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## Diplomová práce

# Literary Portraits of the Louisiana Woman by Novelists George W. Cable, Kate Chopin and Ernest J. Gaines

Literární ztvárnění Louisianské ženy v díle George W. Cabla,  
Kate Chopinové a Ernesta J. Gainese

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of women in three distinct novels set in different historical periods within the State of Louisiana. The novels under analysis are *The Grandissimes* by George W. Cable, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, and *Catherine Carmier* by Ernest J. Gaines. The thesis begins by providing a comprehensive historical and cultural background of Louisiana, focusing on the treatment of women, and highlighting racial, ethnic, and religious influences. Each author is then individually examined along with their life, literary career, and the central themes they explore. Special attention is given to the prominent female characters in each work, with an emphasis on their individual stories, cultural and social contexts, and roles within the narrative. By comparing the portrayals of these female characters, who share French ancestry and the Catholic faith, the thesis aims to enhance understanding of the representation of women in Louisiana literature.

**Keywords:** Southern writers, women in Louisiana, Creole women, feminism

## Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá literárním znázorněním žen ve třech odlišných románech zasazených do různých historických období ve státu Louisiana. Předmětem analýzy jsou romány *The Grandissimes* od George W. Cablea, *The Awakening* od Kate Chopinové a *Catherine Carmier* od Ernesta J. Gainese. Práce začíná souhrnným historickým a kulturním kontextem Louisiany, zdůrazňujícím postavení žen, rasové, etnické a náboženské vlivy. Poté je každý z autorů zkoumán jednotlivě včetně svého života, literární kariéry a hlavních témat, kterým se ve svém díle věnuje. Speciální pozornost je věnována významným ženským postavám, s důrazem na jejich roli v ději, individuální příběhy, motivace, kulturní, náboženský a společenský kontext. Porovnáním společných a odlišných znaků těchto ženských postav, které sdílejí francouzský původ a katolickou víru, si práce klade za cíl zlepšit pochopení reprezentace žen v louisianské literatuře.

**Klíčová slova:** jižanští spisovatelé, ženy v Louisianě, kreolské ženy, feminismus

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# 1 Introduction

Over the years, the position of women in Louisiana society has undergone significant changes. Historically, women were often expected to adhere to traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Nonetheless, Louisiana's diverse cultural heritage, including French, Spanish, African, and Native American ancestry, has contributed to the creation of many intriguing female characters.

In the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Southern writers portrayed women in a variety of ways, reflecting the social dynamics. These portrayals were often influenced by traditional gender roles, depicting women as embodiments of motherhood, and dutiful wives who promoted the Catholic and Creole ideals. However, some Southern writers acknowledged the versatility of women and explored the complexities of their experiences, particularly concerning race, class, and religion. This thesis deals with the notable works of three conscious writers: George W. Cable, Kate Chopin, and Ernest J. Gaines. Each writer belonged to a different era and depicted distinct periods, yet all of them created multifaceted characters. Additionally, their unique life paths provided them with individual perspectives that further influenced their portrayal of women.

The first part analyses the history of Louisiana, as the region's cultural, racial, and ethnic composition is the foundation of the analysed novels. For clarity, the treatment of women and the phenomenon of *plaçage* is described in a separate chapter.

Then the thesis is divided into three separate parts, each dedicated to one author, discussing their origins, literary careers, prevailing themes, and motivations in their writing. The final part of each section is committed to a detailed analysis of the novels *The Grandissimes* (1880), *The Awakening* (1899), and *Catherine Carmier* (1964), and their notable female characters.

This thesis aims to analyse these characters, draw comparisons among the authors, and enhance our understanding of women's literary representation in this unique Southern state, Louisiana.

## 2 History of Louisiana

The history of Louisiana is as complex and unique as the people shaped by its specific conditions. This uniqueness may be sourced from the rich cultural heritage determined throughout the centuries by American Indians, Cajuns, Creoles, enslaved African people, and other contributors to its racial and ethnic composition (Cummins et al. 2014: 13). This socio-cultural context has provided an intricate framework for many notable literary works, among them George W. Cable's *The Grandissimes*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and Ernest J. Gaines' *Catherine Carmier*. Thus, we need to understand Louisiana's social, cultural, and political history to properly analyse these works and their female characters.

Louisiana is diverse in terms of not only its ethnic composition but also its history which attracts considerable scholarly attention. The reason for this is that the period of colonial Louisiana involves the history of other present-day states and touches on many central themes in the whole nation's history. Indian-white relations during its colonial era; the westward expansion of the nation; the origins and development of racial slavery; antebellum politics; the Civil War with its consequences of the abolition of slavery; the aspects of Reconstruction; the racial segregation, and the gains from the modern civil rights movement (Cummins et al. 2014: 14).

Louisiana offers an abundance of events, conflicts, and perspectives, which establish it as one of the most diverse and fascinating regions on the continent, valued by both historians and fiction writers.

### 2.1 The End of Colonial Louisiana

The area that is today known as the State of Louisiana is located along the Gulf of Mexico in the southcentral region of North America, but it represents only a fraction of the colonial Louisiana Territory established by France in 1682 and named *La Louisiane* in honour of King Louis XIV. *La Louisiane* covered the vast territory from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes, and the known history of this region dates back thousands of years to the period of its first inhabitants, Paleo-Amerindians. European influence

dates back only to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Spanish and French explorers carried out their first expeditions along the Mississippi River. The more prominent European colonization efforts took place in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with predominantly French colonial control (Cummins et al. 2014: 75). Spain governed the territory of Louisiana only for four decades at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century before ultimately returning it to France in 1802.

In general, Louisiana was not an easy location to colonize. The French struggled to populate its large area, and hence it was often populated forcibly by French convicts and prostitutes (Taylor 1984: 11). Cheap labour was also very scarce, and the efforts of planters to enslave local Natives turned unsuccessful because they simply ran away, so the importation of enslaved Africans people began in the 1710s, and economic development accelerated in the upcoming decades (Cummins et al. 2014: 71). More immigrants were drawn to the colony by the promise of prosperity, so the ethnic composition soon included, along with Native Americans, people of French, Spanish, French Canadian, German, Anglo, and African heritage. In contrast with the diversity, the amount of population was increasing slowly, and by the 1740s, one of the major settlements of the colony became New Orleans<sup>1</sup> with less than 4,000 whites (800 soldiers), 2,000 slaves, and close to no free blacks (Taylor 1984: 11).

