unusual. He considers that the novel that deals with music "creates its own cultural frame of reference within which composer, performer, and hearer assume their place" (Aronson 68). As an indicator of a musical culture, fictional references to music are extremely important, especially when Chopin's central character, Edna, acknowledges the established musical culture, then questions it.

Music that operates as a cultural indicator, as it does in *The Awakening*, has much more significance than allotted to it by Robert S. Levine, who contends that the Chopin impromptu played by Mlle. Reisz "eventually substitutes for Robert" (Levine 75). This critique limits the association of music to one emotion and one character. Elaine Showalter's suggestion that "the structure of the impromptu, in which there is an opening presentation of a theme, a contrasting middle section, and a modified return to the melodic and rhythmic materials of the opening section parallels the narrative form of *The Awakening*" (Showalter 47) is also reductive. Here Showalter perhaps overestimates the significance of
the impromptu's ternary form (ternary form being common in many musical structures, most notably sonata form) as she seeks to relate music to the novel in a profound way. But by no means can the musical references in *The Awakening* be forced into a macrocosmic superstructure. Instead, music is important because of the coding of it, the use of specific pieces to allude to a cultural background and accompanying attitudes against which Chopin depicts a contrasting view of how art should be considered by society.

Kate Chopin’s own knowledge of musical conventions can be traced to an early age when her grandmother who lived with the O'Flahertys, Madame Charleville, insisted that the young girl learn to speak French and play the piano (Ewell 7). By the age of seventeen, as Chopin’s biographer, Per Seyersted notes,

> ... she pursued her main interests—music, reading, and writing—with something quite close to passion. As for music, she played the piano well, and she loved to go to concerts. 'Her musical memory had become remarkable,' Sister Garesché observes. 'She would go to the opera of one evening; then the next morning be able to reproduce by ear the parts she liked best' (Seyersted 24).

At the age of seventeen young Kate O'Flaherty also recorded a detailed description of the "famous" violinist "Ole Bull" in her commonplace book.² In this passage she refers to "the slumbering passions in the heart of man" touched by music (Ewell 8). Young Kate, drawn to the virtuoso performer, notes, "He handles his instrument, as I thought, tenderly, as though it were something he loved, and in his performance is perfectly at
ease—displaying nothing of that exaggerated style most usually seen in fine violinists" (Ewell 8-9). Her entry in the commonplace book ends with a passage that deals with her inability to describe the musical situation and her desire to be responsive to the musical experience. She says:

To describe the effect his music had upon me would be impossible. It seemed the very perfection of the art, and while listening to him, I for the first time longed to be blind that I might drink it all in undisturbed and undistracted by surrounding objects (Seyersted 24).

Such a reaction, I plan to show, is a fairly typical one, both because of the passivity of the listener involved and because the listener feels that adequately describing the experience would be impossible. It was the very youthful Kate O'Flaherty who made the above reflection, not the mature Kate Chopin whose masterpiece ultimately calls these feelings into question.

Continuing musical experiences and an accompanying sophistication as both a listener and a writer are perhaps responsible for the changes in Chopin's writings about music. Per Seyersted surmises that while in New Orleans Kate "no doubt ... made every use of what the city's Academy of Music, two opera houses, and several theaters had to offer" (Seyersted 42). He also mentions her "love of Wagner," which he surmises was born in the New Orleans French Opera House, which premiered Wagner's Lohengrin and Tannhäuser in the United States (Seyersted 42). And after moving back to St. Louis, Kate Chopin continued to play the piano and organize musicales, opening up her home to such entertainments (Seyersted 62).
It is not surprising that Chopin's musical interests are apparent in her literary works. First was the 1888 "Lilia. Polka for Piano," which was privately published (Ewell xiii); in 1899 she wrote the Christmas story "With the Violins." Her 1889 "Wiser Than a God" so specifically dealt with musical interests that it was published in The Philadelphia Musical Journal. Here the virtuoso and parlour song traditions are contrasted as the talented young Paula von Stoltz works one night playing waltzes for the wealthy Brainard family. Paula's mother, who considers such employment beneath her daughter's talent, calls Paula's engagement a form of "banal servitude" ("Wiser" 1). And Paula herself admits that she is "not unaccustomed to playing dance music" (5), only to be misinterpreted by a Brainard, who assumes this means she cannot play the piano at all. In actuality Paula is an accomplished pianist who plays Chopin's "Berceuse" at her mother's request and is "amongst the knowing an acknowledged mistress of technique" (6). Obviously, then, the Brainards are among the "unknowing," perhaps blinded by their parlour song expectations. Paula also has "the touch and interpretation of the artist" (6), which makes her talent unique.

The artistic pretensions of the Brainard family sharply contrast with Paula's virtuosity. At the dance party George Brainard is encouraged to perform on the banjo, "which was now behind him, now overhead, and again swinging in mid-air like the pendulum of a clock" (5-6) during the course of George's antics. Miss Brainard then graces the company with the "Jewel Song" from Faust and is greatly admired, having been treated as a prodigy by her adoring family. Yet Paula knows that when the girl tried to enter the conservatory, "'Old Engfelder told her in his brusque way to
go back home, that his system was not equal to overcoming impossibilities'" (2). It is the same flushed and triumphant Miss Brainard who condescends to ask Paula to play something, rewarding her with "inane" compliments, like others at the party.

Later, when George Brainard proposes to Paula, she must choose between marriage to him and her artistic ambitions for which she has been trained all her life. She rejects him because, as she says, marriage "'doesn't enter into the purpose of my life'" (9). The separation between domesticity and artistry is clearly delineated, especially when Paula becomes a famous concert pianist. Ten years later, in The Awakening (1899), Chopin also contrasts true artistry and the domestically-oriented parlour song traditions, which are embodied by Mlle. Reisz and Adele Ratignolle.

Music is a prominent feature in the 1891 story, "Mrs. Mobry's Reason" (published 1893). Here the musical allusions are from Wagnerian works; Chopin's plot parallels Wagner's motifs of incest and inherited disease (Wolstenholme 540). Chopin's Sigmund, like Wagner's character, is in love with a cousin and Mrs. Mobry's tainted blood obviously affects her daughter Naomi. Naomi's comments and interests heighten the force of the musical references. Naomi, a music student, discusses Chopin's music with her cousin Sigmund. When Naomi loses her mind, she claims that "I know what the birds are saying up in the trees--like Siegfried when he played upon his pipe under a tree, last winter in town'" (47). The linkage of insanity and the power of music is clear. Barbara Ewell, implying a causality, claims that "As in The Awakening, music is a catalyst for a sensual awakening that is ultimately destructive" (Ewell
This critique is reductive, for Naomi normally expresses herself through music, which disguises her emotions as fanciful rather than deranged. She tells Sigmund, "'Music's the only thing I've studied and learned ... I wonder if anyone else has an ear so tuned and sharpened as I have, to detect the music, not of the spheres, but of earth, subtleties of major and minor chord that the wind strikes upon the tree branches'" (40). Her hereditary insanity causes her to project her beliefs, her increasingly imaginative fancies, onto music. Music, as an abstract art, can easily express whatever she desires it to. But there is no real indication that music causes Naomi's loss of sanity. Rather, the Wagner plot acts as a coded foreshadowing device and links music and nature in a mystic way.

Both "Mrs. Mobry's Reason" and "Wiser Than a God" are forerunners of The Awakening in their thematic treatments of music; in The Awakening these themes are more pervasive and more specific. As in all Chopin's work, the musical pieces that are specifically named in the novel are chosen carefully. The Farival twins play a duet from Louis Hérold's opera Zampa, in which there is a death at sea. The Herald selection and Mlle. Reisz's virtuosic rendering of "Isolde's Song" or "love-death" from Wagner's Tristan and Isolde are both foreshadowings of death at the end of The Awakening. The overture to The Poet and the Peasant by Franz von Suppé is played by the twins, most likely as an awkward orchestral reduction for the piano. The title of the piece highlights the thematic contrast between the artistic elite and those who are not yet familiar with artistic conventions. Robert, and later Victor, sing the popular melody "Ah! Si tu savais" ("Couldst thou but know") by the Irish composer,
Michael William Balfe. The song is a popular expression of romantic love that is linked to Robert's idealizations concerning Edna.

