

KATE CHOPIN



In twentieth century, feminist literature introduced by a few independent daring women. Among them writers Kate Chopin holds a high stature. She was an American novelist and short stories writer.

Kate Chopin was born on February 8, 1850 in St. Louis, Missouri and given the birth name Katherine O'Flaherty. Her father was an Irish immigrant businessman and mother belonged to a French community. Most of her siblings died before crossing twenties. Subsequent to her father's demise, she became close to her maternal family. She also became a voracious reader, fulfilling her appetite with religious allegories, fairy tales, classics and contemporary novels and poetry.

She got married Oscar Chopin when she was 20 and had six children. Her husband died twelve years after their marriage and left her great debt. She moved in with her kids in her mother's house, who also died the following years. Losing two of the closest relations in a brief time, left Chopin in unbearable anguish and depression. Her doctor and a family friend suggested her to pour her depressed and suffocated feelings in writing which could also become a source of income for her. In 1890s she began her writing career with articles, short stories and translation of works of other authors. They were published in a periodical the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and a few other literary magazines.

Chopin's debut novel *At Fault* was published in 1890. It was followed by a short story collection, *Bayou Folk* published in 1894. It contained a famous short story "Désirée's Baby" about the events followed by the birth of a mixed-race child.

Another story "The Story of an Hour" illustrates a woman's reaction on her husband's death. The next volume of short fiction, *A Night in Acadie*, was published in 1897.

There was a recurring thematic pattern in her stories. Her stories mostly focused marriage and conventions of the society. The characters were shown stuck between choices; to do expected of them from society or follow the path of their heart's utmost desire. And usually they chose latter, defying the norms of their society. Chopin was very casual and confident in discussing sensitive issues as, women's desire of independence and their sexual urges. She incorporated all these themes her final novel *The Awakening* published at the end of nineteenth century. The female protagonist in the book was shown to involved in an adulterous affair which went against the conventional stories written at that time. The novel garnered scandalous status for its highly controversial subject matter. It was not received positively because it was written ahead of its time when feminism not part of mainstream American society.

The brash criticism for her novel discouraged Kate Chopin so much so she reverted to short story writing. She penned only seven short stories from 1900 to 1904. She was reported to have suffered a stroke that resulted her death on August 22, 1904. The idea of women's individual and sexual independence was not regarded absurd and scandalous notions in the years that followed her demise. Her writings were for its bold content.

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