The Spanish had far greater success in encouraging immigration, and the population of the colony increased more than fivefold during the four decades of their reign (Cummins et al. 2014: 86). The ethnic composition even diversified with the arrival of Acadians, Canary Islanders, and Haitians.

Owing to these events, colonial Louisiana is often referred to as a 'true melting pot'<sup>1</sup> of people, languages, customs and cultures (Cummins et al. 2014: 10). The new term Creole<sup>2</sup> emerged during the French and Spanish periods to refer to peoples of any mixed ethnic background, race or social status born in Louisiana (Cummins et al. 2014: 109).

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<sup>1</sup> The City of New Orleans was founded in 1718 at the mouth of the Mississippi River with the hope of becoming a significant trading hub transporting goods between the rest of the colony and Europe.

<sup>2</sup> *Creole*, when used in Louisiana, applied to all born in the colony. However, its meaning has been disputed since the Civil War. To some, The *Creoles* can mean the descendants of white French and Spanish colonists or the colonial native-born persons of African heritage and their descendants (Cummins et al. 2014: 109).



Louisiana's colonial era had come to an end in April 1803 as the result of affairs concerning France and its emerging ruler Napoleon Bonaparte (Taylor 1984: 97). Bonaparte's plans for a new French empire centred on Louisiana deteriorated after several military defeats to the British Empire, which devastated his funds and prompted him to offer the Louisiana Territory to the United States for mere \$15 million and renounce all French rights to the entire territory (Wall et al. 2014: 98). Taylor (1984: 71) explains that the reason for this abrupt offer was Bonaparte's unwillingness to see Louisiana militarily taken by the British and suffer another humiliating defeat.

The United States became independent after its declaration in 1776, hence only a few decades before these events, by the union of 13 states alongside the eastern coast of Northern America. The U.S. sought to expand westward, which became possible under the leadership of the third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809). The arrangement with France became the first grand expansion of the United States as it included not only the significant port of New Orleans but the entire Louisiana colony stretching across the Mississippi River basin. This vast area doubled the size of the United States and eventually became 15 modern states later in that century. The United States accepted this lucrative offer, and the Louisiana Purchase Treaty was signed on April 30, 1803.

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 marked a successful turning point in the expansion of the United States and the whole continent. The size of the United States doubled, the country was bolstered economically and strategically, and the westward expansion received a significant impetus. As the French colonial era of Louisiana came to an end, the United States took formal possession of Louisiana in December 1803.

## 2.2 Territorial Period (1803-1812)

Louisiana became a territory of the United States which introduced many significant changes to its people and their lives. The people had to adapt to a new territorial government, a new legal system, growing democracy, and rising numbers of foreign immigrants with different cultures, religions, and unfamiliar languages (Cummins et al. 2014: 108).

In 1804 for governance purposes, Congress divided Louisiana Territory into two parts separated by the 33<sup>rd</sup> parallel, Louisiana District and Territory of Orleans with W. C. C. Claiborne as the governor of the latter (Cummins et al. 2014: 107). The territory of Orleans was the southern portion of the former Louisiana Territory and later became the state of Louisiana.

W. C. C. Claiborne was appointed to oversee the problematic transition and establish a stable administration. He faced a difficult task because all the other U.S. territories were largely populated by English-speaking Protestants familiar with the American political model (Cummins et al. 2014: 108). In contrast to that, the people of Louisiana were multicultural, speaking different languages, predominantly Roman Catholic and the new territorial administration was a dramatic change from the European imperial tradition. In addition, Claiborne had to face the anti-American sentiment and many voices expressing dissatisfaction with the government and newly arrived American Protestants whose lives and traditions were unlike (Cummins et al. 2014: 110).

After the Purchase of 1803, American farmers and traders perceived Louisiana as a land of opportunity. The population grew rapidly as many American slaveholders established plantations worked by large numbers of enslaved African Americans who were forcibly brought to the region as an inexpensive labour force. The census of 1810 showed that the Territory of Orleans's population was almost equally divided between white and black Americans (Cummins et al. 2014: 124). Slaves had a major impact on the economy and society, yet they lived through brutal conditions and daily abuse, which resulted in The Great Slave Revolt of 1811 (Taylor 1984: 97). However, this rebellion was brutally suppressed, and Louisiana remained a slave territory.

Despite these difficult conditions and largely owing to slavery, Governor Claiborne accomplished many achievements. Over the nine years of his time in the office, he boosted the economy with the growth of new industries<sup>3</sup> and established new towns and cities which created opportunities for incoming settlers.

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<sup>3</sup> Claiborne promoted the production of cotton, sugar, and lumber (Cummins et al. 2014: 110).

Under Claiborne, the Territory of Orleans reached a population sufficient<sup>4</sup> to apply for statehood and proposed a constitution. Within two years, the territory was granted statehood due to many factors among which belonged to the growing population, economic significance, and strategic considerations such as its access to the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River.

The Territory of Orleans became a state of Louisiana on April 30, 1812. Louisiana joined the United States as the 18<sup>th</sup> state and, slave state<sup>5</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> state on the land west of the Mississippi. (Dunbar-Nelson 2009: 20).

### 2.3 Antebellum Louisiana (1812-1861)

The first election for Louisiana's state Governor was won by William C. C. Claiborne and New Orleans continued to serve as the capital.

New Orleans was the largest port and city in the South and its importance stemmed from its role as an economic and cultural centre. Its strategic location at the mouth of the Mississippi was crucial for trade and commerce and with the population growing, many people from various backgrounds arrived. The blend of cultures further shaped the Creole culture and New Orleans acquired a reputation as a vibrant and cosmopolitan centre (Sacher 2011).

Not only New Orleans, but the entire Louisiana State experienced a rapid expansion of its economy. In the country, plantations ensured profits in agriculture (Taylor 1984: 81) and despite New Orleans' importance as a commercial centre, agriculture dominated the economy (Cummins et al. 2014: 156). In 1860, there were 1,600 plantations with more than fifty slaves each and encompassed more than 43% of the state's arable land (Taylor 1984: 19, 82).