Kate Chopin's references to the music of Frederic Chopin are important in The Awakening, as they are in her shorter works. His music functions as a link between music and the other arts, allowing music to represent various artistic traditions in The Awakening. The relationship between music and literary arts, for example, operates as music (as a form of organized sound) highlights other sound productions like speech and storytelling. This is a traditional coding of music that is traceable to medieval semantics concerning music. Chopin highlights this coding in The Awakening by having Edna become interested in telling her own stories, as she does to Léonce and Dr. Mandelet. Edna, who is silent or who speaks only in response to others at the beginning of the novel, grows in verbosity. Her growth in storytelling parallels her immersion in the aural world of music.

Chopin's coding of the music of Frederic Chopin is also self-reflexive, highlighting her own narrative artistry through the use of a common surname. Elaine Showalter contends that the name "Chopin" operates as a "literary punning signature that alludes to Kate Chopin's ambitions as an artist and to the emotions she wished her book to arouse in its readers" (Showalter 47). Kate Chopin's allusions to Frederic Chopin suggest several simultaneous referents; the quality of Frederic Chopin's music is suggested, along with Kate Chopin's relationship to artistic traditions.

A more sophisticated type of coding that involves Chopin's music occurs as Kate Chopin omits identification of the Chopin prelude and
impromptu played by Mlle. Reisz. It can be argued that Edna would not, realistically, have known the pieces by number or key (which is how they are identified). It seems more likely, however, that the author who meticulously identified other pieces in her fiction chose instead to enshroud the most important musical experiences in *The Awakening* in some degree of mystery. Thus a reader is kept from too vividly trying to imagine the music. Because the music is typified by quality of sound only, music is of secondary importance to Edna’s reactions. References to music thus focus upon Edna, contrasting her reactions to music with those commonly held in society.

Kate Chopin’s method of coding music is very different from and more complex than the coding of music in other works of nineteenth-century fiction. In other works music often is reduced to a symbol that has one meaning. Or it represents a single character or one emotion in relation to a character, much like a leitmotif. But Chopin alludes to a variety of referents with her codings of music. Music is played or sung by many characters in the novel; it also occurs in conjunction with various reactions to music, ranging from passion to indolence. Chopin treats music as a suggestive rather than a denotative means of coding.

For instance, the narrator relates that "Miss Highcamp played some selections from Grieg upon the piano. She seemed to have apprehended all of the composer’s coldness and none of his poetry. While Edna listened she could not help wondering if she had lost her taste for music" (75). This passage is one of the most elaborate and explicit concerning Edna’s reactions to music; the reference to music is loaded with various meanings. In this passage Miss Highcamp’s wealth is indicated by the fact
that she has been musically educated, even though she seems to have no
gift for musical interpretation. Edna's reaction indicates that Edna is
aware of a coldness in the pianist's personality and will be unfulfilled
by the soullessness of Miss Highcamp and Arobin (who is listening). Edna
has no distaste for music itself; she is disturbed by artistic
pretensions, even her own. But rather than losing her taste for music,
Edna instead attempts to reclaim it, humming a "fantastic tune" that
afternoon and dreaming of music in the night. Edna's reclaiming of music
seems to be part of her belief that music should be evocative, soulful,
and meaningful to both performer and listener. Even so, in the course of
The Awakening, Chopin indicates that while the musical experience can be
meaningful, music itself cannot be reduced to a concrete meaning.

Various other nineteenth-century writers readily translate music
into a concrete correlative meaning in their struggle to communicate the
musical experience. Perhaps because of her background in music and her
experiences as a listener, Chopin's coding is more sophisticated. For,
unlike other authors, Chopin codes a message in music and then refuses to
completely decode it by translating that experience into one specific
meaning in language. And while Chopin's narrator briefly describes Edna's
listening experiences, Chopin's characters do not discuss music in any
detail. The musical experience then remains coded and ambiguous,
encouraging a reader's reaction to its presence.

Writers have often worried about how to code music in their writing.
Writers representative of various cultures who deal with music
thematically, oddly enough, feign ignorance of music in order to discuss
it. E. M. Forster, writing in Britain a generation after Chopin, says in
his essay, "Not Listening to Music," that "Listening to music is such a
muddle that one scarcely knows how to start describing it. The first
point to get clear in my own case is that during the greater part of every
performance I do not attend. The nice sounds make me think of something
else" (33). He goes on to relate music to language as he surmises that
"Professional critics can listen to a piece as consistently and as
steadily as if they were reading a chapter in a novel ... probably they
only achieve it through intellectual training; that is to say, they find
in the music the equivalent of a plot ... (33).

Forster's characters also struggle to describe music, to convert the
experience to the idiom of language. In Howard's End (1910), Chapter
Five, Beethoven's Fifth is highlighted as Forster discusses the reactions
of a row of listeners. Here Forster's own meditative and associative
interpretation of music is embodied by Helen, who in the symphony's third
movement hears "panic and emptiness" (Howard's End 27) and sees goblins
and elephants dancing. In Forster's A Room with a View (1908), the
eccentric clergyman, Mr. Beebe, detects in Lucy Honeychurch's music a
passion that is not obvious in her life. He mentions his "pet theory
about Miss Honeychurch" and wonders, "Does it seem reasonable that she
should play so wonderfully, and live so quietly? I suspect that one day
she will be wonderful in both" (A Room 353). The qualities in Lucy
indicated by her musicianship refer to hidden inner resources and great
potential beneath the surface of her being.

Struggles like those of Helen and Mr. Beebe to understand music are
absent in Kate Chopin's characters, who do not attempt to intellectualize
music. Paula von Stoltz in "Wiser Than a God" is a mistress of her art,
devoting her life to the piano; she says little about music. Music is
Paula's language—the most natural way for her to express herself. Naomi
in "Mrs. Mobry's Reason" says that "'Music is the only thing I've studied
and learned'" (40), but avoids an explicit aesthetic concerning music and
its effects. In The Awakening Edna refrains from verbalizing her
responses to Mlle. Reisz's music; she never translates her experience for
the reader. The first time Mlle. Reisz plays for Edna, she asks her,
"'Well, how did you like my music?'" And Edna is "unable to answer" (27).
The second time Edna hears Mlle. Reisz play, Edna verbalizes only a wish
to return to Mlle. Reisz's apartment (64), remaining characteristically
taciturn about her experience.

By contrast, an extremely wordy narration about music takes place
in Tolstoy's 1889 "The Kreutzer Sonata," of which Chopin most likely had
heard as the novel's notoriety spread across continents. In the novel
Pozdnyshov examines his relationship with music while protesting a
knowledge of it. He claims that it is music that has prompted him to
murder his wife, a pianist who accompanied a young male violinist. His
narration of the tale is essentially his attempt to understand why and how
music caused him to commit murder. He says of his wife and her friend:

"They played Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata ... Do
you know the first presto? You do? ... Ugh! Ugh!
It is a terrible thing, that sonata. And
especially that part. And in general music is a
dreadful thing! What is it? I don't understand
it. What is music? What does it do? And why
does it do what it does? They say music exalts
the soul. Nonsense, it is not true! It has an
effect, an awful effect ... It has neither an
exalting nor a debasing effect but it produces
agitation. How can I put it? Music makes me
forget myself, my real position; it transports
me to some other position not my own" (Tolstoy
85-6).
Pozdnyshev only asserts his ignorance in order to launch into a lengthy diatribe on the potential evils of music. He struggles to tame music referentially, through describing it in great detail, and contends that his experience and decoding of music hold great moral value.

A philosophical discussion of music generated by Søren Kierkegaard influenced attempts to translate musical experiences into verbal ones. The struggle to change idioms is obvious in Kierkegaard's 1843 essay, "The Musical Erotic." There he says:

I know very well that I do not understand music. I freely admit that I am a layman, I do not conceal the fact that I do not belong to the chosen people who are connoisseurs of music, that I am at most a proselyte at the gate whom a strangely irresistible impulse carried from far regions to the point, but no farther (Kierkegaard 52).

He goes on to say that "music as a medium stands lower than language" and functions only "in a certain sense" as a type of language (Kierkegaard 54).

