



Awakenings: The Story of the Kate Chopin Revival (Southern Literary Studies)

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One of the most often repeated anecdotes about the direction of literary studies over the past three decades concerns a graduate student who complained of reading Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* in three classes and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in none. But Chopin has not always been featured in the literary curriculum. Though she achieved national success in her lifetime (1850-1904) as a writer of Louisiana "local color" fiction, after her death her work fell into obscurity until 1969, when Norwegian literary scholar Per Seyersted published *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* and sparked a remarkable American literary revival. Chopin soon became a major presence in the canon and today, every college textbook surveying American literature contains a Chopin short story, her novel *The Awakening*, or an excerpt from it.

In this unique work, twelve prominent Chopin scholars reflect on their parts in the Kate Chopin revival and its impact on their careers. A generation ago, against powerful odds, many of them staked their reputations on the belief--now fully validated--that Chopin is one of America's essential writers. These scholars energetically sponsored Chopin's works in the 1970s and 1980s and encouraged reading, studying, and teaching Chopin. They wrote books and articles about her, gave talks about her, offered interviews to newspapers and magazines, taught her works in their classes, and urged their colleagues to do the same, helping to build a network of teachers, students, editors, journalists, librarians, and others who continue to promote Chopin's work. Throughout, these essays stress several elements vital to the revival's success. Timing proved critical, as the rise of the women's movement and the emergence of new sexual norms in the 1960s helped set an ideal context for Chopin in the United States and abroad in the 1970s and 1980s. Seyersted's biography of Chopin and his accurate texts of her entire oeuvre allowed scholars to quickly publish their analyses of her work. Popular media--including *Redbook*, *The New York Times*, and PBS--took notice of Chopin and advanced her work outside the scholarly realm. But in the final analysis, as the contributors point out, Kate Chopin's irresistible writing itself made her revival possible.

Highly personal, at times amusing, and always thought provoking, these revealing recollections and new critical insights offer a fascinating firsthand account of a decisive moment in American literary history.

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