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<sup>4</sup> According to the census of 1810, the population reached 76,000 which exceeded requirements (Cummins et al. 2014: 124).

<sup>5</sup> *Slave state* is a term used for any of the southern states of the US in which slavery was legal before the Civil War ('slave state', Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The balance between the number of slave states and free states had been roughly maintained since the creation of the Union.

It is undeniable that Louisiana State heavily relied on slave labour to support it. The 1860 census data shows that there were over 331,000 enslaved people which comprised nearly 47 % of the state's total population. (Sacher 2011).

Slavery was a topic that divided the United States since its creation and for this reason, a balance between the number of slave states and free states had been maintained to ensure the balance of power. Slavery was illegal in the free states in the North and legal in the slave states of the South that were dependent on it.

This fragile balance was maintained until the presidential election of 1860.

## 2.4 Secession and the American Civil War (1861-1865)

In November 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected as President of the United States without winning a single Southern state. Lincoln represented the anti-slavery Republican Party which opposed the expansion of slavery into new territories and hence had no support in Louisiana (Cummins et al. 2014: 155). Louisiana viewed Lincoln's election as a threat to their economy and society and thus followed other southern states in seceding from the Union by January 1861 (Sacher 2011).

On March 21, 1861, Louisiana became part of the Confederate States of America (Taylor 1984: 111). The Civil War started in April 1861 and Louisiana played a significant role in the Confederacy due to its strategic advantage, the Mississippi, and agricultural resources. Louisiana's army was growing fast as more than 25,000 men had enlisted by November 1861 as they were enthusiastic to defend their beliefs and expected the war to be brief (Cummins et al. 2014: 200).

From the beginning of the conflict, the Union strategically planned to capture New Orleans to control the Mississippi River and their effort soon paid off. In April 1862, New Orleans was taken by the federal army and became an occupied city for the remainder of the war (Taylor 1984: 113). This allowed the Union to gain access to the lower Mississippi River and dealt a severe blow to the Confederacy as their forces were split.

Across Louisiana, thousands of slaves of various ages managed to flee plantations and seek refuge within the Union camps (Cummins et al. 2014: 204). An even greater number of slaves and free men of colour joined the Union and its army following 1862 when Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation declared that enslaved people in the states fighting against the Union are free by the start of 1863 and freed slaves and free African Americans could join the Union Army (Nystrom 2011). These soldiers fought for the Union in regiments known as Native Guard and United States Coloured Troops (USCT). Eventually, more than 24,000 African Americans from Louisiana joined the Union Army (Hunter 2013).

After four years of warfare and turmoil, the war ended with the Southern defeat. On April 9, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. Other Confederate forces soon followed. The last Confederate military forces in Louisiana surrendered in June 1865, and one of the bloodiest conflicts in American history ended (Cummins et al. 2014: 187).

## 2.5 Reconstruction Period (1865-1877)

The post-Civil War period in the history of the United States is known as the Reconstruction. During the era, Louisiana went through a significant political, social, and economic transformation (Taylor 1984: 142). This was inevitable to ensure the former Confederate states were brought back into the Union and the rights of former slaves were protected.

The war not only bankrupted the Southern states but also destroyed their transport infrastructure. Railroad tracks, roads, farms, plantations, and factories were in ruins. However, Louisiana and all the other states suffered the greatest loss from the tens of thousands of casualties it incurred (Cummins et al. 2014: 212). The estimates of Civil The amount of war casualties ranges between 618,000 to over 850,000 but it fails to reflect the mortality of former slaves (Downs 2018). Present-day demographers suggest the number to exceed 1,000,000 as former slaves were often considered civilians and hence not included in previous numbers (Downs 2018). In the state of

Louisiana itself, is estimated that around 15 to 20 thousand soldiers lost their lives fighting for the Union and Confederacy (Taylor 1984: 129).

In terms of economy, the most staggering loss became the emancipation of slaves (Cummins et al. 2014: 212). The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was ratified in 1865 to abolish slavery in all its states and the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments soon followed to ensure that all citizens would receive equal protection under the law and the right to vote. The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 were dictated by Congress to ensure these Amendments were practised in the former Confederacy states and the tradition of slavery was countered. In terms of voting, registration was allowed only to white and black adult males who had never voluntarily aided the Confederacy (Cummins et al. 2014: 216). In many cases, this rule excluded white Democrats. In simple terms, many white males in Louisiana were disfranchised and the voting right was given to black men, often former slaves, who voted for the Republican political party.

The newly disfranchised men attempted to sway the scales of power in their favour and discourage African Americans from voting by intimidating, terrorizing, and lynching them in organized groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, The Knights of White Camellia or The White League (Cummins et al. 2014: 217-219). Reports of lynchings and vigilante executions of African Americans rapidly increased in 1874 and the victims found themselves without legal protection as both Democrats and Republicans rejected the plan to stop this (Cummins et al. 2014: 220).

In September 1874, The White League defending their pro-slavery beliefs sought to overthrow the government in New Orleans and restore their control. The League outnumbered the police in New Orleans and emerged victorious. However, federal troops once again restored Republican control within a few days. The Battle of Liberty Place represented the inability of white supremacists to regain control and marks the beginning of the end of Reconstruction in Louisiana (Cummins et al. 2014: 222).

The Compromise of 1877 represents an agreement among Republicans and Democrats that formally ended Reconstruction (Cummins et al. 2014: 225). The main terms of the agreement were that Democrats would accept a Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes as the new president of the United States in exchange for the

withdrawal of federal troops from the South and end of federal oversight. These terms were implemented but other promises were soon to be broken as there were no federal forces to supervise (Cummins et al. 2014: 226). This absence led to the white supremacist regaining power and to the end of the progressive civil rights for African Americans. The Reconstruction was over, and Louisiana entered a period of Democratic support of white supremacy that implemented many discriminatory policies (Taylor 1984: 152).

## 2.6 Modern Era (since 1877)

The Modern Era in the history of Louisiana represents the period from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. A brief outline of these nearly 150 years can be given by describing several significant events.