Common among the passages from Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, and Forster is an intellectual disclaimer. The writers and characters contend that they do not understand music, yet they write or speak prolifically and eloquently about it. Obviously, the reader is not to take their disclaimers too seriously. They say that they do not comprehend music in regard to formal training; they speak instead from personal, emotional experiences. The conclusion that can be drawn is that true musicians do not need to verbalize their musical experiences since they fully express
themselves through music; only laymen need to translate music into language. But there is also the more subtle suggestion that only the layman is capable of decoding the musical experience.

As an individual outside of music's continuing influence, the layman is able not only to decode but to retreat from the compelling aspect of music to examine its effect upon him. In this retreat the philosopher-layman discovers that music has encouraged him to behave in immediate and irrational ways which he has trouble comprehending. He tames the musical experience through the rationalism that is facilitated by language. Thus the decoding of music has as its ultimate goal a view of the language of music as exclusive, dangerous, and uncontrollable. This view leads to a study of music and its moral or immoral influence.

Chopin chose not to decode musical experiences in The Awakening, suggesting that music is neither moral nor degenerative; instead music is amoral and absolute. Music conveys a variety of suggested messages and influences that are not translatable into another idiom. Yet moralistic views of music and its powers relate to the novel since Edna's sense of morality alters drastically and concurrently with her musical experiences. Period attitudes toward music and its destructive qualities give an insight into Chopin's reactions, as expressed in The Awakening, to such views.
MORALITY AND MUSIC

As a well-read and well-traveled woman, Kate Chopin was aware of the moralistic European and American attitudes toward music at the turn of the century. Thomas J. Bonner contends that "... as a writer she was not so insular as her two early editions of short stories, Bayou Folk (1894) and A Night in Acadie (1897) might suggest, for her education, her reading, and her grand tour drew her to Europe" (Bonner 281). An avid reader of culturally diverse works, Chopin was familiar with works by Zola, Flaubert, Maupassant, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Hardy, and Whitman, among others (Bonner 282). Under such influences, Chopin came into contact with the philosophical attitudes toward music commonly held during the later nineteenth-century. Philosophers, notably Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, greatly influenced period considerations of music with their theories. Their moralistic discussions of music helped engender a distrust of music and its influences, a fear of the passions it might stir in the individual.

Kierkegaard's 1843 "The Musical Erotic or The Immediate Stages of the Musical Erotic" establishes music as a spiritual yet sensual art. Music is spiritual because it does not permanently exist in a tangible form. Yet because music has an effect in the sensual world, sensuousness is its "subject," expressed through immediate reaction or "lyrical impatience" ("Musical Erotic" 57). As opposed to language, which has its
roots in "reflection," music expresses the immediate, which is erotic in the way it affects the senses:

... we must recognize that in the realm of the spirit it is an imperfect medium, and, hence, that it cannot have its absolute object in the immediately spiritual, determined as spirit. From this it by no means follows that one needs to regard music as the work of the devil, even if our age does offer many horrible proofs of the demoniac power with which music may lay hold upon an individual, and this individual in turn, excite and catch many, especially women, in the seductive snare of fear, by the means of the all-disturbing power of sensuality ("Musical Erotic" 59).

He goes on to say that "this art, more than any other, frequently harrows its votaries in a terrible manner" ("Musical Erotic" 59). In essence Kierkegaard here attributes to music the very powers his essay at first seems to refute. Thus his essay attributes eroticism to music and to feminine susceptibility. And his essay on the "immediate stages" of the erotic is a careful, reflective philosophical essay that belies the value of immediate reaction, because language's basis is in the reflective nature (according to Kierkegaard's theories). He implies that the musical experience must be conquered, tamed, and translated into the idiom of language.

While Nietzsche's 1872 "The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music" is also seemingly a celebration of music, it, like Kierkegaard's essay, defends much of the nineteenth-century attitude of distrust toward music. In "The Birth of Tragedy," which was considered "a work of Wagnerian propaganda" (Sadie 233), the association of tragedy and music is positive, for music, like all art, teaches human beings how to deal
with the tragedy of existence. In Wagner’s music, Nietzsche hears the purifying element in all music. He says, "For amidst our degenerate culture music is the only pure and purifying flame, towards which and away from all things move in a Heracleitean double motion" (Nietzsche 418). In Nietzsche’s pro-Wagnerian attitude, though, lie hints of his eventual break with the composer and denunciation of Romantic music. These hints are in the metaphors suggestive of sexuality such as "purifying flame" and "Heracleitean double motion." Upon the opening of Wagner’s Festival Theatre, Nietzsche concluded that "Wagner had progressively succumbed ... to the unhealthiest forces in contemporary society" (Plantinga 296). Nietzsche’s later denunciation of "neurotic, decadent, perspiring Romantic music" as opposed to "healthy, light-footed, unburdened Dionysian music" (Sadie 234) escalated into a condemnation of an age of "moral and spiritual degeneracy" (Aronson 95). In Nietzsche’s theories, as in Kierkegaard’s, decadence is attributed to society. Music receives influence from the world and thus it becomes a receptor and an expressive medium of perversion. The medium of music is effectively tainted by worldliness and sensuality.

Though the intricacies and subtleties of such theories made no great impact upon society, the general import was well known. Nietzsche especially promoted a trend of distrust toward music as he gave a general notion of degeneracy a prime example in Wagner. And as if the personal flamboyance of Wagner was not enough to excite debate, the reactions of Wagner’s listeners were tantamount to a spectacle. At Bayreuth for Tristan, Samuel Clemens reported that "I know of some, and have heard of many, who could not sleep after it, but cried the night away. I feel
strongly out of place here. Sometimes I feel like the one sane person in the community of the mad" (qtd. in Plantinga 296). Wagner's music was unquestionably the most controversial and spectacular of the period.

Alex Aronson in *Music and the Novel* observes that Wagner's music was portrayed in much late nineteenth-century fiction, replacing the previous and similar controversy surrounding Beethoven and his music (Aronson 94). Aronson describes Wagner's music as "very much in advance of its time" or music that

dared to portray what had till then been unmentionable in literature. It was a music of desire unfulfilled, of longing so intense that it could be embodied only in figures taken from legend and myth, a chromaticism of passion that seemed not of this earth (Aronson 96).

During the controversy over Wagner's music it was fashionable for even fictional characters to remark upon it. In Forster's 1910 *Howard's End* the character Margaret pronounces a popular opinion that in music

"... the real villain is Wagner. He has done more than any man in the nineteenth century towards the muddling of arts. I do feel that music is in a very serious state just now, though extraordinarily interesting. Every now and then in history there do come these terrible geniuses, like Wagner, who stir up all the wells of thought at once. For a moment it's splendid. Such a splash as never was. But afterwards--such a lot of mud; and the wells--as it were, they communicate with each other too easily now, and not one of them will run quite clear. That's what Wagner's done" (*Howard's End* 32).
Here Margaret expresses her suspicions concerning the immediacy of music, the suspect quality of Wagner's music, and of Wagner's impact upon culture.

In 1895 Dr. Max Nordau published *Degeneration*, a work that discusses the effects of musicians upon a culture overwrought by degeneracy. He labels Wagner as insane, along with Rossini, Schubert, Chopin, Berlioz, and Smetena, all of whom, according to Nordau, had "morbid peculiarities" (Diserens 185). Like other musical alarmists, Nordau sought to protect the innocent, the female. He says:

How unperverted must wives and readers be when they are in a state of mind to witness these pieces without blushing crimson and sinking into the earth for shame ... The lovers in these pieces behave like tom cats gone mad, rolling in contortions and convulsions over a root of valerian (qtd. in Aronson 94).

In "The Sanity of Art: An Exposure of the Current Nonsense About Artists Being Degenerate," Bernard Shaw attacks Nordau as an ignorant moralist. Shaw contends that "At every new wave of energy in art the same alarm has been raised ... these alarms always had their public, like prophecies of the end of the world ..." (Shaw 291).^5

A work that portrayed degeneration much like that discussed by Nordau was Tolstoy's 1889 "The Kreutzer Sonata," which voiced Tolstoy's personal belief that music's power most often destroyed moral activity. It is Beethoven's music here that is of questionable value as it is depicted in relation to sexual love. Tolstoy himself thought that
"obscure, almost unhealthy" excitement was discernable in Beethoven's final compositions (Aronson 91).

