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COOKING UP CHANGE: RECONSTRUCTING THE CREOLE WOMAN

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Cooking Up Change: Reconstructing the Creole Woman

A Thesis

Presented to

The College of Graduate Studies

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Master of Arts in English

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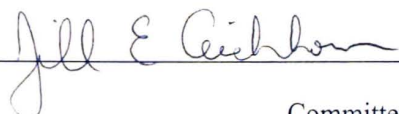
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Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Chapter II: Establishing Cultural Guidelines.....	6
Chapter III: Analyzing the Text: Chopin's <i>The Awakening</i>	14
Chapter IV: Analyzing the Text: King's <i>The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard</i>	26
Chapter V: Conclusion.....	29
References.....	31
Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography.....	33

Dedication

This work is dedicated to café au lait, shrimp creole, and beignets.

Critical Influences

The late nineteenth century changed on every social, economic, and cultural front. The feminist movement gathered steam and became more organized as proponents pushed for equality and suffrage for all women. Later, in the 1960's and 70's, another wave of feminism arose and began to re-examine their predecessors; female writers of previous decades and even centuries resurfaced to become part of the literary canon as the role of women in society changed. When studying works proclaimed to be feminist texts, the contemporary culture surrounding the text and its author needs to be examined as well in order to provide a more complete image.

During the feminist movement of the 1960's and 70's, writers such as Kate Chopin were brought to the forefront of women's literature and have remained there, while others such as Grace King have only surfaced in the critical arena every so often. Chopin's novel, *The Awakening*, has been hailed as a feminist model by such literary critics as Barbara Ewell and Barbara Solomon, and Chopin is studied in college classrooms as a leading feminist writer. Kate Chopin's novel was reevaluated and found to be crucial reading in feminist literature. Many feminists claim Edna Pontellier to be a feminist prototype in literature. Edna is not only a leading lady of feminism, but also the embodiment of what an independent thinking, strong woman should be. Her character acts as a foil with Madame Ratignolle, who devotes herself wholly to her husband and children. Edna is quite often associated with the forward thinking, modern woman and, therefore, strong while Adèle represents the past as a weak, feminine woman who is dominated by her husband and family's needs.

In order to establish the cultural facets of Creoles in the late nineteenth century, cultural evidence must be produced and studied alongside the literary texts in order to create a more complete view of the society in question. Lafcadio Hearn, an Irish-Greek immigrant who made his way to New Orleans in the 1870's as a journalist, provides several sources to use in gauging the social expectations of the time period. Hearn's fascination with the Creoles led him to devote almost a decade to its study during which he produced multiple collections of his findings. Hearn's collection of essays, articles, poems, city sketches, and even recipes captures the image of the Creole like no other collection; he provides details on not just the literal meaning of what makes one a "Creole," but also the minute nuances that make up the internal being of a man or woman of that culture. His studies varied from the culinary arts to linguistics, and he was well-known for his attraction to voodoo queen Marie Laveau.

Grace King's work resurfaced in 1970's, but her writings have not been so openly hailed as feminist works. King's *The Pleasant Ways of St. Medard* captures the image of a changing New Orleans in the 1860's after the official end of the Civil War. Mariana Talbot moves her family back to the city of New Orleans and works diligently to reestablish their position in society, much like Adèle Ratignolle or her family must have done. The role of the Creole woman in the late nineteenth century was more than "family" oriented; she directed her children's education, her spouse's career, the management of the family's finances and home life, and, ultimately, her family's position in society. Mariana Talbot and Adèle Ratignolle understand this role of their lives and partake in it wholeheartedly; Edna, as an outsider to the Creole culture, does not. While Edna is often considered the stronger, more "feminist" character, Mariana and Adèle are

also empowered in a way that existed in their culture and in their time period, that of Reconstruction Era New Orleans.

Hearn's work carries importance in a sociological aspect in that his studies allow readers to establish the cultural context of works such as Chopin's and King's. The roles of Edna and Adèle are deeply associated with their respective cultures. Edna is constantly viewed as an outsider to the Creole culture into which she has married, while Adèle has been raised in the Creole culture of New Orleans. If one takes this cultural context into consideration in a new historicist mode of interpretation, Adèle Ratignolle cannot be viewed as the "counter-feminist" image so often ascribed to her by feminist critics because, as a redefined Creole woman, her strength is seen in her ability to run her family and household. By considering Hearn's statements of the Creole culture, the state of feminism at the time, and the role of the female in Creole society, the emphasis placed on the Creole woman as weak, feminine, and disempowered can be reevaluated to prove that she, in fact, possessed more power in establishing herself and her family in the Creole society of the late nineteenth century than previously thought, not *in spite of* her being female, but *because of* it.

CHAPTER I:

Introduction

The Creole culture of New Orleans has a distinct flavor and in the late nineteenth century began the slow process of change dubbed "Americanization." This process began after the Civil War and its effects can be seen in various literary models published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The evolution of the southern woman is one aspect of southern society that became greatly altered during the Reconstruction Era, and one which is frequently examined by modern feminist critics. Kate Chopin's heroine, Edna Pontellier, is often treated as a prototype of feminism and is contrasted within the novel to the character of Adèle Ratignolle. The two women are frequently depicted in criticism as binaries or social opposites in terms of their feminist qualities, but when viewed in their contemporary culture through works such as Hearn's, while each woman holds a different place on the feminine spectrum, neither position is dominant or preferable over the other in terms of those feminist qualities. Writers such as Hearn and novelist/historian Grace King provide especially useful sources for reconstructing the Creole woman in this cultural context.

Lafcadio Hearn's cultural works and collections enable an understanding of the Creole culture from a contemporary perspective, rather than a historical one. Hearn ventured into the city in 1870 and spent nearly a decade capturing every essence possible on paper as he chronicled not only New Orleans, but the heart of the Creole culture that defined it. This collection of work, which includes regular newspaper editorials, a linguistic guide, and a cookbook of Creole cuisine, focuses a great deal on how the

culture is evolving as well as a deep appreciation of the Creole woman. Hearn, like many outsiders when they first visit New Orleans, was immediately enamored of the old city. Hearn, an Irish-Greek journalist, first set foot in New Orleans in 1877, after leaving his previous post in Cincinnati following a scandalous but brief marriage and divorce. Even in the later nineteenth century, New Orleans had already earned worldly renown as a place of mystery and intrigue, and in "*The American Scene* (1907) Henry James noted that whereas the 'ancient order' in the South was 'masculine, fierce and mustachioed,' the post-Civil War era was marked by a 'strange feminization'" (qtd in Kirby n.p.). Hearn began writing about the unique culture found in the city almost immediately and set himself the task of documenting the changes in the Creole culture as they were occurring in those decades of change following the Civil War. Most of Hearn's writings were done for local newspapers, but he soon branched out to include not only nonfictional essays and editorials, but some poetry, prose, and even a novel. Hearn's articles became well-known in New Orleans society, and he befriended several in the city's literary circle, including "his New Orleans contemporary and sometimes friend, writer George Washington Cable" (Starr xx). These connections were extended through Hearn's work for the local newspapers as well as his side ventures of cultural analysis.