Following Reconstruction, the United States and Louisiana enforced laws of racial segregation known as the Jim Crow<sup>6</sup> laws that remained effective until the 1960s. These laws were a successful attempt to remove political and economic rights achieved by African Americans during Reconstruction Era. The 1890 segregation law requires all railroads to have separate accommodations for white and “coloured” people (Cummins et al. 2014: 252). This was the state’s first actual segregation law, although the white population in the South had generally practised racial discrimination before (Cummins et al. 2014: 252). After the railroad segregation came separation in streetcars, jails, hotels and other public establishments. (Cummins et al. 2014: 271). Even interracial marriage and cohabitation became a felony.

Throughout the late 1800s, Democrats attempted to reduce voter registration of African Americans and poor whites in ways that included intimidation, violence, and lynching. Their efforts culminated in 1898 when a new state constitution with the addition of suffrage<sup>7</sup> restrictions was admitted (Cummins et al. 2014: 269). This addition

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<sup>6</sup> *Jim Crow* is a pejorative term used to address African Americans (Fremont 2000: 15). Also, Jim Crow was a phrase used for legal segregation and discrimination against African Americans (Cummins et al. 2014: 252).

<sup>7</sup> *Suffrage* denotes the right to vote and the exercise of such right. Its synonym is *franchise* (‘suffrage’, Merriam-Webster, n.d).

required all voters to pass literacy tests and prove ownership of property. As anticipated, the amount of African American voters declined from 130,344 to 1,342 in 1904 and reached only 598 in 1918 (Cummins et al. 2014: 269-70). Following disfranchisement, African Americans were left with no representation in politics.

Louisiana and the rest of the United States fell into the Great Depression in 1929 (Taylor 1984: 180). The economic prosperity of the 1920s was followed by high unemployment rates and declines in agricultural and industrial production. Low wages with high prices forced many citizens into poverty. The economy of Louisiana suffered throughout the 1930s, until the 1940s when improvement came in the form of wartime industries (Cummins et al. 2014: 345). During the Second World War, employment in Louisiana nearly doubled, and by the 1950s, personal income had tripled in comparison to the previous decade.

The Civil Right Movement represents a resistance to the oppression of African Americans that became prominent in the 1950s but dates decades into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The movement represented African Americans and their allies who challenged laws and traditions rooted in racism. Several notable events fuelled their cause and inspired future civil rights actions. In 1953, three years before the arrest of Rosa Parks in Alabama, members of the movement successfully staged a bus boycott in Baton Rouge and challenged segregation laws (Cummins et al. 2014: 363). In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* abolished racial segregation in public schools. The leading figure in the fight for racial equality in Louisiana was attorney Alexander Pierre "A.P." Tureaud, who was a key figure in ending segregation in New Orleans.

The 1960s experienced more activism and progress in the Civil Rights Movement that continued to fight for racial equality. Gradually, African Americans gained more rights, and the number of their voter registration grew rapidly following 1964 and 1965 when federal laws prohibited discrimination based on sex, religion, colour, and race.

The 1960s witnessed a decline in farming as agricultural opportunities were overshadowed by economic advantages in other industries. The number of farms declined, and the state's metropolitan areas grew thanks to the petrochemical industry along the Mississippi (Cummins et al. 2014: 389). In major cities such as New Orleans,



white citizens often migrated to the country and the city became inhabited by the majority of African Americans. New Orleans gained a reputation as a cultural hub, and The French Quarter became famous as a neighbourhood of entertainment, lively atmosphere and festivals. As the popularity of New Orleans as a tourist destination arose, the tourism industry became a significant method for generating profit.

Since the 1960s, Louisiana's politics has become racially integrated but had hardly lost the controversial character. As an example, a white supremacist David Duke was elected a member of the House of Representatives in 1989 while being the former leader of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi party supporter (Cummins et al. 2014: 419). A high number of politicians such as Edwin W. Edwards have been accused and/or convicted of corruption, fraud, and extortion.

Throughout the modern period, Louisiana suffered several natural disasters among which stand out hurricanes. Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 respectively dealt more damage than any other natural disaster until their time (Cummins et al. 2014: 390). Hurricane Katrina devastated Louisiana and left behind hundreds of dead, thousands injured and more than a quarter of a million homes and businesses in complete ruins. Subsequently, 250,000 residents moved permanently out of the state in fear of another natural disaster (Cummins et al. 2014: 470). With predictions of global warming, severe flooding and power outages becoming more common, people searched for safer areas (Cummins et al. 2014: 469).

After centuries defined by colonization, inequality and oppression, Louisiana transitioned to an ethnically diverse state with a growing economy. The population of Louisiana did experience decline, but the new millennium brought advancement of technology and the creation of new industries. Economically, the oil and natural gas industries continue to prosper as well as the film industry and tourism (Cummins et al. 2014: 470). The chapter on racial equality in the history of Louisiana has been closed and new challenges in the form of environmental issues are ahead since the position of Louisiana on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico predicts a higher propensity to natural disasters.

## 2.7 Women in Louisiana History

Throughout the history of Louisiana, women have played significant roles, but their rights and status in society have evolved. In the past, a woman's position was determined by her cultural, racial, and economic background as well as education and religion.

In the indigenous society of Native Americans, women played a much larger and more important role in the public sphere than European women at that time (Cummins et al. 2014: 22). The Choctaw was a Native American tribe that settled in the delta of the Mississippi River in the 1760s and their women oversaw and directed culture traditions, foodways, social organization in their villages and often even diplomatic relations with other tribes and Europeans (Cummins et al. 2014: 22).

In the early colonial period under French and Spanish rule, women were granted certain property rights and legal protections. Women were able to own their property, inherit it and take part in business transactions.

Creole culture had a positive influence on the position of women. Creole women of mixed French, Spanish, African and Native American origin often held prominent positions within their communities and families. They maintained their cultural traditions and managed household affairs.

The Catholic Church had influenced the position and education of women at least since the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Ursuline Sisters are a Catholic religious order that was founded in 1535 and arrived in New Orleans in the 1720s (Cummins et al. 2014: 61). The sisters established educational institutions such as the Ursuline Academy and provided education and empowerment opportunities for girls and women. Their presence in Louisiana represented a model of women as educators, administrators, and community leaders. They were capable and helped challenge traditional gender roles. At the end of the colonial period, the Ursuline Academy had more than 100 day-students and opened hospitals, cared for orphans, single women and women in need (Cummins et al. 2014: 75).