The end-of-the-century philosophy, which was preoccupied with degeneracy, most often focused upon music in conjunction with women. As the so-called weaker sex, prone to sensual temptation and barely able to restrain their own libidinous urges, women needed protection from the unleashed powers of Romantic music. Yet music was of such a potentially destructive nature that men who tried to protect women from music fell prey to it themselves, as does Tolstoy's Pozdnyshev in "The Kreutzer Sonata." He initially fears that the violinist who plays music with his wife will "conquer, crush, bind her, twist her round his little finger and do whatever he liked with her" (Tolstoy 177). Despite his belief that he sees the pitfalls awaiting his wife, Pozdnyshev himself is greatly affected by music that is "impassioned to the point of obscenity" and he murders his wife (Tolstoy 190). By voicing Pozdnyshev's view of music, "The Kreutzer Sonata" raised "the female question" (Moller xiii) along with sexual and musical concerns in a way that exemplified turn-of-the-century moralistic thought concerning the degenerative effects of Romantic music.

Following in Tolstoy's wake, Kate Chopin also deals with Romantic music, female sexuality, and susceptibility to music. She seemingly constructs a novel that points, like Tolstoy's, to a moral view. Edna displays all the physical signs of a woman who needs moral guidance; the fact that she is barely in control of her sensual nature suggests a predisposition to falling prey to music's charms. She enjoys good food, languorous sleep, pleasant conversation, and passionate music increasingly
throughout the novel. Chopin sets up the expectation that her character will be overwhelmed by erotic Romantic music. But Chopin's reluctance to concretize the musical experience through language also suggests that a moral is not behind Chopin's allusions to music. Indeed Chopin's treatment of music, as she refuses to decode music, obstructs a moral end; in *The Awakening*, unlike moralizing works of the nineteenth-century, music is an ambiguous force that cannot be conquered or tamed through language.
THE AMBIGUITY OF LISTENING

Listening itself was not perceived as inherently immoral or decadent, according to Tolstoy, Nietzsche, and Nordau. Decadence was linked primarily to Romantic music. And unsurprisingly, period fictional depictions of female listeners present them as the unsuspecting victims of such music and the musicians who play it. Edna is comparable to other fictional female listeners who are greatly influenced, even overpowered, by music as Edna at first seems to embody the qualities of the other characters. Passive and impressionable, the young female listener is profoundly influenced by the music she hears. Like Edna, Verena Tarrant of James's The Bostonians, Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady, Trilby in du Maurier's novel of the same name, and Lucy in Cather's Lucy Gayheart experience compelling, yet unsettling emotions in conjunctions with music.

Henry James' The Bostonians (1886), like The Awakening, emphasizes women's rights. And Verena Tarrant, like Edna, is touched both by a yearning for freedom and a delight in embodying the role of listener to music. The conflict of these two ideas is obvious after Verena and Olive attend a social affair where Mr. Burrage entertains at the piano. After enjoying his music Verena expresses a desire to "take men as they are" rather than question their motives. She says:
"It would be very nice not to have so many questions, but to think they were all comfortably answered, so that one could sit there on an old leather chair, with the curtains drawn and keeping out the cold, the darkness, all the big, terrible, cruel world—sit there and listen for ever to Schubert and Mendelssohn. They didn't care anything about female suffrage! And I didn't feel the want of a vote today at all, did you?" (The Bostonians 168).

Here Verena emphasizes the comfort of the passive role; she is enthroned on an old leather chair (itself an emblem of protective masculinity), shielded from the elements in an idyllic world where lighthearted, delicate classical music subdues her passion and overrides Olive's emancipatory influence over her.

Another of James's heroines, Isabel Archer, is also considerably influenced and subdued by music that she hears in The Portrait of a Lady (1881). In this case, the quintessential lady, Isabel, exhibits an uncharacteristically subdued attitude after hearing Madame Merle play the piano. She falls under the woman's spell at this first meeting in their relationship. Like Edna, Isabel is most complimentary of the other woman's talent as

... she became aware that the lady at the piano played remarkably well. She was playing something of Beethoven's--Isabel knew not what, but she recognized Beethoven--and she touched the piano softly and discreetly, but with evident skill. Her touch was that of an artist; Isabel sat down noiselessly in the nearest chair and waited til the end of the piece (Portrait 159)."
This passage is particularly important in the novel, for it is Isabel's first encounter with Madame Merle. Entranced and delighted by the music, Isabel easily falls under the woman's spell.

An equally sympathetic female heroine appears in George du Maurier's 1894 *Trilby* where, even though she is a singer, Trilby is nonetheless passive. She is by nature tone-deaf but falls under the spell of the egomaniacal Svengali, who coaches her to develop her fantastic voice, which is best displayed in a vocal rendition of Chopin’s Impromptu in A flat. Music takes possession of Trilby's personality, making her unable to remember her life before she married Svengali. She is not an active, reasonable performer; she is a victim of a spell cast upon her by Romantic music and the evil, musical mentor.

Passivity on the part of the listener is a foreshadowing of destruction. Verena's friendship with Olive and her feminist ideals are lost, Isabel loses happiness and love, and Trilby loses first her sanity, then her life. Like these characters, Willa Cather's Lucy Gayheart of the novel *Lucy Gayheart* (1935) also loses her life, becoming an appropriately tragic figure associated with music. Lucy is an accompanist, which in itself does not indicate passivity, except that Lucy is almost totally controlled by the singer, Sebastian. He is the musician who is treated as an artist—so much so that even while accompanying him Lucy is described as a listener or audience, absorbed in his music. She contributes an accompaniment to further his musical vision rather than her own. And like her beloved Sebastian who drowns, Lucy romantically follows him to a watery death because of a skating accident.
Merely by becoming a listener a character like Edna suggests a range of compliances that typify her as weak, inefffectual, and passive—to her own detriment. Verena's response to music contradicts her sentiments for women's rights; Isabel's reaction reveals her love for beauty that makes her susceptible to manipulation. The reactions of Trilby and Lucy Gayheart suggest a deterministically sealed fate that rules their lives. In light of these depictions of listeners, Edna's act of listening is ominous.

Listening, in the nineteenth-century, would have suggested a loss of power on a social scale as well as on a personal one. Music historian Friedrich Blume says:

As a result of the shift in social patronage of music to the level of the public, composers now no longer presented their works to a class in which they served as members; instead, as autonomous and responsible shapers of valid ideas for all humanity, they faced an amorphous multitude that they were to raise to their own sphere, to lift above itself, a public that was to worship them as demigods in the temple of art or to reject them as madmen (91).

This shift in the social dynamics of music, Blume says, was noticeable from the Classic era onward. But with the nineteenth-century rise of the virtuoso tradition, exemplified by artists like Paganini and Liszt, the performer was a celebrity also. No longer supported and artistically controlled by wealthy patrons and religious establishments, the musician could play to the general public and charge admission. With the patron replaced by the adoring masses, the performer attained a control over his or her performance for the first time. In response to such a shift in
attitudes came a distrust of music and the musician's power obvious in fiction of the period.

On a more personal level the performer is always in control of the listening situation. For a brief period of time the performer controls the senses and perhaps the emotions of his or her listeners. Unsurprisingly, fictional depictions of listening stress the listener's loss of control. And, as in The Awakening, a loss of control is often described with water imagery. Aronson says that "The water metaphor comes naturally to the novelist in search of an image which would best describe the 'flooding' of the consciousness by music" (Aronson 115). "Implied in the metaphor" he says, "is an image of the listener who by immersing himself in music, 'melts' into it, 'dissolves,' and finally, 'drowns' in it" (Aronson 113).8

The continuum from listening to tears to drowning foreshadows Edna's destruction, highlighting nineteenth-century suspicions of music. When Edna first hears Mlle. Reisz play, "the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her" (27). Edna's metaphoric drowning, through both tears and accompanying metaphors, prefigures her eventual dissolution into a large body of salt water.9 When Edna again hears Mlle. Reisz's music it fills the room and floats out into the night and to "the crescent of the river, losing itself in the silence of the upper air" (64). In both situations Edna is overwhelmed by tears; the force of music upon her emotions is great.
Subsequent references highlight strong thematic links between music and water. Edna's association of the air "Ah! si tu savais!" occurs with her recollections of "the ripple of the water, the flapping sail" and of her excursion to Chênière Caminada with Robert, who sang in the boat (58). When Mlle. Reisz plays the Chopin Impromptu laced with Wagner, it floats out over the river; the overwhelming qualities of rhythmic song and rhythmic sea are associated. At Edna's dinner party the sound of mandolin music mingles with "the soft, monotonous splash of a fountain" (88). And finally, facing the waters of the Gulf, Edna recalls the cryptic words of Mlle. Reisz as she hears the seductive sea's voice and sees a bird fluttering down to the water. Here the mysticism of Mlle. Reisz's words and the mystical enchantment of the sea's motion are combined.