Hearn's desire to catalogue the Creole culture led him to the research and formation of a distinct work published in 1885 entitled *La Cuisine Creole*. In *La Cuisine Creole*, Hearn provides a large collection of Creole recipes, "the first of the now endless stream of books devoted to the culinary arts in New Orleans" (Starr xvii). This work was reprinted in a second edition in 1966, but is now no longer in print. Hearn organizes his

guide based upon the needs of the young Creole housewife about to entertain guests in her home. He opens with a very brief statement about the Creole housewife's needs and how his book attempts to meet those needs both culturally and economically, two important aspects to the Creole housewife, according to Hearn. After discussing a multitude of soup recipes, Hearn moves into reciting basic dishes of "gombo," oysters, jambalaya, and fish. In some cases, Hearn provides a plethora of details in his instructions, such as in the directions for how to dress a turtle: "Cut off the head and let it bleed well" (31), while in others, his directions are vague to the point of uselessness, as in his recipe for roasted duck: "Clean, draw and truss the duck or ducks, wash them nicely, salt and pepper them and [...] stuff with mashed potatoes" (77). The section addressing meat or poultry dishes is significantly shorter than those listing fish, vegetable, and dessert dishes, perhaps due to his attempt at providing more economical choices as pertains to ingredients. A number of recipes, such as potato and chicken salad and "cold slaw," are regular appearances at picnics and barbecues today. As Hearn progresses through the collection, he includes a section entitled "Delicate Preparations for the Sick and Convalescent" in which he provides multiple remedies for common ailments. Hearn finishes his collection with a brief discussion on wines, provides several sample meal plans for an evening of entertaining, and concludes with a short section on how to properly clean a home, with advice such as "House cleaning should commence at the top of the house and work downwards. In this case it may be undertaken by spells, with intervening rests" (257). The goal for his work was to provide useful information for the young Creole wife to set up her home with little to no outside assistance in the means of

servants or slaves. Using Hearn's collection as a guide, the reader can see that Chopin and King present very different images of the typical Creole, perhaps due to their own biographical experiences of the culture and their own times spent living in the fading city of New Orleans.

In the decades following Hearn's collection, several writers would paint similar pictures of the Creole culture and define both what it is and what it is not. The collection of writings created by Hearn between 1877 and 1887 describes the Creole culture during the Reconstruction period in New Orleans and influences both Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and the lesser known Grace King's *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard* (1916) in defining and describing the Creole woman. While desiring independence and strength, southern women had already experienced thirty years of conflict and change. Not only were they left to care for themselves and their immediate families in a time of war, but many women, like Grace King's mother, were left in charge of large, working plantations while the battles raged practically in their backyards. Women like King's mother had already witnessed immense social change, and many lost fortunes, family, and pride. During the occupation of New Orleans, the King family sought passage to leave the city so they could rejoin Grace's father at the family plantation. In order to obtain the necessary paperwork to travel legally, Mrs. King had to face the commanding general himself. In a collection of her works edited by Robert Bush, King writes in her memoir:

[My mother] must do it, and she could do it! She was not afraid of anything or anybody, and she, if anyone, could face the Commanding

General in his headquarters.[...] We children watched her set out, dressed carefully as for church-- silk dress, mantilla, pretty bonnet [...], lace veil, and parasol, her head held high, and the usual bright smile on her face.

(40)

What women like this gained, however, was a sense of control; they could lead their families, feed them, heal them, and educate them independently. After the war, these women worked to pick up the pieces of their lives, put their men back together, and progress into an uncertain future.

CHAPTER II:

Establishing Cultural Guidelines

The placement of the two novelists, Chopin and King, along a continuum of “Creole-ness” finds them relatively close together, and yet miles apart. Neither one is fully a part of that culture, and each strives to represent her view of it from a quasi-outsider perspective. The attention paid to the authors’ statuses as either “insider” or “outsider” reflects sociologist Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism. In his work, *Orientalism*, Said claims that “men have always divided the world up into regions having either real or imagined distinction from each other” (39). According to Said, the Orient, in this case any culture deemed “different” from the mainstream, presents difficulty to the Occident, or mainstream culture. Said’s own personal studies focus on Islamic and Asian topics, but the inherent concept of the major culture overtaking and viewing the minor culture in negative connotations can be applied to the American fascination with the Creole culture. Said maintains that his goal is not “to make an assertion about the necessary privilege of an ‘insider’ perspective over an ‘outsider’ one,” but simply to work to solidify the representation of the “Orient” society in the texts or works of the “Occident” culture (322). Said accredits the notion of insider/outsider status to noted sociologist Robert K. Merton, who writes in his text *The Sociology of Science* that “one has monopolistic or privileged access to knowledge, or is excluded from it, by virtue of group membership or social position” and that “only through continued socialization in the life of a group can one become fully aware of its symbolisms and socially shared realities” (105-6). In this case, Hearn, King, and Chopin all act as “outsiders” to varying

degrees. Hearn remains an outsider in multiple senses of the word and spends his life working to capture other cultures from his outsider status. King is perhaps the closest to the Creole structure of society, having been raised in the city of New Orleans and attended French schools alongside her young Creole friends. Chopin's position as outsider rests in between Hearn and King as she marries into the society with some French heritage, without a strictly Creole upbringing.

Kate Chopin's own cultural heritage denotes some French ancestry, but not enough for the locals to consider her as a full member of their society. She represented the Creole culture through the eyes of Edna Pontellier, a native Kentuckian who, like Chopin, married into a Creole family similar to the Pontelliers. Chopin was raised by the maternal side of her family after her father's death during her childhood, and her grandmother, a cunning businesswoman and role model for young Kate, had a strong hand in her granddaughter's education. After marrying Oscar and moving to New Orleans, "although she spoke fluent French and came from a Confederate family, Kate Chopin was [still considered] an outsider, a Yankee, and a symbol of the victorious North" (Toth 118). This status of being an "outsider" to the locals can be seen in Chopin's creation of Edna, and Chopin writes many of her own characteristics into Edna's character, such as her long, solitary walks through a dangerous city. Chopin witnessed the decline of the Creole culture in the 1870's as many families sought to rebuild their fortunes after the war. Due to financial prosperity, Oscar had been sent to live in France until the war abated; this was an act both desired by those who could not afford such an opportunity, and scorned by those loyal to the Confederate flag. Even the Chopins,

however, were eventually affected by the economic woes and moved their family to Cloutierville in 1879.