Women's place of residence was another factor as there were vast differences between the urban and rural way of life. In rural areas, the plantation economy influenced women's position and status. White women born into wealthy families were able to get educated at home or in private schools and their duties were outsourced to enslaved women. However, higher education remained still inaccessible, and their opportunities were limited. Enslaved women of colour were subjected to difficult labour and raising their children while taking care of the household and children of the family they served. Free women of colour were usually lived in urban areas and worked in underpaid positions. However, they were able to hold important positions within their families. Creole women managed their households, led the family and community, and preserved the traditions of their culture.

During the antebellum era, women's rights were quite limited when compared to their male counterparts. They had no right to vote, and their role was often restricted solely to domestic care and charity. They had limited control over their own (inherited) property and needed the consent of a male relative to their spouse to manage legal transactions. However, some women managed to distinguish themselves from men in cultural and literary circles. Still, enslaved women were being exploited and free women of colour usually worked as maids, cleaners, street vendors and even prostitutes (Cummins et al. 2014: 192).

The Civil War and the following decades brought changes to a woman's status. The war extended women's rights and opportunities. They often gained more responsibilities in terms of managing and dealing with property because many men died in the war and there was a shortage of able working men (Cummins et al. 2014: 213). The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed enslaved women and they started working to support their families. The educational opportunities of all women widened, and their efforts were focused on suffrage and gaining social and political equality.

In 1891, the Louisiana Woman's Suffrage Association (LWSA) was founded in New Orleans. The suffrage members campaigned through newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and conventions for their cause and fought those opposed to women's right to vote for decades (Cummins et al. 2014: 277). The suffrage movement eventually

succeeded and the Nineteenth Amendment securing the right to vote for all women was introduced in Congress in 1878. Nonetheless, it is necessary to mention that members of the movement were largely upper or middle-class white women who fought mainly for the rights of white women. Some suffragists such as Kate M. Gordon of Louisiana openly opposed and criticised the Nineteenth Amendment (Cummins et al. 2014: 277).

On August 18, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified and all women regardless of their racial background could register to vote (Cummins et al. 2013: 269).

The following decades of modern era society experienced a wave of emancipation of women that spread through public life and politics. Women joined political organizations and more began to pursue higher education. Women were able to vote since 1920 but not all women were equal as segregation by race was the norm in public spaces, including schools and universities. The first woman to attend a university in Louisiana was Sarah Towles Reed in 1882 but the first African American female was able to attend as late as 1964. After years in court, Freya Anderson Rivers attended Louisiana State University as the first African American female in 1964 (Black History at LSU, n.d.).

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the social roles of women transformed, and the traditional gender roles shifted. Women's organizations began to focus on gaining gender equality in all aspects of life. Activists tackled the issue of sexual discrimination, unequal pay and property control and ownership (Cummins et al. 2014: 408). Among the most significant females of this era belongs Corrine Claiborne Boggs who became the first woman elected to Congress and remained the representative of Louisiana State until her retirement in 1988 (Cummins et al. 2014: 393, 408). Claiborne Boggs paved a path for future female politicians in the area.

The history of women in Louisiana is tumultuous and complicated but women made significant progress in achieving gender equality. Many accomplishments were achieved and although the gender question is still relevant, females have a strong position in contemporary society. There might still be differences in gender equality among various communities within Louisiana, but on the state level, women hold

significant roles and contribute heavily to the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres.

### 2.7.1 Plaçage

The history of Louisiana women during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is tightly connected to the phenomenon of *plaçage*. *Plaçage* represented a legal arrangement in which a young free woman of colour was kept as a mistress of a white man (Cummins et al. 2014: 177). In this form of “concubinage”, a white gentleman would support a young quadroon<sup>8</sup> woman and her mother, provided them with a home and legally acknowledged any offspring (Brattain 2005: 629).

This system was put in place because of a shortage of European women in the previous decades. During the French colonial period (1718-1768), the number of European women in the colony was limited and hence male European colonists engaged in sexual relations with female African slaves and Native Americans. This arrangement produced many offspring that created a new group of people called free people of colour, *gens de couleur libre* (Martin 2009: 65). Likewise, as much as 42 per cent of former slave women in Louisiana gained their freedom for reasons relating to these extramarital relations from 1769 to 1803 and became *gens de couleur libre* as their children (Cummins et al. 2014: 88). The free women of colour represented a noteworthy part of population New Orleans and actively participated in Louisiana’s economy (Cummins et al. 2014: 88). However, the surplus of the new generation of young and unmarried free women of colour caused an issue. These ladies sought protection, stability, and status and because they were legally unable to marry white men, their best option was to become mistresses (Harrington Bryan 2009: 51).

Following these informal arrangements, a rather stable system of concubinage called *plaçage* arose in New Orleans at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The process started

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<sup>8</sup> People of colour were identified by the colonists and latter society by the amount of African ancestry. (Martin 2009: 58). They were identified as mulattos, mestizos, quadroons, octoroons, and other terms. *Quadroons* had one-quarter African ancestry and were generally considered as fair-skinned (Martin 2009: 59).

at the elegant and elaborate quadrone balls that were hosted in luxurious venues such as the St. Phillippe Theatre. At the ball, mothers would show off their young daughters to white eligible men with hopes of finding an admirer and initiating *plaçage*. Harrington Bryan (2009: 51) marks the 1790s as the beginning of the quadrone balls and their popularity lasting till the 1850s.

The woman would become known as *placée* and although not recognised by the law and white society as a legal wife, she could lead a comfortable life with her children. The *plaçage* could last for life or mere years depending on the man who could decide to end the connexion when he legally married a woman of European origin (Dunbar-Nelson 2009: 22). Sometimes, the men continued with the liaison after marriage and sustained two families with separate residences, one gained through marriage and one through *plaçage* (Dunbar-Nelson 2009: 23). Or as was often the case in New Orleans, the men lived monogamously with their *placée* and children who were recognised as the only heirs (Martin 2009: 68).