Yet as strong as the thematic links between music and water are throughout the course of Edna's listening experiences, the destructiveness of music (and its influence upon Edna's drowning) is not directly attributed to the medium of music. The music Edna hears is of an ambiguous nature rather than simply a destructive one. The music that at first made her passions "lash" and "bind" her later passively "loses itself" in the night. Music also occurs in conjunction with all Edna's strong emotions. Her feelings of melancholy are reflected when, at her dinner party, Edna feels a "chill" that "seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords wailed" (88). After leaving her children at Iberville Edna perceives her feelings in terms of a "delicious song" that she can no longer hear. In conjunction with Edna's feelings of tenderness and love, music relates to her remembrances of Robert's singing. Edna differs from Isabel, Verena, and Trilby in that her feelings after and
during music do not exclusively relate to a type of euphoria. Such a euphoria is dangerous to the above characters as they allow their own pleasures to preclude reason. Edna instead perceives music as much more than a route to ecstatic emotion; she integrates music into her life on many levels, listening to Miss Highcamp as well as Mlle. Reisz and supplying background music for her sensual party as well as becoming engrossed by Mlle. Reisz's playing. Thus, in Chopin's novel, music is much more than a route to destruction, despite the fact that Edna does, on two occasions, experience strange and overwhelming feelings in conjunction with music.

When Edna experiences "the very passions themselves" and dissolves into passionate tears she is being aroused by music. The passions are latent within Edna and are awakened by her musical experiences. The course of her awakening causes the central ambiguity of the listening experience as the passive and active phases of listening are commingled. And as much as Chopin seems to depict a character who embodies the beautiful passivity of the nineteenth-century listener, Chopin also subverts this traditional depiction.

The fact that Edna is capable of passionate tears says much more about Edna than it does about the music she hears, especially since Edna is the only individual in *The Awakening* who strongly reacts to music. Mlle. Reisz's playing arouses "a fever of enthusiasm" among her other listeners at Madame Lebrun's and especially invites the admiration of Robert Lebrun. But neither enthusiasm nor the supposed admiration of Robert (which we never witness directly) equals the magnitude of Edna's reaction.
As an individual who is unique, Edna receives special attention from Mlle. Reisz. When Robert first persuades Mlle. Reisz to play at his mother's musicale, he says to Edna, "I'll tell her that you want to hear her. She likes you. She will come" (26). This statement does not appear to be Robert's romantic coloring of the situation, for Mlle. Reisz does come and asks what Edna would like to hear her play. Seemingly she has discerned in Edna a quality that would make Edna a preferred listener. Mlle. Reisz proclaims Edna "the only one worth playing for" (27) as Edna sobs passionately in response to Mlle. Reisz's music.

In The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, and Listener Roger Sessions focuses upon not only the listener's reaction, but the listener's active participation as well:

To listen implies rather a real participation, a real response, a real sharing in the work of the composer and of the performer ... music is no longer an incident of an adjunct but an independent and self-sufficient medium of expression. His [the listener's] ideal aim is to apprehend to the fullest and most complete possible extent the musical utterance of the composer as the performer delivers it to him (Sessions 7-8).

Likewise Aronson mentions a tenacious contact between performer, audience, and composer that occurs in a "spiritual meeting-house" (Aronson 90) where a dialogic meeting takes place beneath the social decorum of the musical situation.

Since Chopin does not allow the reader to enter a subterranean world where a spiritual meeting takes place, Edna's actions following music are particularly important, for they contradict the association of passivity
with listening. At Grand Isle, after hearing Mlle. Reisz play she, "like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers ... " (28), conquers her dread of the water and learns to swim. Triumphant in her success, Edna "wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (28). It is also after hearing Mlle. Reisz that Edna takes a more profound interest in her painting.

The parallels between artistry and swimming, supported by associations of music and water imagery, highlight a sink-or-swim psychology that governs Edna's reaction to both art and water. Once Edna has learned to swim she will not sink unless she so chooses. But once she acquires the ability to swim she scorns her previous attempts, "splashing about like a baby" (28). She does not have a gradual initiation into swimming; she suddenly becomes capable of it. Likewise Edna suddenly is capable of responding to the music of an artist. And as a listener Edna can no longer remain utterly passive; she has acquired the ability to listen actively and to become a vital part of a performance. And just as Edna can now both sink or swim, she must have true artistry or none at all. She refuses to recognize Adele's pianistic efforts as art and her own sketching as real painting. For Edna there is no compromise—she recognizes true artistry and finds amateurism frustrating.

Edna's listening experiences, though in some ways similar to depictions of listeners by James, Cather, and du Maurier, characterize Edna as a much more active element of the musical situation than do other period novels. Edna's reactions during the music are unusually forceful as she passionately cries. And her actions after music—swimming and painting—are especially active. Yet music's influence upon Edna is
indeterminate as demarcations between Edna's acts and reactions are unclear. Nor is the extent to which Edna is influenced by music clear. Chopin effectively enshrouds the nineteenth-century moralist's search for blame (especially concerning Edna's suicide) in an ambiguity that is related to music and its power over Edna. Chopin sets up the common scenario of the impressionable female listener and overwhelming Romantic music, but she fails to indicate that music is responsible for Edna's death. Music may be responsible for a variety of changes which Edna undergoes, especially since music occurs in conjunction with various emotions, not just euphoric ones that lead to moral danger. Nevertheless, Chopin's use of the scenario does suggest that music's influence can be blamed for Edna's immoral acts. Perhaps Chopin saw the use of this scenario as a way to shield her character and her novel from a potentially hostile, moralistic audience. And contributing to the scenario that links immoral influence to music is Mlle. Reisz, who has been perceived as an embodiment of the stereotype of the evil musician, a character often seen in period novels.
Critics often treat Mlle. Reisz as a negative character in The Awakening and describe her as an "evil fairy" who is "homely, ascetic, dark, and malevolently maternal" (Fox-Genovese 285-6), as a "conjurer" who casts a spell upon Edna (Giorcelli 137), and as a "severe and spiritual" person (Gilbert 50) whose artistry "presents danger" to Edna (Batten 85). An apparent embodiment of the nineteenth-century stereotype of the evil artist whose work ensnares the innocent, Mlle. Reisz is comparable to du Maurier's Svengali, James' Madame Merle, and Cather's Mockford, all of whom use enchanting music to establish a rapport that is more powerful than loathsome personal characteristics.

Mlle. Reisz is described as "homely ... with a small weazened face and body and eyes that glowed" (26). She is the "most disagreeable and unpopular woman" in her neighborhood in the city (59) and a disruption in the amiable spirit of Grand Isle, where she "had quarreled with almost every one owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others" (26). But Mlle. Reisz is also an enigma, for Chopin does not present her thoughts and feelings; instead there are only her actions and the way her music influences others, especially Edna. The characterization of Mlle. Riesz attests to much more than the fulfillment of a stereotype.

Even seemingly negative descriptions of her are tempered, such as the statement that she was disagreeable, quarrelsome, and trampled upon
the rights of others. The sentence immediately following this, "Robert prevailed upon her without any too great difficulty" (26), implies that Mlle. Reisz is not as disagreeable as she might seem, for she is susceptible to Robert's wheedling, having a softness for both him and Edna.