Chopin's writing career began to take shape and became a means of supporting herself and her six children after Oscar's death from malaria in 1882. Her earlier writings were considered part of the "local color" movement, but Chopin began turning the focus of her writing to reflect the internal struggles of her characters, and her "interest is always primarily the internal world of her women characters as they search for a voice and space for themselves apart from society's agreed upon social roles" (Bryan 55). Writers such as George Washington Cable sought to define and display the Creole culture, but in *The Awakening*, "Chopin's major interest is never the 'cultural voice' of Edna and her outside world except as it illuminates the growth of her interior, personal voice and vision" (Bryan 58). Chopin created more universal characters that could reach a wide variety of people rather than a small interested group. In the creation of Edna Pontellier, Chopin did just that. Regardless of her literary accomplishments, Chopin faded away from the literary forefront until the latter part of the twentieth century. While New Critics were already lifting Chopin from the station of "local color" writer in the mid-twentieth century, the Feminist movement of 1960's encouraged a surge in the forgotten literature of women, and Chopin's work rose in popularity.

Grace King, another female writer in late nineteenth century New Orleans, focused her writing on representing the Creoles. Unlike Chopin's novel, King's novel actually did receive high praise in her lifetime, but her work faded from critical attention and has yet to be widely read. King grew up in New Orleans and lived among Creole

society for her entire life. King takes a great deal of pride in her city and its cultures, even though they are not precisely “hers.” While she was raised a Protestant, she attended Catholic, French speaking schools, just as her mother before her. In her memoirs, *Letters of a Southern Woman*, King tells an anecdote of her mother’s education in a convent school in the French Quarter. Studying alongside the little Creole girls, her mother spoke fluent French and learned her catechisms perfectly until Communion Day arrived. When her mother told the priest that she was a Protestant, the priest supposedly smiled sadly and replied, “That’s too bad. You were such a good Catholic girl!”

Like many in the city’s literary circle, King expressed outrage at George Washington Cable’s representation of Creole culture in his novel *Les Grandissimes*, which portrays the Creoles as brutal, heartless slave masters. When King expressed offense at this to Cable’s editor, the editor encouraged her to write something to the contrary. This simple challenge spurred King’s career, and she wrote *Monsieur Motte* almost immediately. In her first attempt at writing fiction, King chronicles the life of young Marie, who is of a wealthy family but orphaned at birth during the Civil War. She is financially supported at the city’s best boarding school by a mysterious “uncle” who is revealed in the conclusion to be her mother’s former slave and dearest friend, now a free woman. King’s shows her view of the interconnectedness between some families and their slaves and the dedication that many of the women of both colors felt for each other. Stylistically, in this short story-turned-novella, “King is moving from the romanticism of [Caroline Lee] Hentz to the psychological realism of Kate Chopin and other writers a decade later” (Shillingsburg n.p.). King’s focus tends to shift between the character and

the social setting around her, and while the characters' inner thoughts are described in omniscient detail, these thoughts typically concern the characters' own survival or contemplation of society's demands or restraints, not their own internal development. Precarious social positions are often explored because during Reconstruction, every social position was tenuous.

In the case of *Monsieur Motte*, the protagonist, Marie, exists as both a cultural insider and outsider simultaneously. While she is raised in an elite French school among the Creoles, she is an "American"; that is to say, she is of a patrician family without the French roots held so valuable by the New Orleans Creoles. In this sense, "a decade later Marie might have found a sister in Edna Pontellier" in that they both occupy the same position relative to two cultures, just as King and Chopin did themselves (Shillingsburg n.p.). While neither King nor Chopin possessed Creole roots, King was treated with more acceptance by the society of Creoles than Chopin, possibly due to Chopin marrying into the Creole culture rather than being raised alongside it as King had been. Relatives and friends of the Chopins "regarded her with great suspicion and disapproval" and felt her "Midwestern origins, her frank and forthright ways, and her insistence on doing strange things-- such as taking long walks by herself-- made her seem more Yankee than Southern" (Toth 66-7). Another consideration is the difference in their public personas. King encouraged and supported women's suffrage, but while "King appreciated the new vistas such protofeminists like [Julia Ward] Howe opened up to her, [she] lamented the sacrifice of feminine modesty and propriety often accompanying such vision" (Wilson 43). King even went so far as to politely decline speaking at an 1888 convention on

women's suffrage when she had been invited to address an audience by Susan B.

Anthony (Wilson 43). King, like her Creole neighbors, valued the idea of the Southern Lady, and this notion can be identified in her novels and characters.

King's writing style reflected a French flavor, and she directed her writing for a particular purpose: to show women, Creoles, and blacks in all their strengths to the world. She wrote "with artistry and feeling for a class of people who were all but voiceless, the disenfranchised and penniless women, black and white, who lived in the South after the Civil War" (Kirby n.p.). King used literature to capture the stories of camaraderie, bravery, and strength that abounded for these groups, but because her writing did not revolve around romantic love or the punished South's wrongs, she often found herself with no publisher. After early versions of her novel, *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard*, were declined by her editor, another writing acquaintance, Thomas Nelson Page, offered King advice: add in a romantic plot line. King refused. She maintained that the time period following the war was not in the least romantic and that to represent it so would be dishonest and misrepresent the culture and people, just as she felt Cable had done years earlier (Bush 23-4). King had sent a copy of her manuscript to an agent in London while visiting there in 1913, but the agent failed to publish a review or follow up for several years. Believing the novel to have been published, the agent passed the novel along to critic Edward Garnett. In the 1916 review in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Garnett wrote a review of Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* which he followed with, "Even higher, in its literary art, must we rank Grace King's *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard*, a story rare in its historical significance [...] Will not its exquisite shades of feeling, delicate in vibrating sadness,

give this novel a permanent place as an American literary classic?" (qtd in Bush 24).

Garnett did not realize that until his review, King's novel had still not been published. It wasn't until 1916, more than a decade after starting the novel, that Henry Holt and Company published the novel to critical praise, but low sales.

The literary characters created by King represent her view of the Creole culture as it stood in the late nineteenth century, and King became a renowned historian of the South and New Orleans, in particular, when she compiled several volumes on the history of the city and its people. She was fascinated by the representations of its women in literature and, when those representations felt false, she sought to display the realities of their lives, which she claimed were "'surprise-boxes [*sic*] to us women; we never know what is going to come out of them: our own plans, our own ideas count for nothing. ... Men are the serious occupation, women are the playthings, of fate'" (qtd in Shillingsburg n.p.). King created female characters who "are much more prepared to face the hardships and humiliation brought about by the social change than men, who are caught up so fully in their abstract codes of honor and pride that they are blind to the obvious truths that surround them" (Bryan 46). In no case is this more true than in King's *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard*, which centers around the Talbot family as it returns to New Orleans after the Civil War. While King provides in-depth chapters describing the characters around the family, she returns ultimately to focus on Mariana Talbot, the matriarch of the family. King's own past hints that Mariana is modeled after her own mother, who led the children, grandparents, and slaves from an occupied New Orleans through the swamps and bayous to find the family plantation where her Confederate husband waited. King

does not focus on the acts of bravery exhibited during the War, but on the tedious, exhausting lives of those who attempt to put the pieces back together; the mothers, sisters, and daughters who are left to struggle to keep the family clothed, fed, and educated while trying to repair their men's egos and psyches along the way.