The sons and daughters of such unions were educated in France out of necessity as there were no quality schools for mixed-race children in Louisiana (Martin 2009: 68). The children became well-educated, cultured, and wealthy people who began to gain influence. By the 1830s, they created a new generation of free people of colour who distinguished themselves as a highly skilled and independent class. Many of them became culturally, socially, and politically influential and used this power to free their slave relatives (Martin 2009: 69).

The advantages of *plaçage* were deeply rooted in a racially stratified and unequal society but it had a significant impact on the quality of life of many women. Through miscegenation, an enslaved mother could obtain security, freedom, education, and economic security for her children and herself, and eventually increase the social and legal status of people of colour (Martin 2009: 70).

## 2.8 Religion

A diverse range of religious traditions has played a significant role in the history of Louisiana. The most historically significant are two major branches of Christianity: Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

Roman Catholicism was the dominant religious tradition in Louisiana for much of its history, particularly during the French and Spanish colonial periods. This made the region unique as it contrasted with Protestantism in all English colonies, except Maryland. The Catholic Church played a central role in the religious and social life of the state and its traditions influenced many aspects of Louisiana's culture and identity.

However, this favoured position had been challenged by Protestant immigrants largely of German or Anglo-American origin (Taylor 1984: 101). To maintain Catholicism as the main religion, the government passed a law prohibiting Protestant worship in the larger towns, and New Orleans welcomed its first own bishop in 1795 (Cummins et al. 2014: 91). These and other attempts proved futile, as the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 brought even more immigrants and various Protestant denominations, namely Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians, managed to establish their first Louisianian churches by 1820s (Cummins et al. 2014: 170).

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant organizations attracted followers and their numbers steadily grew. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Catholicism and Protestantism continued to compete and coexist. Catholicism remained the dominant religion but both groups played important roles in the culture and life of the people.

Today, Louisiana is a state with diverse religious traditions. While Catholicism and Protestantism remain the most prominent religious groups, a growing number of non-Christian religious communities, such as Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists, are also present.

### 3 George W. Cable (1844-1925)

George Washington Cable was born in New Orleans on October 12, 1844. His place of birth is quite significant, as his name today is tightly connected to his native city, which served as the main subject of his work (Butcher 1962: 19). George W. Cable was a novelist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century who is catalogued in American literature as a leading exponent of local colour fiction (Butcher 1948: 462).

New Orleans has attracted other noted authors who lived there and wrote about the city but Cable's realistic, yet romantic description of the colourful and exotic history, unique customs, and conflicting cultures brought it fame (Butcher 1962: 19). Cable is predominantly valued for his realistic description of the antebellum Creole way of life and militant essays on behalf of civil rights for the African Americans (Butcher 1948a: 462). Through his writings, Cable captured the atmosphere of New Orleans, the harsh realities of slavery and challenged the reality of challenged societal norms and sought to bring about positive change.

Before Cable's birth, New Orleans had not been an American city very long yet was the fourth largest city in the United States with more than 130,000 residents (Butcher 1962: 19). Although Louisiana entered the Union as a state in 1812, the city had not lost its strikingly different atmosphere and was easy to distinguish among other American cities. However, the Creole, descendants of the French and Spanish settlers, influence started to decline by the 1840s and their wealth had passed to the newly arriving Americans (Butcher 1962: 19). The Cable family was among these Americans who saw New Orleans as a land of opportunity.

On October 12, 1844, George W. Cable was born into a wealthy family who migrated to New Orleans following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. His parents were slaveholders and part of the city's society and Presbyterians in religion. Cable's father, George Washington Cable, was a relatively successful businessman who was born in Virginia and attained a measure of prosperity, but the family's financial situation was tumultuous and unstable (Butcher 1962: 22). The father of the family eventually died after suffering multiple financial failures as well as bad health and young George had to leave education in private high school and assume his father's job at the customhouse



at only fourteen years old (Butcher 1962: 22). Young George was the oldest boy in the family and took upon himself the financial burden.

Soon after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Cable started working as a cashier for a grocer's company (Butcher 1962: 22). As New Orleans was captured by Northern troops in 1862, The Cables were banished from the city for refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the Union and the young and fragile George W. Cable enlisted in the Confederate cavalry at the age of 17 (Butcher 1962: 23). His time in the Confederate army gave him an understanding of the institution of slavery when he saw the brutal treatment of enslaved people by Confederate forces. During his time in the army, he worked as a clerk, often read the bible, and used every opportunity to educate himself on the struggle in which he was now engaged (Butcher 1962: 23). As the end war was coming to an end, he reevaluated his views on race and equality.

After the war, Cable worked multiple small low-paying jobs and married Louise Stewart Bartlett of Northern in 1769 and began his career as a journalist (Turner 1966: 38). In 1870, he began his writing career in the New Orleans *Picayune* by writing a column titled *Drop Shot* about contemporary literary works and public affairs with related social issues (Butcher 1962: 23). Soon after joining the *Picayune*, he also became a reporter and explored the relationship between Creoles, African Americans, and white Americans. Within a few years, Cable was starting to become an established writer who hoped for a book publication, but his work was initially turned down and continued his journalistic career (Butcher 1962: 23). In 1872, Cable found interest in New Orleans' churches and charities and carried out research that gained him acclaim (Butcher 1962: 24). He skilfully curated the romantic Creole tales of New Orleans' vibrant history in a captivating and thought-provoking way. Following these events, Cable began writing more Creole stories that were published by Scribner's Monthly and later in a book *Old Creole Days* (1879).

Cable's stories of Creole life brought him favourable national attention and for some time he could be considered a local celebrity but the pay he received was inadequate and his financial liabilities towards his growing family forced him to stop submitting them and find a second employment (Butcher 1962: 25,26). By 1877, Cable

and his wife Louise had five children and he found himself juggling three jobs which left him limited time to pursue writing. His responsibilities of supporting his family, caring for his mother, and managing the mortgage for the family's house hindered his writing career.

George W. Cable spent the limited time he had for writing *Old Creole Days* with the help of Hjalmar H. Boyesen (Butcher 1962: 26). Boyesen was a writer and professor at Cornell University of Norwegian-American origin who engaged in frequent correspondence with Cable and supported his work (Turner 1966: 27). One year before the publishing, The Cables debt was increasing as their household caught yellow fever which caused the death of the only son, George, and brother-in-law that added Cable's widowed sister and her three children to Cable's financial obligations (Butcher 1962: 29). Despite Boyesen risking his reputation and money for his support of Cable and his work, Cable decided not to publicly acknowledge his indebtedness to him (Butcher 1962: 30).

