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剑桥美国小说新论·33
(英文影印版)

New Essays on

The Awakening

《觉醒》新论

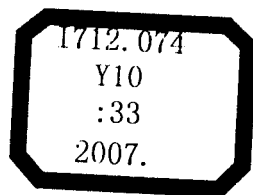
Wendy Martin 编



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导 读

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近年来,美国文学在我国很受欢迎。大专院校英语系纷纷开设美国文学选读和专题课,学生从中学到的大部分内容是美国小说。不仅如此,在本科毕业论文、硕士论文或博士论文方面,学生所选题材也大多为关于某部美国小说或某个美国小说家。然而,我们的学生往往热衷理论而对作品或作家缺乏深入细致的了解和分析。他们往往先大谈理论规则,然后罗列一些例证,不能很好地把理论和文本融会贯通,恰如其分地结合在一起。在这种情况下,我们需要一些好的参考资料来帮助学生更好地认识和理解他们在阅读或研究的作品和作家。《剑桥美国小说新论》正是这样一套优秀的参考书。

这套丛书的负责人是曾经主编过《哥伦比亚美国文学史》的艾默里·埃利奥特教授,并且由英国剑桥大学出版社在上世纪80年代中期开始陆续出书,至今仍在发行并出版新书,目前已有五十多种,不仅出平装本还有精装本。一套书发行二十多年还有生命力,估计还会继续发行,主要因为它确实从学生的需要出发,深受他们和教师的喜爱。

《剑桥美国小说新论》的编排方式比较统一。根据主编制定的原则,每本书针对一部美国文学历史上有名望的大作家的一本经典小说,论述者都是研究这位作家的知名学者。开篇是一位权威专家的论述,主要论及作品的创作过程、出版历史、当年的评价以及小说发表以来不同时期的主要评论和阅读倾向。随后是四到五篇论述,从不同角度用不同的批评方法对作品进行分析和阐



释。这些文章并非信手拈来,而是专门为这套丛书撰写的,运用的理论都比较新,其中不乏颇有新意的真知灼见。书的最后是为学生进一步学习和研究而提供的参考书目。由此可见,编书的学者们为了帮助学生确实煞费苦心,努力做到尽善尽美。

这五十多种书有早期美国文学家库珀的《最后的莫希干人》,也有当代试验小说大师品钦的《拍卖第49号》和厄普代克那曾被《时代》杂志评为1923年以来100部最佳小说之一的《兔子,跑吧!》;有我们比较熟悉的麦尔维尔的《白鲸》,也有我们还不了解的他的《漂亮水手》;有中国学生很喜欢的海明威的长篇小说《永别了,武器》,令人想不到的是还有一本论述他所有的短篇小说的集子。有些大作家如亨利·詹姆斯、威廉·福克纳等都有两三本作品入选,但它们都分别有专门的集子。丛书当然涉及已有定论的大作家,包括黑人和白人作家(可惜还没有华裔作家的作品),但也包括20世纪70年代妇女运动中发掘出来的如凯特·肖邦的《觉醒》和佐拉·尼尔·赫斯顿的《他们眼望上苍》,甚至还有我国读者很熟悉的斯托夫人的《汤姆叔叔的小屋》。当年这部小说曾经风靡美国,在全世界都有一定的影响,后来被贬为“政治宣传”作品,从此在美国文学史上销声匿迹。70年代后随着要求扩大文学经典中女性和少数族裔作家的呼声日益高涨,人们才开始重新评价这部作品,分析它对日后妇女作家的影响、对黑人形象的塑造,甚至它在美国文学的哥特式传统中的地位等等。

这样的例子还有很多,例如威廉·迪恩·豪威尔斯和他的《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》。以前人们只肯定他在发展现实主义文学和理论方面的贡献,对他的作品除了《赛拉斯·拉帕姆的发迹》评价都不太高。但在这本新论文集子里编者对已有定论进行挑战,强调豪威尔斯的小说、他的现实主义跟当时的社会经济文化现状有很大的关系。他的小说既有其文学形式,又是一种社会力量。另外一位19世纪新英格兰作家萨拉·奥尼·裘威特过去一向被看成是乡土作家,现在学者们用女性主义观点强调她的《尖枞树之乡》对美国文学的贡献,分析当年的种族、民族主义和文学市场