Mlle. Reisz, as one of two outstanding female, almost maternal, influences upon Edna, is comparable to Adele Ratignolle. As the women embody two obvious social roles--one domestic and one artistic--so they represent two types of music. Adele's music is tame, controlled, out of the parlor song tradition. She plays pieces that are easily mastered by women who play occasionally in their leisure time. Yet Adele feels she must justify this pastime to her world, claiming that "She was keeping up her music on account of the children," to brighten her home and make it more attractive (25).

By contrast, Mlle. Reisz seems unaccustomed to caring about the reception of her more challenging music, "stopping for neither thanks nor applause" at Madame Lebrun's (27) and refusing to play at Edna's house for the pleasure of Edna's father. This attitude is modified by Mlle. Reisz's recognition of Edna as a listener worthy of her playing, saying, "You are the only one worth playing for. Those others? Bah!" (27). Mlle. Reisz's and Edna's mutual satisfaction with their performer-listener relationship suggests a nurturing, caring relationship comparable to the one between Edna and Adele. As Adele shows her concern for Edna by asking Robert to "let Mrs. Pontellier alone" (20) and giving Edna advice as to how to keep Léonce home in the evenings, so Mlle. Reisz bids Edna to be careful descending the steps from her apartment in the dark (64) and whispers to
her in French, telling her to "be good" at the dinner party (88). These actions on the part of both women indicate their concern for Edna and their interest in her welfare.

Mlle. Reisz's affectionate gestures towards Edna are thus part of Chopin's subversions of period depictions of music. But Mlle. Reisz's affection for Edna, in the end, surpasses Adele's. Adele's final words to Edna admonish her, remind her to "Think of the children, Edna" (109). Mlle. Reisz takes a more personal interest in Edna, and slips from the role of a parental figure into that of intimate friend. She raves over Edna's appearance in her bathing suit and proclaims that she is a "foolish old woman" whom Edna has "captivated" (63). She mediates Edna's contact with Robert and asks Edna about her feelings for the young man. When Mlle. Reisz says that she can refuse Edna nothing, she is right, for she relinquishes Robert's letters to Edna and plays command performances of Chopin at her request.

Mlle. Reisz and Adele are alike not only in their concern for Edna, but in their treatment of music as a gift. Adele treats music as a gift that she gives to a family, playing to effect a general sense of enjoyment. Mlle. Reisz, however, in addition to giving musical performances directly to Edna, speaks of the "many gifts--absolute gifts--which have to be acquired by one's own effort" if one is to be an artist (63). Thus, to her, artistry itself is a gift, not just the music it produces. And a disposition toward artistry must be combined with other "gifts" that channel it, discipline it so that music can be produced. She is telling Edna, apparently, that having the artistic impulse is not
all it takes to be an artist, warning her not to expect too much of herself.

Mlle. Reisz's perceptions concerning Edna's artistic impulses and relationship with Robert belie the woman's preoccupation with the spiritual realm, the traditional habitat of the artist. Rather than abiding solely in a balmy, spiritual atmosphere, Mlle. Reisz is very much the realist. Indeed she is the only independent character in the novel, living alone in the business district of New Orleans and coming as close to a professional musician as anyone portrayed in *The Awakening*. Her worldly observations even incline toward cattiness as she likens the Farival twins to mosquitoes and gossips about Victor Lebrun. The night of Edna's sumptuous dinner party Mlle. Reisz is totally preoccupied by her lavish surroundings. Her disparaging remarks about the symphony musicians are tempered by the narrator's comment that "All her interest seemed to be centered upon the delicacies placed before her" (87). Edna affords Mlle. Reisz a treasured look into the sensual world of material comfort that is comparable to Mlle. Reisz's spiritual guidance of Edna as Mlle. Reisz's music gives Edna brief looks into the spiritual realm. Mlle. Reisz's appreciation of the lavish food of the sensual world and her appreciation of her rapt listener (related to the spiritual aspect of music) prove her understanding of both spiritual and sensual realms.

Mlle. Reisz also exhibits a certain respect for social expectations, balancing both artistry and her position in Creole society. Her role as an eccentric spinster-artist allows her this balance. She makes only brief appearances in society and is not monitored (as Edna is) on a day-to-day basis. And Mlle. Reisz channels her feelings into music—
a socially permissible mode of expression that is not available to Edna. Mlle. Reisz codes her feelings, through music, in a way that is passionate and meaningful yet abstract and inoffensive. And because music is an abstract art, Mlle. Reisz is not responsible for the way her music is interpreted. Since Mlle. Reisz is a socially and morally ambiguous character, the most important analysis of Mlle. Reisz is based on motifs that Chopin thematically links to her music.

Linked to Mlle. Reisz's music are conflicting images of sinking and rising, drowning and transcendence. The music played by Mlle. Reisz makes Edna experience drowning sensations. Then Edna swims after hearing Chopin. The rising images, transcendent ones, are associated with birds. Mlle. Reisz tells Edna that "'The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth'" (82); she then feels Edna's shoulder as if to test Edna's strength (Portales 431).

This bird that Mlle. Reisz mentions is an abstract bird—not a parrot like Mrs. Lebrun's, or a mocking bird, or pigeon (all of which are domesticated birds), or other birds of Edna's experience. It is an imagined and unknown bird that belongs to a world that is not earthly. Thus the struggle, the strength of such a bird is transferable to the figure of Mlle. Reisz herself, who is consistently described in terms of rising and descending. She provokes a "settling down" of her audience members in chapter ten. When approaching a piano, of course, the diminutive figure of the pianist descends, then rises when she is done. This is unremarkable except when coupled with descriptions of her as
"rising, or rather descending from her cushions" at Edna's party (89), as if the narrator does not at first know whether Mlle. Reisz is approaching a spiritual state or leaving one. And after transporting Edna to Mlle. Reisz's apartment "up under the roof" (61), Mlle. Reisz bids Edna to be careful when going down the stairs and "landing," sustaining the metaphor that Mlle. Reisz transports Edna to spiritual heights with her music. Edna's readjustment to the ordinary or lower world is difficult, even treacherous. As Edna attempts to balance rising and falling, the ordinary and extraordinary, the narrator comments that Edna experiences "a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual" (93).

The conflict between the social and spiritual is marked throughout the novel. But at the end of the novel Chopin fuses the imagery, indicating Edna's realization that the two worlds are not truly separate; social influences do intrude upon the spiritual world that is attained through music. Beside the "seductive, whispering, clamoring, murmuring" sea is "A bird with a broken wing" which is "beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, curling disabled down, down to the water" (113). With Mlle. Reisz's bird disabled, defeated, Edna lifts her body into the water; her terror "flames up," then sinks. Against natural, expected rhythms of the undulating waves is the notion of flight or transcendence into an unknown, an abstraction. Nowhere is this more apparent than in The Awakening's final paragraph. There the known or social world is described in terms of confining, sinking images. Along with "old terror" there are the dictatorial voices of Edna's father and sister. An old chained dog barks. And the spurs of a calvary officer give a disturbing
clank. The droning sound of bees and the cloying, musty smell of pinks all work together to create a sense of repression. Yet, at the same time, there is an ambiguity present in the passage because of word choice and placement.

Chopin places the word "air" at the end of the last sentence, highlighting the aspirational sound of the sound in the onomopoeic word. Its airy sound is unusual at the end of a sentence, where intonation usually demands a drop in pitch, a sinking sound in language. At the end of the sentence the word "air" creates a rising vocal line and a sense of upward motion. This is an audible sensation that is itself as abstract as the sinking imagery is concrete.

The audible, rising sensation indicates a spiritual transcendence at Edna's death, rather than a punishment or destructive failure. In contrast to the conflicting images of the final paragraph, Edna's transcendence is especially vivid. Confining images relate to society; transcendence is associated with music and Mlle. Reisz as Edna thinks of the woman during the last passages of the novel. Though Mlle. Reisz gave Edna the gift of spiritual experiences, she could not give her the power to sustain or fully comprehend them. Thus Edna's drowning is a grasp for a final spirituality born of Mlle. Reisz's tutelage and a renunciation of a society that cohabitates with and restricts a free spirit. Mlle. Reisz is only the giver of gifts; she does not and cannot assume responsibility for the way they are received.
EDNA AS A LISTENER

As powerfully as Mlle. Reisz and her music influence Edna, Edna does seek to reclaim music, to personalize it. As the narrator remarks, Edna is accustomed to visualizing music in a highly personal way. Adele's "well-rendered" music allows her to conjure images of a naked man by the seaside, a mincing lady, children playing, and a woman stroking a cat. Yet Mlle. Reisz's music will not allow Edna such specific and self-indulgent pictorializations. Instead, with Mlle. Reisz's music Edna experiences "naked passions" and is "at the mercy of her senses" (Justus 116). Because Edna's pictorializations clearly relate to her talent for painting, her loss of the ability to conjure pictures to music indicates that she is learning to perceive music as music, not in terms of any other idiom.