Finally, a collection of stories *Old Creole Days* was published in 1879. All the stories exploit the fabulous New Orleans and the old Creole Louisiana which were his chief provinces in fiction (Butcher 1948b: 137). Cable delves into the lives of both Creoles and African Americans and examines their relationship, interactions, and struggles. A notable story regarding the topic of this thesis is *Madame Delphine* which is conveniently the first story in the collection and describes a tragic tale of a mixed-race woman that is torn between her Creole heritage and societal expectations. Madame Delphine is an old quadroon woman who is fighting prejudice during her time.

In 1880, Cable published his perhaps most well-known literary work and his first novel, *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life*. The work was initially serialized in Scribner's Magazine over the course of 7 months. The setting of the novel is New Orleans and explores similar themes as Cable's other work. The Grandissime family is placed at the centre of the plot which follows the racial tensions and social dynamics of its Creole and mixed-race members. The plot heavily explores racial injustice and the system of *plaçage*, slavery, and even lynchings in the early 1800s and Cable hoped the story would increase awareness of these issues (Thompson et al., n.d.). Cable's next published work

is *Madame Delphine* (1881) which originated as a short story and was reworked into a novella. Later in his life, Cable considered *Madame Delphine* his masterpiece (Turner 1966: 108).

In 1884, Cable started a long-lasting friendship and even professional relationship with Mark Twain. Their understanding was based on their shared views of social and political issues, satirical humour, and interests in literature. The friendship helped Cable gain wider recognition as Twain promoted his writing, especially his first novel *The Grandissimes* (1881). Mark Twain even referenced Cable and the novel in his book *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). The two authors also held joint readings of their work (Butcher 1962: 14).

During the late 1880s and 1890s, Cable's writing style changed. In response to his mounting concerns about social conditions in the South, Cable shifted his focus to non-fiction and gave public readings and speeches promoting his perspective. He published his second novel *Dr Sevier* (1884) which attacked the prison system (Thompson et al., n.d.). This novel was soon followed by an extensive work *The Convict Lease System in the Southern States* (1885) that heavily continued with the criticism of Southern prisons and asylums began in *Dr Sevier* (Butcher 1948b: 142). In 1885, Cable released two more essays that challenged Louisiana's society: *The Freedman's Case in Equity* and *The Silent South*. These three works advocated for racial equality and abruptly criticized the Jim Crow law system. (Thompson et al., n.d.). They were initially released in *Century Magazine* and later published together in *The Silent South* (1885) (Butcher 1948b: 141). Another notable non-fiction work of this period is *The Creoles of Louisiana* (1884) which describes the heritage and traditions of the Creole population that had French, Spanish, African, and Caribbean ancestry.

After the harsh criticism of their society, many Creoles and other Southerners started resenting Cable's work (Butcher 1962: 14). Cable received honorary degrees from many distinguished universities and delivered lectures at the Johns Hopkins University (Butcher 1962: 136) but the Southern hostile reception forced The Cables to move permanently to Northampton in Massachusetts in 1885 (Thompson et al., n.d.).

In Massachusetts, Cable continued his writing career and New Orleans and began public lectures. He never stopped advocating for racial equality but also attempted to participate in improving the well-being of working-class people in Massachusetts. In 1886, Cable founded the first of the Home Culture Clubs which were a part of a program of practical social improvement that he engaged with for the next thirty-five years (Turner 1966: 273). Their goal was to educate and socialize people.

Cable continued to write about New Orleans and Louisiana throughout the rest of his long career (Richardson, n.d.). His following works include an extensive list of collections and novels. Among the most notable titles of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century belongs a short story collection *Bonaventure* (1888), a collection of political essays *The Negro Question* (1990), and a collection of historical and supernatural tales *Strange True Stories of Louisiana* (1990).

During the early 1900s, Cable remained faithful to his cause and continued to write and lecture. His focus was set on improving the educational and economic opportunities of African Americans and his community. Many of Cable's stories were dramatized. Cable was an avid supporter of dramatization and often actively participated in their adapting (Turner 1966: 345). In 1901, Cable wrote *The Cavalier* (1901) which proved to be his nearest approach to success in what he called "theatre business" and the novel was played on Broadway in 1902 (Butcher 1962: 141). The fact is that Cable welcomed the dramatization of his works partly due to his unstable financial situation (Butcher 1962: 141). He often needed to be paid in advance and produced a lot of material. Shortly after finishing a novel *The Cavalier* (1901), he wrote another one titled *Bylow Hill* (1902).

In his personal life, he still struggled to support himself financially and a sorrowful event crossed Cable's life in 1904, when his wife Louise died. He married his second wife Eva. C. Stevenson within two years after his first wife's passing. In 1909, he managed to finish the stage version of "Posson Jone" and "Pere Raphael" which originally appeared in print during the 1970s (Butcher 1962: 141).

During the last years of his life, Cable wrote a few more literary works but none of them gained the acclaim of his earlier works. The final work of the fifty-year career is

the novel *Lovers of Louisiana* (1918) which is shorter than any of his previous novels except *Bylow Hill* and which plot is one of the simplest he employed (Turner 1966: 353). The story focuses on dialogue. Cable's second wife died in 1923 and he married for the third time in the same year at the age of 79.

Cable's health had been declining significantly since 1923 and he had become less active and social. George Washington Cable passed away in St. Petersburg, Florida at the age of 80 on January 31, 1925. His death marked the end of a prolific and influential literary career (Turner 1966: 357)

### 3.1 The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life (1880)

New Orleans was not only Cable's hometown but the setting of his first novel and most influential work *The Grandissimes* (1880). Although George W. Cable did not descend from the Creole people<sup>9</sup>, he had deep love and understanding of New Orleans which can be seen in his vivid description of the city's spirit and vibrant atmosphere. The local colour is, among others, provided using dialect speech. Cable had a rich linguistic store, and he used dialect to immerse his readers who can "hear" not only English, but also Creole English, Creole French, and Negro French (Chase 1956: 381). Other notable devices for expressing local colour are voodoo practices (Stephens 1987: 11).