对她写作的影响。用封底宣传语言来说,这本集子对美国文学研究、女性主义批评理论和美国研究等方面都会引起很大的兴趣。

还有一本书似乎在我们国家很少有人提起过——亨利·罗思的《就说是睡着了》。此书在 20 世纪 30 年代曾经风靡一时,此后长期销声匿迹,60 年代又再度受到推崇。现在这部小说则是上面提到的《时代》杂志 100 部优秀小说中的一部,被认为是上个世纪头 50 年里最为出色的美国犹太小说、最优秀的现代主义小说之一。评论家认为集子里的文章采用心理分析、社会历史主义等批评方法探讨了有关移民、族裔和文化归属等多方面的问题。

这套集子里还出现了令人信服的新论点。很长时间内海明威一直被认为是讨厌女人的大男子主义者。但在关于他的短篇小说的论述里,作者通过分析《在密执安北部》,令人信服地证明海明威其实对妇女充满同情。不仅如此,这一论断还瓦解了海明威在《太阳照样升起》中充分暴露他的厌女症的定论。

然而,作者们并不侈谈理论或玩弄理论名词,所有的论断都是既以一定的理论为基础,又对文本进行深入的分析;既把理论阐述得深入浅出,又把作品分析得丝丝入扣,让人不由得不得信服。他们能够做到这一点完全是因为他们了解学生的水平和需要。

我认为《剑桥美国小说新论》是一套很好的参考书。北京大学出版社购买版权,出版这套书是个有益于外国文学研究教学的决定。

Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself—apart from history, biography, and society—there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to

New Essays on The Awakening

American novels now widely read and studied. Each volume is devoted to a single novel and begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the novel's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of the American novel, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott
Princeton University

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Introduction

WENDY MARTIN

IN a portrait of Kate Chopin (Katherine O'Flaherty Chopin, 1850–1904), her son Felix remembers her as being available to her three sons and three daughters at all times. Describing his mother as being constantly interrupted by her children as she read or wrote in her Morris chair in the living room that was filled with books and decorated with a few simple paintings, he notes that there was a statue of a naked Venus on one of the bookshelves.¹ This icon of female eros represents the primary concern of Chopin's fiction – the celebration of female sexuality, and the tension between erotic desire and the demands of marriage, the family, and a traditional society.

Kate Chopin juggled the demands of her writing career and motherhood with extraordinary success. Although she often longed for privacy for her work as well as greater personal freedom, she carried out her domestic and social responsibilities with apparent equanimity. In spite of the fact that she was widowed in her early thirties and was left with six children to raise, she established a very comfortable home for her family and was known throughout St. Louis for her thriving household and her salon, which was frequented by the city's most prominent intellectuals and artists. By the mid-1890s, Kate Chopin was a nationally recognized novelist, short story writer, essayist and reviewer. She wrote more than one hundred short stories, many of which were published in *Vogue*, *The Century*, and the *Atlantic* and were later collected in *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897). Her best-known work, *The Awakening*, was published in 1899.

Born Katherine O'Flaherty in 1850 in St. Louis, Kate Chopin's mother, Eliza Faris, was of French Creole ancestry and her father,

Thomas O'Flaherty, was a prosperous merchant who had emigrated from Ireland in 1825. The O'Flaherty family life was lively, and Kate was a much-loved child. However, when she was four years old, her father was killed by the collapse of the bridge carrying the inaugural train of the Pacific Railroad into St. Louis. After Thomas O'Flaherty's tragic and untimely death, Kate grew close to her maternal grandmother, who spent many hours telling her granddaughter stories of Creole life. The sophisticated plots sometimes involved extramarital romance and interracial marriage, which gave the young girl an unusually complex view of the world.

When Kate O'Flaherty was nine years old, she entered St. Louis Academy of the Sacred Heart. Even though this was her first formal education, she was already an avid reader. Her grandmother's stories had kindled her interest in literature, and she knew all of the French classics as well as *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, *Ivanhoe*, and much of Dickens. As she grew older she became increasingly sophisticated in her taste, and read Dante, Cervantes, Goethe, Coleridge, Austen, and the Brontës as well. After graduating from the Academy in June 1868, she continued to be a voracious reader and became especially interested in the work of Madame de Stael. An entry in her commonplace book records a conversation between Byron and de Stael that explores the relationship between passion and virtue in their respective works. Apparently, the young student was fascinated by the fact that Byron – of all people – accused de Stael of undermining the morals of young women with her tales of unrequited love. During her late adolescence, Kate O'Flaherty had an active social life that included parties and balls, picnics, and the theater; at the same time, she felt guilty for spending so much of her time with social amusements. When she met Oscar Chopin, who was then twenty-five, she fell in love with the young French Creole from northwestern Louisiana – Natchitoches – and agreed to marry him.²