CHAPTER III:

Analyzing the Text: Chopin's *The Awakening*

The ineffable strength of southern women had not gone unnoticed, and outsiders such as Hearn became infatuated with their presence and roles in society. The image of the Southern Belle abounds in literature and, after the advent of film, on the silver screen. Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier embodies the ideals of an evolving woman of the late nineteenth century and not the traditional image of a "good" Creole wife as seen in Adèle Ratignolle, while King's Mariana Talbot is an amalgamation of the traditional Creole wife and the modern New Woman. Hearn focuses these cultural delineations, not on the Southern Belle, but on the Creole Belle, and he creates a kind of checklist in his descriptions to create or depict the "perfect" Creole woman along with ample description of the traditional Creole male. In the Creole culture, appearance is a highly important aspect of both social and financial well-being. Hearn writes of "the old Creole gentlemen who persistently live in the quaint houses amidst a certain quaint poverty, often, alas, vainly striving to keep out the dampness and to 'maintain appearances'" (46). This description fits Edna's lover, Arobin, when, during Edna's dinner party, he admits that while his name hangs on a lawyer's sign, proclaiming himself to be a lawyer, he is really only maintaining an appearance of a working man. Though Arobin does not lack in finances, he understands that he is expected to maintain a particular social appearance or expectation, especially following the Civil War when so many people struggled for decades for survival alone. He replies to an inquiry about his profession, "One is really forced as a matter of convenience these days to assume the virtue of an occupation if he

has it not" (84). While Arobin speaks nonchalantly about this social expectation, Mr. Ratignolle is aghast at such blatant humor poked at their society. While these expectations exist, they are not discussed in polite company nor met by such open falsehood.

Like Mr. Ratignolle, Mr. Pontellier, on the surface a "good" Creole, works diligently to maintain his image and reputation in society, even against Edna's encouragement to save money. The desire to renovate their Esplanade Street home is not a novel idea for Léonce, who wishes to begin as soon as the family returns to the city after the Grand Isle vacation. Having been raised in a more conservative setting in Kentucky, Edna's view on the family's spending sprees is obvious, and she feels the renovations are not needed. After Léonce requests her to accompany him to select new light fixtures, she responds, "I hardly think we need new fixtures, Léonce. Don't let us get anything new; you are too extravagant. I don't think you ever think of saving or putting by" (51). The emphasis on renovation can be construed as a social commentary on Chopin's part. It is not only the house on Esplanade Street that is being renovated, but Edna who is changing and growing, as is the very society of New Orleans.

In the case of the Pontelliers' discussion of finance and home renovation, Edna's position is conservative and reflects a new wave in that society. She recognizes their current level of comfort as quite acceptable and her words about saving money are ominous. Léonce responds, "The way to become rich is to make money, my dear Edna, not to save it!" (51). Léonce's disdain for saving as an unnecessary act carries a dark sense of foreboding. The state of finances in the late nineteenth century was a precarious

one, but in Léonce's world, money is to be shown, not pocketed away and hidden. His culture is one in which he should display his success for the world to see. This attitude, however, would be deeply challenged in 1893 with the crash of the stock market. At the time, "the depression set off by the Panic of 1893 was the greatest depression America had known, and was only surpassed by the Great Depression of the 1930's" (McNamara 1). Léonce's primary investments reside in stocks and his carefree spending place the setting of the novel in a more lucrative era for stocks; it seems Chopin is setting up Léonce not only for the challenge of losing his wife, but also his financial and social statuses as well.

Edna's own concerns for social appearances simply do not exist. This attribute is part of her allure as an icon of the Feminist movement; she is a woman who decides her own life regardless of society's expectations. Edna's move into the Pigeon House is questioned by those around her, and Adèle expresses concern for her friend, asking if someone couldn't stay with her in the house. Ironically, Adèle says to Edna, "In some way you seem to me a child, Edna" (91). Edna's view of Adèle is remarkably similar; she remarks in several instances Adèle's reliance on Mr. Ratignolle and her complete devotion to her children while at the same time viewing herself as stronger and more mature than Adèle because of her own desire to be independent of her husband and children. Edna views her family as tying her down while Adèle views her own as part of her identity. Adèle, however, fears for Edna's reputation and bluntly tells Edna that "some one [*sic*] was talking of Alcée Arobin visiting you," insinuating that local gossip has already begun concerning Edna's reputation (91).

Typically, Edna is viewed as the stronger, more “pro-feminist” character because of the separation of her identity from her duty to her family. The flaw in this view, however, is that while Edna and Adèle are opposite in their outlooks, cultures, and roles in life, they are not binary in strength or amount of “pro-feminine” qualities. Adèle welcomes her maternal role as family matriarch while Edna strives for a more independent existence, but each woman is entitled to her choice of lifestyle. What is often overlooked in arguments of feminism is that the women have the ability to choose; neither one is “weaker” than the other. They are simply different forms of feminine strength. This is part of the allure of Adèle and Edna’s friendship; they love one another and accept the other’s decisions. Adèle apologizes for her words of advice, but Edna “laughed [and replied] ‘You may say anything you like to me’” (91). This friendship is welcomed by Edna who is not used to sisterly affection. The two become so close that Adèle feels able to discuss her concerns for Edna’s well-being without causing offense and even comments on Edna’s marriage. She proclaims that ““it’s a pity Mr. Pontellier doesn’t stay home more in the evenings. I think you would be more [...] united”” (66). Edna laughs Adèle’s comments away, claiming she would have nothing to say to Léonce even if he did increase his time at home, further illustrating the differences between the two couples’ marriages.

Adèle maintains the typical image of the pre-Civil War Creole, while Edna does not fit the Creole image at all. Adèle and Edna’s lives are very different from one another, yet they respect each other and withhold judgment. Traditionally, in the Creole society of the late nineteenth century, the matriarch of the family maintains Reception Days, days of

formal visitations she hosts from her home. During her Reception Day, a wife opened the doors of her home to receive visitors throughout the day. These visitors were typically related to her husband's career contacts, and these social gatherings played an important role in her spouse's position in the workplace. A "good" Creole housewife could and should maintain the family's position in society in order to ensure that her husband's career continued to run smoothly and that the family's financial future was secured. Edna, however, decides to discontinue her Reception Day tradition, dumbfounding Léonce. Edna sees the tradition as a simple domestic task easily eschewed, but Léonce understands the effect that Edna's decision could have on his career and their financial stability. However, Edna's dismissal of the Reception Day is more than a dismissal of her domestic role; she is ultimately giving up her voice and role in her husband's career.

The Creole wives were not simply recognizing traditional social protocol; they made calculated visits to better their family's social standings. In *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard*, Mariana Talbot uses her visits to her new neighbors to establish a financially feasible education for her children. Mademoiselle Mimi runs a small school that once would have been below the Talbot's social standing, but the high inflation rates of the schools the children would have attended cause Mariana to seek out Mme. Mimi instead. She meets with Mme. Mimi on Mimi's reception day to discuss Mr. Talbot's expectations of education, claiming they are her own as well. She ultimately decides that the children will learn from Mme. Mimi, but Mr. Talbot has personal issues with Mimi's Catholic instruction and insists that she present both Catholic and Protestant sides of history, much to Mimi's confusion.