Edna's perception of music as music is very close to a philosophy of art for art's sake. Such a philosophy is suggested by Chopin as she undercuts the expectations nineteenth-century readers would have attached to a novel about a young female listener who is affected by Romantic music. Such readers would have been accustomed to attaching a moral to a novel about such music. Instead, Chopin celebrates Romantic music's influence and Edna's spiritual experiences through it. Music is important because it is a unique medium and has no express and ulterior motives.
Edna grows away from conjuring pictures to music; Edna's talent for painting is juxtaposed to Mlle. Reisz's music-making ability. A comparison of Mlle. Reisz and Edna as artists is perhaps a little unfair because of their respective trainings. Mlle. Reisz has alluded to the strength of the artist, whose inner resources allow her to channel her life through her art. Edna has artistic impulses and artistic sensitivity, but has no experience in directing these feelings. No evidence is given that Edna took drawing or music lessons as a child. Yet her father, the Colonel, is prepared to believe his daughter is a talented artist, for "if her talent had been ten-fold greater than it was, it should not have surprised him, convinced as he was that he had bequeathed to all of his daughters the germs of a masterful capability, which only depended upon their own efforts to be directed toward successful achievement" (68). The Colonel's attitude here contains an element of the naive that is also discernable in Edna, for both initially believe that artistry is easily accomplished by either disposition or genetics.

Edna's growing sophistication as a listener of music is reflected in her attitude toward the musical experience. She becomes accustomed to listening without the aid of pictures, without their referential (in cases self-referential) support. And the abstractness of music is at first alarming to Edna as "she waited for the material pictures which she thought would gather and blaze before her imagination. She waited in vain" (27). In one sense, Edna's expectations are dashed completely since she does not experience what she had hoped. Here Edna's listening is analogous to her life of romantic idealization--waiting for a passionate and beautiful experience. One of Edna's romantic concepts is of the naked
man by the sea and nearby bird. This vision, which prefigures her own end, may suggest that Edna becomes one with her own romantic ideals, eventually rejecting the abstraction of music. But there is a greater and more subtle irony involved, again analogous to Edna's listening experience. Just as Edna does experience a response to music of the magnitude she craves, it works in an unexpectedly nonrepresentational mode. And Edna does end her life in a situation very like that of the figure she imagines, but not for a desperate reach to recapture a romantic ideal.

The ideal, in the course of Edna's experience in *The Awakening*, becomes less distinct, less visible to her as she gains both worldly and artistic sophistication that will not allow her to indulge in romantic visions like those she pictured while listening to Adele's piano playing. She knows that Robert is not going to fulfill her, even if she tries to make him the center of her world in a Ratignolle fashion. She tells Robert:

"I love you ... only you. It was you who awoke me last summer out of a life-long, stupid dream. Oh! you have made me so unhappy with your indifference. Oh! I have suffered, suffered! Now you are here we shall love each other, my Robert. We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of any consequence. I must go to my friend; but you will wait for me? No matter how late; you will wait for me, Robert?" (107).

Edna makes these statements, knowing that she and Robert have just reached a violent conflict. Robert has spoken of Léonce releasing Edna to him. Edna reacts with sophisticated incredulity, saying:
"You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy, she is yours,' I should laugh at you both" (106-7).

Clearly Edna's two statements are contradictory. One (immediately above) reflects Edna's recent experiences and a change in her thinking. When Robert turns pale and asks what she means, she placates him with what he will understand—a romantically idealized (and socially appropriate) view of them that Edna herself no longer believes. She believed it at one time and wants to believe it again, reverting to it in the face of Robert's reaction. Edna recoils from her own morally ambiguous thoughts in the face of Robert's search for a moral and socially sanctioned conclusion to their flirtation. In a like manner Edna initially recoiled from the mysterious experience of abstract music, caught between old habits and new sensations.

Edna's changed lifestyle and artistic beliefs can be discussed in terms of a search for spirituality. She longs to rise above the mundane as she does during the musical experience. Leaving her house is not enough; Edna chooses not only a new home, but an elevated spot as well. Arobin finds her in the old home, preparing to move and "upon a high step-ladder, unhooking a picture from the wall" (84). Arobin calls for her to come down. Edna replies, "No ... Ellen is afraid to mount the ladder. Joe is working over at the 'pigeon house'—that's the name Ellen gives it, because it's so small and looks like a pigeon house--and some one has to do this'" (84). Edna certainly does not need to be on the ladder. She
is exhilarated by the experience, mimicking flight like one of Mlle. Reisz's birds. Ominously, however, she is moving into the house of a pigeon—a domesticated bird which will not meet her own lofty expectations.

As the reader becomes increasingly aware that Edna's preparedness for artistry and her artistic expectations are to be at odds with each other, music drops out of the novel. Edna's life, once so full of every conceivable type of music, becomes discordant and tuneless. At her dinner party the mandolin players provide only a background music, "an agreeable accompaniment rather than an interruption to the conversation"; when her guests leave, Edna's feeling is highlighted as she likens their voices to "a discordant note upon the quiet harmony of the night" (90). The next reference to music again ends with silence. After Edna leaves her children, who are like a "delicious song," "the song no longer echoed in her soul. She was again alone" (94). Immediately after that experience Edna goes to see Mlle. Reisz, but finds no one in. Returning later in the day, Edna seats herself at the piano, but succeeds only in "softly picking out with one hand the bars of a piece of music which lay open before her" (96). Thus music fades, almost imperceptibly, from Edna's life. The absence of music in her life indicates that a sensual world cannot sustain Edna's questing spirit, especially as Edna is unable to adequately supply her own music.

Edna's seating of herself at Mlle. Reisz's piano is only one action in a series of imitations of the musician's life. Trying to fill her life with artistry is not enough for Edna, who begins to mimic Mlle. Reisz's actions and attitudes. When Adele Ratignolle visits Edna's "pigeon
house," Edna tells her to "Mind the step," (95), much like Mlle. Reisz, at her home, telling Edna, "Be careful; the stairs and landing are dark; don't stumble" (64). The relationships between the women are also comparable. Mlle. Reisz plays her music especially for Edna while Edna shows her sketches to Adele. Most striking, though, is Edna's statement to Dr. Mandelet when she says:

"There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But 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" (110).

Edna's statements are reminiscent of the language that Chopin uses to describe Mlle. Reisz in Chapter Ten, where the pianist has "a disposition to trample upon the rights of others" (26). If indeed Edna is acquiring an artistic disposition, then she is in a terrible situation, with neither the artistry to sustain her impulses nor the guiltlessness that accompanies a disposition like Mlle. Reisz's.

Edna's disillusionment with art is analogous to her disillusionment with her lovers. She has begun to realize that painting is not for her, music is wafting from her life, and she has attempted only one fantastic story. She searches for self-expression through various arts, discarding them in her frustrations. If the analogy between lovers and art forms is apt, then neither love nor art will last for her. Edna's frustrations regarding artistry are heightened by definitions of the artist that occur in casual conversation. Léonce is prepared to allow Edna to paint as long
as their family life remains intact, mentioning Adele Ratignolle’s devotion to her music and her home. Edna rejects the implied notion of herself and Adele as artists, saying, "'She isn’t a musician and I’m not a painter. It isn’t on account of painting that I let things go’" (57). She resents the idea of artistry being applied to amateurs, even herself. At Edna’s decidedly sensual dinner, Miss Mayblunt pronounces the Colonel an artist because of the cocktail he had invented (87), demonstrating that there is in society a casual attitude toward artistry rather than an ongoing quest for understanding like the one Edna pursues.