After a three-month European honeymoon, Oscar and Kate Chopin moved to New Orleans, where she spent considerable time exploring the city, which seemed more Old World than American to her. The couple lived in New Orleans for nine years until excessive rain ruined the cotton industry in 1878–9. They then moved

their large family to Cloutierville. Chopin describes the little town as a "French village" consisting of "two long rows of very old frame houses, facing each other closely across a dusty highway." Apparently, she lived a reasonably contented life there and is described as being a gracious hostess with considerable leisure and enough time to travel to St. Louis for lengthy visits. When Oscar caught swamp fever – malaria – in 1883 and died suddenly, the thirty-three-year-old Kate Chopin took over the management of the Natchitoches plantation and directed the enterprise with considerable success. But after a year, she sold the business and moved her family back to St. Louis to be closer to her mother. However, this reunion was very brief; Mrs. O'Flaherty died in June 1885, and the loss of husband and mother in rapid succession was devastating. Kate Chopin's daughter describes her mother as sinking into a depression from which she probably never fully recovered: "I think the tragic death of her father early in her life . . . the loss of her young husband and her mother, left a stamp of sadness on her which was never lost."³

Chopin's obstetrician, Frederick Kolbenheyer, was one of the few people who seemed to understand her during the period following the deaths of her husband and mother. He was an intellectual who was respected in St. Louis for his knowledge of philosophy and contemporary scientific theory, especially the work of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, as well as Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer. Noting that Chopin was articulate and had descriptive abilities, Kolbenheyer urged her to write; he understood that writing could be a focus for her extraordinary energy, as well as a source of income. His influence on his patient was profound, so much so that Kate Chopin gave up her Catholic faith and embarked on a career as a writer. At first she wrote love poetry lamenting her husband's death; these poems were extremely sentimental but were nevertheless published in *America*, a literary magazine located in Chicago in 1889. At this time, she also began writing short stories and was deeply influenced by the work of Maupassant, whom she credited with teaching her how to write:

I had been in the woods, in the fields, groping around; looking for something big, satisfying, convincing . . . [when] I stumbled upon Maupassant. I read his stories and marvelled at them. Here

was life, not fiction; for where were the plots, the old fashioned mechanism and stage trapping that in a vague, unthinking way I had fancied were essential to the art of story making. Here was a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who, in a direct and simple way, told us what he saw.⁴

What Chopin valued in Maupassant, then, was his skillful rendering of subjective experience and his emphasis on the importance of individual consciousness.

Chopin also read and admired Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and William Dean Howells and wrote a short story, "A Poor Girl," in an attempt to achieve the realistic texture that was characteristic of their work. This story was not accepted for publication but two others, "Wiser Than a God" and "A Point at Issue," were published in 1889. Both of these works explore the tension between artistic aspiration and social convention. In 1890, Chopin completed a novel, "At Fault," which she published and promoted at her own expense. Again, she explores the themes of emotional autonomy and the moral constraints imposed by society. Even though this first novel was published by a vanity press, it received a surprising number of reviews – including one in *The Nation*. Most of the reviewers objected to what they considered the questionable morals of the characters but admired its descriptive power and skillful characterizations.

Reinforced by the praise of "At Fault," Chopin completed another novel, "Young Dr. Gosse," two years later but failed to find a publisher for it. Turning to short fiction, she wrote at least forty stories, portraits, and vignettes that were published in local journals during the next three years. In 1893 Chopin's stories began to appear in Eastern magazines; the next eight years, *Vogue* accepted eighteen of her stories for publication. Most of her stories continued to explore the tension between emotional and erotic inclination and traditional social mores; for example, "A Shameful Affair," "A Lady of Bayou St. John," and "At Chenière Caminada" are unabashed explorations of eros and its consequences. Chopin's willingness to wrestle with taboo issues was unusual in a

woman writer of her generation and earned her a reputation for striking boldness.

In May 1893, Chopin went to New York City to interest publishers in her second novel and in a collection of her short stories, and Houghton Mifflin agreed to publish *Bayou Folk*. Because this volume, published in 1894, consisted of twenty-three stories that take place in Louisiana, for the most part Natchitoches, Chopin earned the reputation of being an important new local color writer. However, several reviews, especially those in *The Nation* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, also praised her wider vision and stylistic expertise that transcended regional circumstances.⁵ Encouraged by the attention her work received, Chopin wrote the truly daring "The Story of an Hour" in April 1894. The story describes the complex and certainly untraditional response of a woman who receives the news that her husband has been killed in a railroad accident; she weeps profusely and then exults that she is now unencumbered: "free, free, free!" she exclaims. The narration elaborates Louise Mallard's excitement:

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. . . . She saw a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe that they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature.⁶

Embedded in this text is an extremely radical, even subversive, view of the institution of patriarchal marriage and family, in which the power is traditionally held by husbands, not by wives and certainly not by children.