As with most aspects of their domestic life, the Creole wives of the late nineteenth century learned to “make-do,” that is, to support the family at less financial cost. Hearn explains that “the Creole housewife often makes delicious *morceaux* from the things usually thrown away by the extravagant servant. She is proud of her art, and deservedly receives the compliments of her friends” (192). This explanation combines Léonce and Edna's values in an act that both saves money and maintains appearance. The family is able to display their wealth by the type and style of its cuisine, while the wife knows that she has saved the family expense in preparation. The need to preserve the family's place in society extends far beyond the patriarchal head of the family and rests upon the wife and matriarch. In his cookbook, *La Cuisine Creole*, Hearn includes not only a multitude of recipes, but also short descriptions of a stereotypical Creole housewife. These short expostulations describe not only the wife's role as a cook or chef, but as the foundation of the family unit, itself. The wife has the power to establish the mood for the family, the control of the servants, the society the family keeps, and, therefore, the role and social standing of the family.

In *La Cuisine Creole*, Hearn asserts that “much domestic contentment depends upon the successful preparation of the meal; and as food rendered indigestible through ignorance in cooking often creates discord and unhappiness, it behooves the young housekeeper to learn the art of cooking” (*i*). According to Hearn, the most basic level of domestic happiness begins at the dining room table. The consumption of food is not only a required act for sustenance, but a sensual act as well in that delicate spices and flavors could be manipulated in order to produce a desired effect on the consumer of the meal.

Before moving to the Pigeon House, Edna and her husband, Léonce, share a meal that has been prepared by the family cook, an individual Léonce “used to think [...] was a treasure” (50). Even before learning of his wife’s discarding the traditional Reception Day routine, Léonce “tasted his soup and began to season it with pepper, salt, vinegar, mustard-- everything within reach” (48). Hearn’s statement in this particular case rings true as Léonce’s dissatisfaction with the evening had already begun before he and Edna have their disagreement over her abandonment of the Tuesday ritual. Edna defends the cook, but Léonce claims that the cook’s sudden lack of culinary art is due to mismanagement; he claims that if the people one employs “run things their own way, they’d soon make a nice mess” (50). In this case, the manager of the situation should be Edna, as the lady of the house. Edna, however, distances herself from the domestic duties entailed by her family and home, further frustrating her husband who does not understand her sudden refusal to follow the cultural norms. Due to necessity, Léonce deals with the servants in Edna’s place, saving “her that disagreeable mission, for which she was so poorly fitted” (52). Once again, Edna has shown that she “was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles” (10). She is out of place in every aspect of the culture, even in her own home.

Compared with Edna and Léonce’s awkward marriage, the Ratignolles’s traditional marriage appears to be blissful, even after three children. Unlike Edna, Adèle’s clearly Creole background shapes her person and character and, also unlike Edna, she adores her role as mother to her children. Adèle is presented as perfection personified, but “Chopin exposes [her] insufficiency as [a model]” (Ewell 91). Edna’s character is

compared to Adèle, and the dark, passionate artist is positioned against the light, angelic mother. Adèle devotes herself to her children and family and “her absorption in the role of ‘mother-woman’ [is] attractively conventional, but Edna cannot sacrifice ‘the essential’ for the sake of such blissful immersion in others’ needs” (Ewell 91). If Edna’s actions are representative of the more modern and independent female, then by default, Adèle is often addressed as the more dependent and, therefore, weaker woman as she leads her “life as one of blind contentment without passion” (Solomon 118). Critics such as Barbara Solomon and Barbara Ewell who treat Adèle as one socially viable option for Edna and Mme. Reisz as another, and these critics often claim that Edna is “attracted to Adèle’s comforting and outgoing nature, [just as] she is attracted to the strength and independence of the solitary artist” (Solomon 118). In placing Madame Ratignolle and Mme. Reisz as binary oppositions, Solomon’s descriptive assignments mean that if Adèle is comforting, then Mme. Reisz is not, and if Mme. Reisz is strong and independent, then Adèle is not. These descriptions, however, are not entirely accurate. While Mme. Reisz may not embody the archetypal image of motherhood, she does provide a sense of maternal comfort to Edna, for whom “there was nothing which so quieted the turmoil of Edna’s senses as a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz” (75).

When evaluating Adèle, however, the reader must take her actions and descriptions at face value because the reader is only able to see Adèle through Edna’s, and occasionally Léonce’s, limited perspectives. While Léonce Pontellier is on the surface a Creole, he does not embody the spirit of the Creole culture internally. Edna attends the Ratignolles’s soirees, but Léonce often declines, believing the events to be

“*bourgeois*,” perhaps due to the Ratignolles’s position in society (66). While Léonce’s income derives from his role in the stock market, Alphonse Ratignolle owns and runs a store over which a large apartment makes up the Ratignolle abode. After the Civil War ravaged New Orleans, earning an income for many became an incredibly daunting task. The Ratignolles took over Alphonse’s father’s business as a store owner and keeper, a potentially lower type of social position than the elite patricians with whom Léonce may be used to socializing as seen in his constant absences from home in order to socialize at the local gentlemen’s club. Edna describes the soirees and the Ratignolle family as being “very French, very foreign” (52) and notes that Alphonse “and his wife spoke English with an accent” while Léonce “spoke English with no accent whatever” (54). The role of the French accent may be Edna’s way of differentiating her husband’s modified “Creoleness” with that of the Ratignolles. While Kate Chopin’s husband, Oscar, had a Creole ancestry, he and other southern gentlemen who spent the Civil War years in France rather than in participating in the War were often viewed as lesser men or less loyal to their heritage and home than those who stayed to fight. The very names used to address the ladies of each family can also signal their respective cultures; while Adèle is referred to as *Madame* Ratignolle, Edna is always called *Mrs.* Pontellier, preferring the English over the French. While the reader is never privy to Léonce’s life before marrying Edna, his lack of accent and successful role in the New York stock market during a time when most Creole families struggled to survive in New Orleans show that Léonce has sacrificed much of his cultural heritage in order to benefit personally and financially.

The Ratignolles carefully plan their existence in order to ensure the family's survival; this is a decidedly Creole trait defined by Hearn when he discusses the frugality of the Creole woman. This trait is an interesting one considering that the very same culture also prides itself on maintaining appearances. During the summer at Grand Isle when Edna and Adèle first meet, Adèle busies herself with sewing winter clothing for the children for the next season. Edna views this activity as a waste of the summer and doggedly cuts out patterns under Adèle's tutelage only to please her friend. Adèle, however, is not just fulfilling the role of devoted mother; she is essentially providing clothing for the family before the time of need and, thus, saving them future financial strain.