Edna will never, in her mature life, develop a virtuosic ability. But in her desire to emulate artistry she realizes she is trapped within a society that forces a coding of expression. And such a coding is unavailable to Edna. She can appreciate and recognize artistry, but she cannot find fulfillment in the art she creates. Since Edna has no satisfying artistic outlet, she takes on the "unwomanly habit" of expressing herself through her actions and everyday life. Her actions prompt society’s censure, which is very like society’s censure of artistic material, something Chopin’s readers should have recognized as they must have compared Chopin’s novel with others of the time. Chopin’s novel and characters must at first have seemed the embodiment of moralistic views toward music. But Chopin slowly and subtly subverts the view of Edna as weak and passive, of Romantic music as dangerous, and of Mlle. Reisz as evil. Neither Edna nor music nor Mlle. Reisz are discussed in terms of morals. A moral view is simply not part of Chopin’s attitude toward her characters and situations. Nor, she seems to indicate, should morals be imposed upon art, especially music, which is an abstract art.
Edna’s awakening to artistry, through music, offers not a critique of music and the feelings it arouses, but of the society which cannot unconditionally accept Edna’s need for an emotional outlet. When Edna is listening to Mlle. Reisz, she can accept the combination of society’s codes with artistic ones. But when Edna eventually seeks to express herself, through artistry, she rebels against a society that denies her expression in her daily life—the only medium she can work within to her own satisfaction. These are the weights that anchor Edna to a world of tradition, for her transcendence through music is only a brief and fleeting experience that encourages her to fly high into new and unknown realms. Edna’s experiences, which are only briefly related to the reader, are as tantalizing to him or her as they are to Edna. The brevity and suggestiveness of Chopin’s descriptions are part of her reaction to traditional and hackneyed descriptions of music in other novels.

Like Edna, Kate Chopin also moves from convention to a subversion of it. Edna changes from a conventional, domestic woman to a free-thinking and independent one; so Chopin moves from common motifs in nineteenth-century fiction to a negation of the traditional and concrete meanings attached to musical motifs. She presents a performer-listener situation where Romantic music influences a young female listener. But Edna perceives music as non-referential and abstract, an indication that music is not evoked in the novel with its usual destructive and immoral connotations. In relation to Edna’s suicide, music is more closely aligned with creation than destruction. Through music Edna’s artistic sensitivity is born and after music Edna learns to swim; in a period of silence in her life she decides not to use her swimming ability. And as
Chopin reveals that her characters Edna and Mlle. Reisz are much more than typical nineteenth-century stereotypes, she codes music in The Awakening in a way that is ambiguous.

Her coding suggests period influences and patterns, but adds to them to reflect an underlying philosophy that views art as amoral and prompts questioning as to why the traditional coding exists. Unlike nineteenth-century novels that depict musical situations, including The Portrait of a Lady, The Bostonians, and Trilby, Chopin's novel portrays society as a constricting force, conditionally accepting behavior and limiting artistic growth. It is through music and its influences in The Awakening that Kate Chopin envisions an artistic utopia that, to Edna's frustrations did not exist in her world, or, sadly enough, in Chopin's own.
NOTES

1 Katherine Garesché, Kate Chopin's girlhood friend, became a nun at the St. Louise Academy of the Sacred Heart. Emily Toth notes that Kate and Kitty were "separated by the Civil War at the age of thirteen" and were unable to see each other again until the end of the war (Toth 288). Kitty's recollection about Kate's singing would have dated to a time when the two girls were both very young.

2 "Ole Bull" (pronounced O-LAY) was a popular performer who at one time played a Strandivari violin, the Ole Bull violin (1687) now in the Smithsonian Institution's Dr. Herbert Axelrod collection. Ole Bull sold his Strandivari instrument before 1861, so it is not probable that Chopin heard him perform on his prized instrument.

3 The virtuosic tradition was based on an individual's technical facility and musicianship as well as his or her decision to make a career out of music. An emphasis on virtuosity was especially pronounced in the nineteenth-century when the popularity of figures like Paganini, Liszt, Chopin, and Clara Schumann was extraordinary. Before the interest in virtuoso performers there was more of a sense of equality between the performer and the gentleman amateur. However, with the attention placed upon virtuosity, the separation between artist and his or her audience became more profound. Such performers drew crowds of listeners, exciting a musical fever of activity that affected most fashionable households. In the home, usually the parlour, music was supplied as a part of ordinary entertaining. There it was fashionable for amateur musicians to perform pieces that were arrangements of popular operatic or symphonic works. In a comparative sense the parlour song tradition was an imitation of the virtuosic one.

4 By "Dionysian" music Nietzsche means an earthy, even voluptuous music that conveys a sense of unity or oneness among mankind in a mythical sense. Giorcelli discusses Nietzsche in conjunction with The Awakening, seeing Apollonian (the opposite of Dionysian) and Dionysian elements in Robert and Victor Lebrun (Giorcelli 132), but concedes that "It is possible that the occasional Nietzschean theme in Chopin is actually Emersonian and one acquired on native ground" (146).

5 Shaw's 1913 short play, "The Music-Cure," seems to be a reaction against the moralization of music and a parody of nineteenth-century views of the destructive nature of music. There the young and distraught Reginald, who plays popular music, is brought from his depression by the classical performer, Strega. Not wanting to be lifted from his depression, Reginald threatens to leap out of the window as she attempts to cure him by
playing. "Do," Strega answers, "What an advertisement! It will be really kind of you" (Shaw 157). There is a happy ending.

6 I am quoting from James's 1881 version of The Portrait of a Lady rather than the revised 1908 edition. The 1881 publication more strongly voices James's view of Madame Merle as an artist. In the 1881 version Madame Merle is a "brilliant musician" (177) who plays Beethoven and has the touch "of an artist" (159). In the revised edition she, a "brave musician," plays Schubert (a much less controversial composer); her playing reveals "skill" and "feeling" (151), but not artistry.

7 Even though Lucy Gayheart is later than other novels that I have juxtaposed to The Awakening, Cather's novel seems an appropriate choice because, early in her career, Cather reviewed The Awakening for the "Books and Magazines" section of the Pittsburgh Leader of July 8, 1899.

8 Bram Dijkstra in his Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siecle Culture discusses drowning as a popular type of death for heroines of the turn of the century. Ophelia, an extremely popular figure of the era, exhibits an outward or bodily passivity in her suicidal drowning as well as an inward control over her thoughts and passions (Dijkstra 42).

9 The drowning metaphor, contend some critics, especially relates to female death. Elaine Showalter views Edna's drowning as, in one sense, an appropriately feminine type of death, for "Drowning itself brings to mind metaphysical analogies between femininity and liquidity. As the female body is prone to wetness, blood, milk, tears, and amniotic fluid, so in drowning the woman is immersed in the feminine organic element" (Showalter 52).

10 Chopin's use of passive verb constructions, say some critics, indicates Edna's doom because of the language describing Edna. Susan J. Rosowski notes that "Chopin describes the release of Edna's imaginative life in terms of passivity. Edna 'blindly' follows 'whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction' p. 913)" (Rosowski 317). Wendy Martin, too, comments upon the passive verb construction in the passage describing Edna's first swim. She claims the passiveness here indicates that Edna will never have the stamina to withstand the current and tides (Martin 22).

11 Chopin's readers voiced the opinion that Edna deserved her death as a type of punishment for her immoral ways. Elaine Showalter notes that Edna's drowning is suggestive of period fictional punishments for "female transgressors against morality" (Showalter 52). Readers of The Awakening attacked Chopin for her failure to punish Edna. Such a punishment, they felt, would justify the immoral elements of Chopin's plot. The New Orleans Times-Democrat of June 18, 1899 mentioned that there was in The Awakening a deplorable "undercurrent of sympathy" for Edna and "nowhere a single note of censure" for her (TA 150). Other reviews like the one in the Los Angeles Sunday Times of June 25, 1899 refer to the "author's
desire to hint her belief that her heroine had the right of the matter" (TA 152).

Mockford, Sebastian's long-time accompanist, is clearly the most malignant figure in Cather's Lucy Gayheart. It is he who ensnares Sebastian; Sebastian in turn causes Lucy to fall in love with him, which indirectly causes her destruction. Sebastian's motives are artistically-oriented while Mockford's, like Svengali's and Madame Merle's, are power-oriented.
WORKS CITED


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