Apparently, this story signaled a more assertive phase of Kate Chopin's development as a person and as a writer. In less than a decade she had published a novel, nearly one hundred stories and numerous sketches, essays, poems, and a one-act comedy, as well as having written a second novel that remained unpublished. A

diary entry dated about a month after she completed "The Story of an Hour" indicates that she was pleased with her accomplishments and was living very much in the present:

How curiously the past effaces itself for me! I sometimes regret that it is so; for there must be a certain pleasure in retrospection. I cannot live through yesterday or tomorrow. It is why the dead in their character of dead and association with the grave have no hold upon me. . . . If it were possible for my husband and my mother to come back to earth, I feel that I would unhesitatingly give up every thing that has come into my life since they left it and join my existence again with theirs. To do that, I would have to forget the past ten years of my growth – my real growth. But I would take back a little wisdom with me: it would be the spirit of perfect acquiescence.⁷

Clearly, Chopin loved the freedom she had to pursue her own interests, and the theme of freedom from binding responsibility recurs in many of her stories. One of the most striking examples of this preoccupation is "A Pair of Silk Stockings," in which the female protagonist, Mrs. Sommers, longs to escape her responsibility to her children. In an afternoon of abandon, she treats herself to a luxurious lunch, the cinema, elegant gloves, and a pair of silk stockings. Other stories, such as "A Sentimental Soul" and "Madame Celestin's Divorce," are also excellent examples of the tension between self-effacement and self-assertion that is characteristic of Chopin's work.

Many of the stories that were published in her second collection, *A Night in Acadie*, in 1897 continue to explore female sexuality and the lives of women who follow (or would like to follow) their erotic impulses. The heroine of "Athenaise" acts out of passion; Madame Farival of "Lilacs" has several affairs; Suzima in "A Vacation and a Voice" takes a young boy as a lover; and Alberta of "Two Portraits" has sexual liaisons "when and where she chooses." Unlike most of her literary contemporaries, Chopin does not moralize about her heroines' moral frailty. More important, she does not attempt to make her fiction acceptable by punishing her heroines for their unconventional sexuality. Frequently, she had difficulty publishing her stories because of her amoral style; R. W. Gilder refused to publish "The Story of an Hour" in *Century*

magazine because he thought it was unethical. Even when Chopin toned down her work in an effort to appear in *Century* magazine (the protagonists in “A No-Account Creole” and “A Night in Acadie” were both chastened for flaunting convention), Gilder refused to publish them. However, when H. E. Scudder, the editor who accepted “Athenaise” for the *Atlantic*, suggested that she write another novel, she began work on *The Awakening*. Two years later, in April 1899, it was published by Herbert S. Stone & Company of Chicago and New York.

In recent years, critics have generally acknowledged the importance of *The Awakening* as an effectively crafted narrative of Edna Pontellier’s conflict between individual autonomy and social conformity, but the reviewers in the period immediately following publication of the novel condemned Chopin’s protagonist as weak, selfish, and immoral; most of them smugly gloated over her suicide. Frances Porcher announced in the May 4, 1899, issue of *The Mirror* that Edna has “awakened to know the shifting, treacherous, fickle deeps of her own soul in which lies, alert and strong and cruel, the fiend called Passion, that is all animal and all of earth, earthy.” Porcher concluded her review: “It is better to lie down in the green waves and sink down in close embraces of old ocean, and so she does.”⁸ Six weeks later the reviewer in *Public Opinion* announced: “we are all well satisfied when Mrs. Pontellier deliberately swims out to her death in the waters of the gulf.”⁹ Another review that appeared at the same time in *Literature* describes the novel as an “essentially vulgar” story and concluded, “the waters of the gulf close appropriately over one who has drifted from all right moorings, and has not the grace to repent.”¹⁰ The reviewer of the *Providence Sunday Journal*, who singled out Chopin’s novel for the “Book of the Week” section, announced, “Miss Kate Chopin is another clever woman, but she has put her cleverness to a very bad use in writing *The Awakening*. The purport of the story can hardly be described in language fit for publication.”¹¹ And the reviewer from the *Los Angeles Sunday Times* complained, “the novel is unhealthily introspective and morbid in feeling . . . when she writes another book it is to be hoped that she will choose a theme more healthful and sweeter of smell.”¹² The reviewer from the *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, proclaiming the book “unhealthy,” objected to the fact