Adèle's own personal talents are applied to maternal duties. She "played [piano] very well, keeping excellent waltz time and infusing an expression into the strains which was indeed inspiring," though "she was [only] keeping up her music on account of the children" (24). By keeping her own skills finely tuned, Adèle would be able to instruct the children herself in the future, rather than paying an instructor or tutor, thus saving the family additional expense. Even her own "hobby" is maintained for the betterment of the children and home, creating a warm environment of classical French education. Adèle's piano playing is an act that brings her, in her eyes, closer to her family and children while Edna's artwork takes her further away from her own family, even so far as moving into her own small home, the Pigeon House, to pursue it.

Edna is best able to view the differences between her family and a "true Creole" family through her association with Adèle. She is immediately struck by the blonde

beauty who is the very “embodiment of every womanly grace and charm [...] the bygone heroine of romance and fair lady of our dreams” (9). Adèle is a picture of Creole perfection; she possesses beauty, charm, a maternal nature, and femininity to spare. In this view, Adèle’s character can be related to the Creole culture’s past; she embodies the ideal of a southern woman before the Civil War. Edna is enamored of her new friend and is surprised at Adèle’s “entire absence of prudery,” a distinctly Creole trait, but Edna “had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable” (10). Adèle is open about her pregnancies and deliveries, while Edna is taken aback by such candid openness. While Adèle and other Creoles speak so openly about these topics, however, they retain their chastity and fidelity. Due to this trait, “the Creole husband is never jealous; with him the gangrene passion is one which has become dwarfed by disuse” (12). Ultimately, Edna does not fit either of these descriptions as she is uncomfortable speaking about her own deliveries of her two sons and eventually begins an extramarital affair with Arobin. Léonce, however, does not become jealous of Edna’s isolation of herself; he, instead, in typical Creole style, worries over the appearance to the society around them.

Madame Ratignolle maintains her appearance of a delicate, southern woman throughout the novel, even while being placated by her knowing “audiences.” While on Grand Isle, Adèle neatly packs away her sewing before she “complain[s] of faintness” (13). While Edna and Robert attend their friend immediately, Edna “could not help wondering if there were not a little imagination responsible for its origin, for the rose tint had never faded from her friend’s face” (13). Mrs. Pontellier “flew for the cologne

water," but she still wonders if the faintness were in fact an act on Adèle's part for attention (13). Feigning an act of fainting would produce the image of delicacy, considered a ladylike characteristic among the Creoles. While Adèle's "weakness" is tended by Robert and Edna, they are not truly concerned for her well-being; once Adèle walks away "with the grace and majesty which queens are sometimes supposed to possess," she lifts her youngest child from the nurse's arms, even though "as everybody knew, the doctor had forbidden her to lift so much as a pin!" (13). Madame Ratignolle is a perfectly healthy expectant mother, though she maintains that image of fragility. She continues to uphold this image when in the final chapters of the novel, she delivers her fourth child. While everyone else around her is calm, Adèle, who has born three children already, paces the house and demands that Doctor Mandelet be fired for being thirty minutes late. Though Edna, Alphonse, and a nurse attend Adèle, she exclaims, "'Is it possible I am to be abandoned like this-- neglected by everyone?'" (104). During her labor, Adèle chats a bit with Edna, who thinks back onto her own deliveries, but they are "only half remembered" (104). In a style indicative of Edna's early statements of avoiding discussing such matters as labor or pregnancy, the actual delivery of Adèle's child is completely omitted, and the narration about the delivery reads, "with an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, [Edna] witnessed the scene [of] torture" (104). The irony in this statement is that Edna witnesses the birth of a child and focuses on the violence of the scene in a stylistic narrative choice that again reflects Edna's lack of maternal ambitions or connections.

CHAPTER IV:

Analyzing the Text: King's *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard*

Unlike Edna, who has the financial stability to pursue her desires in the 1890's, Mariana Talbot must set aside appearances for another matter: new found poverty in the 1870's. She often reflects upon the years spent on the plantation during the War as she makes her way through a new New Orleans. These changes are most evident when Mariana steps outside the run down home in the neighborhood of St. Médard, the only house the Talbot family can afford at the time due to extreme inflation. Mariana is finally able to take her children shopping on an elite section of Canal Street, a simple task she has envisioned for years. Their first stop is the shoe shop, where the proprietor sets one child upon a stool, examines the shoes she wears, and simply stares at Mariana in confusion. Mariana laughs and replies, "“Oh! We made those on our plantation! And I can tell you we were very glad to get them! The skin came from one of our alligators, shot swimming in our own bayou, and our own shoe-maker tanned it and [...] I made the eyelets myself”" (87). At first, she is nervous walking among the fine shops of her youth, and she readily hands out little anecdotes of their lives on the plantation. Remembering the starkness of life helps Mariana to prioritize the events and occurrences in her daily life. While she feels she must "maintain appearances," she does so with a new outlook on her situation; the family's social position has changed, and this shift creates internal hardship for Mr. Talbot who struggles to redefine himself in the new society, while Mrs. Talbot smiles and gently moves forward.

In her past, Mariana was one among a society of ladies with “their easy, careless extravagance, their utter indifference to their money” but now is a “woman,” “hard-working, saving, wrinkling eyes at a price, drawing down the mouth over a bargain” (95). When the shoe shop owner, Gregoire, shows her the newest shoes, she cries, “‘How thin [...] how slight! Why they would wear out in no time! They would not last for one walk and the heels are too high!’” (87). Her priorities changed during her time on the plantation, and she is no longer focused on fashion. Mariana wishes to make the most frugal choices for her family, and yet maintain an appearance in society as though they have already reestablished their social position. On occasion, her past nature and habits surface, but only when maintaining appearances in public. When speaking with a shopkeeper from whom she purchased goods before the war, she says lightheartedly, “‘When money is spent, what is the use of remembering it? On the contrary, the sooner we forget it the better,’” but later in the same scene, the omniscient narration reveals that was the “way precisely, that she used to talk and feel” (94-5). Outwardly, Mariana gives the impression that the Talbot family lives in financial security, but she finds ways to trim the costs in other areas in order to make up the difference.

Her transition from high society lady to working-class woman occurred over the course of the War, but these intense moments are only visited in flashbacks throughout King’s novel. One such flashback shows Mariana doctoring the ill as best she could using a book of remedies because no doctor could be found. Much like Lafcadio Hearn’s book of recipes, Mariana’s book of remedies became her guide in a time period when she had no one to assist her or take responsibility for the events around her. Mariana used such

guides to complete these daily tasks for which she had never been trained; servants and slaves had always done the grueling daily chores. In the course of the war, however, Mrs. Talbot was forced to become a leader for her family as well as the multitude of slaves on their family plantation. When thinking back to the War, Mariana shudders when she remembers the last of linen sheets she had set aside for herself or family in the event of a death. All the rest of the fine linen had been used to bury others (82).

This choice to focus on the after effects of the War emphasizes King's intended purpose of representing the women and children and their own war that must now be fought. Dr. Botot remarks to Mariana early in the novel that "there are no fortunes of war for women and children. It is all misfortunes for them, they are the sufferers; and their war goes on after the peace, they will be still suffering for it, when the war is forgotten" (45). The concept of the women and children fighting their own war is carried throughout the novel, and King even provides a child's plot line alongside the adults with the story of young Cribiche. When her narration omnisciently shifts to an adult male, it is usually to focus on the women in his life, and his role or communication with the Talbot family in order to provide a connection to an adjacent plot line. While several chapters are focused on these orbital characters, the narration continues to return to Mariana.

CHAPTER V:

Conclusion

The three characters, Adèle, Mariana, and Edna, illustrate three different types of women in the late nineteenth century. In terms of the state of feminism in the late nineteenth century, Adèle clearly can be related to the past generations of Creoles. Her gentle, maternal nature and angelic appearance show her to be literally the picture of Creole perfection during the antebellum era that many Creoles in the late 1800's considered their "glory days." Mariana, as a once genteel lady who has transitioned into a new society after the War, represents the present state of womanhood in the 1870's. Mariana faces the task of appearing to be as Adèle is, though with the difficulty of reconstructing every member of her family in order to help him or her adjust to the changes of their new society. She uses her newfound independence to manage her family's meager income, her children's illnesses, and her husband's bruised ego upon his return to the city. Edna represents the future of the southern woman and, as such, does not fit into her current social setting, hence her obvious isolation from those around her and her eventual suicide. Edna's desire to be financially independent and free of the domesticity expected of her sets her apart and fits better into the society that will come decades later. These three women do not exist as representations of binary oppositions, identifying an independent woman against a dependent one, but rather as progressive, transforming identities. One is not "stronger" or more of a feminist icon than the others; they are each representative of their associated eras, though they exist simultaneously in the late nineteenth century. Works like the nonfiction collection of Lafcadio Hearn allow

these women to be considered based upon the ideals of their own contemporary time period rather than the ideals of a more modern era. Together, they are the Fates of the Creole culture, past, present, and future.

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Solomon, Barbara H. "Characters as Foils to Edna." *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's The Awakening*. Ed., Bernard Koloski. New York: Modern Language Association, 1988. Print.

Starr, S. Frederick, Ed. "Introduction." *Inventing New Orleans*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001. Print.

Toth, Emily. "Kate Chopin Knowing What It Means to Miss New Orleans." *Louisiana Women Their Lives and Times*. Eds., Janet Allured and Judith F. Gentry. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2009. Print.

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Appendix A:

Annotated Bibliography

Benfey, Christopher. *Degas in New Orleans, Encounters in the Creole World of Kate Chopin and George Washington Cable*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Print.

An interesting, if not entirely trustworthy, account of New Orleans' society in the nineteenth century. Benfey focuses much of the work on social circles somewhat irrelevant to Degas, but does provide some background for contemporary writers, such as Chopin and Cable. Benfey does occasionally mislead the reader (for example, Benfey claims that Cable attended dinner parties with Madame LaLaurie in her mansion on Royal Street, but Cable wasn't born until 1844, 10 years after LaLaurie fled to France) and only a careful reading of the notes reveals this.

Bryan, Violet Harrington. "Defining Race, Gender, and the Myth: King, Chopin, and Dunbar-Nelson." *The Myth of New Orleans in Literature: Dialogues of Race and Gender*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993. Print.

Bryan's straight-forward, scholarly approach to comparing the various aspects of King, Chopin, and Dunbar-Nelson focuses on their representations of race and gender. The chapter dedicated to these writers detailed the influence of the Creole culture and the city of New Orleans in their writing and draws direct comparisons among the works of King and Chopin. Bryan uses King's shorter works rather

than discussing King's novel, *The Pleasant Ways of St. Medard*, but provides detailed analysis of the works she does highlight.

Bush, Robert. *Grace King of New Orleans: A Selection of Her Writings*. Louisiana State UP, 1973. Print.

The only thorough collection of King's works with a complete biography, Bush's work is made up of long excerpts from King's various projects, including her novels, memoirs, short stories, biographies, and histories. The selections provided represent the best of King's work.

---. "Grace King (1852-1932) American Literary Realism 8.1 (1975): 42-51. *JSTOR*. January 2, 2012. Web.

Bush's article on King mostly summarizes the writer's accolades and reviews of her projects as they were published in chronological order. Bush provides not only excerpts from the reviews, but the exact publication and date as well. King's work, overall, was well-received, and critics expected her to become a regular in American Literature studies.

Cable, George Washington. *Madame Delphine*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881. N. pag. Kindle file.

An interesting novella about a quadroon, Madame Delphine, who struggles to find a respectable place in pre-Civil War, New Orleans society for her mixed blood daughter, Olive. Through the novella, Pere Jerome, a trusted friend and priest, and Madame Delphine question the law that even the tiniest bit of "black blood" marks an individual's class and race for life. Ultimately, Madame Delphine lies

about Olive's parentage, claiming that she is not the biological mother. She confesses this to Pere Jerome before dying outside of the confessional.

---. *Old Creole Days*. N. pag. Kindle file.

Cable's collection of short stories from the Louisiana area of the south, mostly dating before 1850. Cable's tales tend to reflect pictures of times long past, even for Cable, and often focus on female leading characters. Cable's known, deep respect for Creole women of mixed races is well displayed throughout his works as he tends to depict their situation as the most tenuous of New Orleans' society.

---. *Strange True Tales of Louisiana*. N. pag. Kindle file.

This collection of tales circulates around a collection of female heroes. A tale of two adventurous sisters in the late 1700's is told along with the tale of Salome Muller, the white slave. Cable, also, devotes a section to Madame LaLaurie and her infamous house of Rue Royale as well as to Attalie Brouillard, a Creole woman who outsmarts the men around her. The collection ends with the tale of a Union woman living in the South during the Civil War and her experiences through the war. It is notable that every single tale centers on a female character.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening An Authoritative Text Biographical and Historical Contexts Criticism*. Ed., Margo Culley. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994. Print.

Kate Chopin's novel about Edna Pontellier, the wife of a Creole man in New Orleans in the late nineteenth century. Edna's dissatisfaction with her domestic life leads her to explore herself and ultimately, in a culture in which she cannot be

both herself and a “good” wife and mother, Edna drowns herself so as not to be dishonest to herself or a “bad” mother to her children.

---. Ed. Sandra M. Gilbert. *Kate Chopin: Complete Novels and Stories: At Fault / Bayou Folk / A Night in Acadie / The Awakening / Uncollected Stories*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States Inc., 2002. Print.

A complete collection of Chopin's works, including her longer length works such as *The Awakening* as well as the shorter selections. Chopin's writing reflects her experiences in the south during the Reconstruction era and often focuses on the role women play in a changing society.

DeJean, Joan. “Critical Creolization: Grace King and Writing on French in the American South.” *Southern Literature and Literary Theory*. Ed. Jefferson Humphries. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1990. Print.

DeJean focuses on the linguistic and literal variations in the term “Creole” and how King’s writings reflect her position in the Creole society. DeJean discusses “literary translingualism” and “creolegraphia” as they pertain to King’s works, mostly *Monsieur Motte* and “The Little Convent Girl.”

Hearn, Lafcadio. *La Cuisine Creole, A Collection of Culinary Recipes*. 2nd Ed. New Orleans: F.F. Hansell & Bro., Ltd., 1885. Print.

An interesting cookbook of collected, traditional Creole dishes with the occasional informational section on Creole culture and women added. Hearn briefly discusses the role of the Creole wife in the kitchen and home. As a recipe guide, the book is too vague for amateur chefs to recreate the dishes, but the

cultural information, while succinct, gives the reader a mental image of the “good” Creole wife.

---. *Inventing New Orleans*. Ed., S. Frederick Starr. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001. Print.

A collection of Hearn's essays, sketches, and commentaries on the culture of New Orleans in the 1870's. Much of Hearn's work was published in contemporary newspapers and magazines. This collection showcases Hearn's talent for capturing a culture in a documentary style and included sections from *La Cuisine Creole* as well as Hearn's notes on the Creole language.

Juncker, Clara. "Grace King: woman-as-artist." *The Southern Literary Journal* 20.1 (1987): 37+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 1 Jan. 2012.

Juncker focuses her article on both King as a writer as well as her female protagonists and their placement on the edge of racial and gender separations. Centering mostly on King's short story, "The Festival of the Dead," Juncker claims that King's heroines are ahead of their time and applies some light Kristevan and Laconian theories to her understanding of the characters.

Kennedy, Richard S., Ed. *Literary New Orleans: Essays and Meditations*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992. Print.

A short collection of biographical sketches of New Orleans most renowned writers from the 1800's, starting with George Washington Cable, and continuing on through the 1950's with Tennessee Williams. Others writers covered include Grace King, Kate Chopin, Lafcadio Hearn, and William Faulkner. The author's stated intent is to consider New Orleans as a center of writing and creativity.

King, Grace. *Balcony Stories*. Ridgewood, NJ: The Gregg Press, 1968. Print.

King's collection of short stories set in and near New Orleans during the nineteenth century and featuring women of various ages and races. King's focus is clearly the late nineteenth century women and how society and the arrangement of social classes were reordered during the Reconstruction of the south, in particular, New Orleans. Common themes include life as a Creole, marriage, aging in a changing society, and the strength of women.

---. *The Pleasant Ways of Saint Medard*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916.

Print.

King's only full length novel focuses on the characters of a small neighborhood and centers on the return of the Talbot family in Reconstruction Era New Orleans. Social issues of the time are represented throughout the novel, and King excels in displaying the changes that take place as a country and society tries to heal from war. King discusses gender roles and racial issues among the characters who of various races and cultural ethnicity. The novel ends ambiguously with Mr. Talbot's illness and his former assistant in charge of his business and, presumptively, his family's welfare.

Kirby, David. "Grace (Elizabeth) King." *American Short-Story Writers, 1880-1910*. Ed.

Bobby Ellen Kimbel and William E. Grant. Detroit: Gale Research, 1989.

Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 78. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 1 Jan.

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A brief work that focuses on King as an overlooked talent among American writers. Kirby cites Bush's work a great deal and, like several other critics and writers, seemed to expect King's writing to surface with the feminist movements of the seventies and eighties. Kirby also emphasizes the heavy French fashion of King's writing as well as her "artistry and feeling for a class of people who were all but voiceless, the disenfranchised and penniless women, black and white, who lived in the South after the Civil War" (n.p.).

Koloski, Bernard. Ed. *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's The Awakening*. New York: Modern Language Association, 1988. Print.

A crucial collection of essays and perspectives on incorporating Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* into collegiate coursework. A multitude of professors, critics, and instructors offer their viewpoints on the novel's multifaceted interpretations along with how they address these issues in a classroom setting. Perspectives include several aspects of feminism, psychoanalytic theory, cultural topics, and stylistic approaches. Koloski provides concise introductions to the material, the critics, and the essays and approaches to follow, but in an act reflecting an effective teaching style, he quickly fades and allows the selected pieces to take center stage.

Kreyling, Michael. "After the War: Romance and the Reconstruction of Southern Literature." *Southern Literature in Transition: Heritage and Promise*. Ed. Philip Castille and William Osborne. Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1983.

111-125. Rpt. in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Ed. Lynn M. Zott. Vol. 116. Detroit: Gale, 2003. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 1 Jan. 2012.

Kreyling examines the roles of three lesser known southern writers, Lafcadio Hearn, George Washington Cable, and Grace King. Each of the three is in turn evaluate on his or her ability to render images of the south through literature. In addition to this individual skill comparison, Kreyling also elaborates on the role of the publishing companies of the time period and their desire that postbellum literature contain a romantic love story as part of the plot and how this requirement affected the writers.

Simpson, Claude M., Jr. "Grace King: the historian as apologist." *The Southern Literary Journal* 6.2 (1974): 130+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 1 Jan. 2012.

Simpson's short article addresses Grace King as an apologist for previous literary representations of the Creole culture. King's writing was a direct result of her antagonistic reactions to George Washington Cable's writing, and Simpson feels that her own writing acts more as an apology to the Creole culture rather than as a better rendition of it. Simpson heavily cites Bush's work as the most thorough and complete study on King.

Shillingsburg, Miriam J. "The Ascent of Woman, Southern Style: Hentz, King, Chopin." *Southern Literature in Transition: Heritage and Promise*. Ed. Philip Castille and William Osborne. Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1983. 127-140. Rpt. in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Ed. Lynn M. Zott. Vol. 116. Detroit: Gale, 2003. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 1 Jan. 2012.

A well-written article that evaluates not only the works of three female, southern authors, but their relevance to each other and how that relationship shows an evolution in southern literature composed by women. Shillingsburg discusses the role of the romantic in Hentz, the realism of King, and how those aspects evolved into the internal realism of Chopin's Edna Pontellier.

Toth, Emily. "Kate Chopin Knowing What It Means to Miss New Orleans." *Louisiana Women Their Lives and Times*. Eds Janet Allured and Judith F. Gentry. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2009. Print.

Toth, well-known for her extensive work as Chopin's biographer, provides a summary of Chopin's life, focusing on her time in Louisiana as it relates to the overall theme of the volume. She promotes the influence of New Orleans and Chopin's time both in the city and in the country as being crucial to Chopin's development as a writer. According to Toth, Chopin's time in New Orleans brought about her maturation into adulthood as a mother, a wife, and as a writer.

---. *Unveiling Kate Chopin*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1999. Print.

Kate Chopin's prevailing biographer's detailed account of Chopin's life and how that life influenced her writing. Toth's work, released on the centennial of *The Awakening's* publication date.

Wilson, Mary Ann. "Grace King New Orleans Literary Historian." *Louisiana Women Their Lives and Times*. Eds Janet Allured and Judith F. Gentry. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2009. Print.

Wilson's chapter on Grace King provides not only a biographical summary of the author, but also connects King to the larger artistic and social movements around her. Wilson presents the image of King as a southern lady who sides with pro-feminist movements of the Victorian era, but one who maintains that women should retain a sense of grace and femininity.