Before writing *The Grandissimes* (1880), Cable conducted extensive research on the history, culture, and social dynamics of New Orleans (Chase 1956: 374). George W. Cable was deeply interested in the culture of his hometown while being attentive to its racial and social tensions. He was an avid advocate for social justice. Believing in the power of literature, he wrote the novel with the intent to promote understanding of New Orleans and shed light on the racial injustice and the consequences of slavery. (Chase 1956.)

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<sup>9</sup> George W. Cable's mother was of Puritan New England descent and his father came from Virginia (Chase 1956: 376).

The work was initially published in six parts in the nineteenth volume of *Scribner's Monthly*<sup>10</sup> from November 1879 to April 1880 (*Scribner's Monthly* 1889: Vol. 19). Within less than a year after its release in the magazine, the complete novel titled *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (1880) was published in book form by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

The novel is set predominantly in racially divided New Orleans, Louisiana. The story begins with a social event in 1803, the year of the Louisiana Purchase. The plot chronicles the romances and adventures of several members of the Grandissime family whose history is interwoven with the larger social and historical events

The Cable uses his characters to express both sympathy and judgement of the South. In his work, Cable's appreciation of Creole culture is counterbalanced by the abuse of slaves. The story of Bras Coupé is incorporated into the story and serves as a powerful depiction of the hardship and resilience of those who suffer for the profit of their masters.

Overall, the significance of *The Grandissimes* (1880) lies in Cable's ability to address important social and racial issues, create authentic characters, evoke a sense of place, and capture the complexities of relationships and life in New Orleans. Richard Chase (1956: 373) states:

*The Grandissimes* is a novel of ideas, describing an intricate society full of ambiguities of class, caste, and race. With this novel, Cable transcends his previous achievements and limitations and wrote a masterpiece.

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<sup>10</sup> *Scribner's Monthly* was a well-known literary periodical founded in 1870. Complete issues, including the one with *The Grandissimes*, can be found in the online archives of *HathiTrust* ([hathitrust.org](http://hathitrust.org)).

### 3.1.1 Plot

The book consists of sixty-one chapters. An omniscient narrator tells the story of three families tied by their history: the Grandissimes, Fusiliers, and De Grapions. The novel is full of interconnected subplots, racially tangled bloodlines and individual character arcs which might, together with the French dialect speech, come across as confusing on first and even second reading. The following synopsis of the plot is greatly simplified to pinpoint and highlight the more significant events.

The book's opening scene takes place in New Orleans in 1803 during a masquerade ball. The city's elite and the main characters of the novel gather to dance and socialize. Guests speculate about the identities of the masked figures and observe the festivities. Two masks engage in playful banter, one of them identified as Honoré Grandissime. The other is widowed Aurore De Grapion-Nancanou, which is revealed later in the story.

We are introduced to Joseph Frowenfeld, German American, who left North with his family to start a new life in Louisiana. During their journey, they meet a passenger who mentions Joseph's cousin Honoré Grandissime and tells them a story about Bras-Coupé, an African prince who would rather be hunted than work as a slave. The family settles down but falls ill with a yellow fever and only Joseph survives. Joseph is an abolitionist, taken back by the racially prejudiced South.

Joseph befriends Doctor Keene who tells him about the charming neighbouring De Grapion (Nancanou) women. He talks about the rivalry between De Grapion and Grandissime families, quadroon balls and Creole culture. Frowenfeld is fascinated.

In the next chapter, we learn about a girl Lufki-Humma, born to a Natchez princess and a Tchoupitoulas chief in 1673. She became an Indian queen and high priestess. In 1699, she encountered French explorers, ancestors of the Grandissime and Fusilier families and fell in love with the latter. The ancestor of the De Grapions competed for her against Fusilier but lost and the rivalry among families started. Fusilier married Lufki-Humma and established a large and formidable family which became united to the Grandissimes through marriage.

Doctor Keene explains the complexity of the situation at the masquerade ball. Honoré Grandissime was speaking with Aurora De Grapion-Nancanou, De Grapion by birth, whose husband was killed by Agricola Fusilier, Honoré's uncle. Aurora and her daughter are now alone and poor. None of the two guests knows whom they met.

Joseph Frowenfeld rents a small building and opens an apothecary. A man called Honoré Grandissime becomes his landlord and Joseph meets old-fashioned racist Agricola Fusilier. Additionally, Joseph is enchanted by a beautiful lady visiting his shop who turns out to be Aurore. Quadroon Palmyre Philosophe is introduced as a former maid and current friend of Aurore. Palmyre wants revenge on Agricola for forcing her marriage to Bras Coupé several years ago. Aurore and her daughter Clotilde are struggling to pay rent and face the danger of eviction by their landlord, Honoré Grandissime.

After severe confusion, Joseph finds out there are two men called Honoré Grandissime and they are half-brothers. Numa Grandissime had two sons. First, he had a quadroon Honoré with a woman he did not marry, and then he was pressured to marry Agricola's sister who bore the white Honoré. The two boys were both educated in Paris and after Numa's death, the older brother, for convenience titled Honoré f.m.c. (free man of colour), inherited the bulk of his fortune while the younger was meant to take on his late father's office.

Honoré f.m.c. speaks freely with Joseph, who is an abolitionist and does not judge Honoré's origin, about his devoted love towards Palmyre who does not reciprocate his feelings. Instead of him, she is in love with his younger half-brother.

Aurora means to visit her landlord Honoré Grandissime about her rent but by accident visits the younger brother, who is the man she spoke with at the masquerade ball. Honoré is captivated by Aurore's charm and offers help in resolving the issue with his quadroon brother.

Joseph is asked by Doctor Keene to dress Palmyre's wound. She was injured when attempting to get revenge on Agricola. We learn about Palmyre's past as white Honoré's twin sister's maid.



The younger Honoré desires to unite his racially divided family and create harmony among all the city's fractions. However, his family sees his views as foolishness. Honoré Grandissime and Joseph discuss the slavery system when they encounter the other Honoré (f.m.c.) attempting suicide and stop him.

We are told the story of Bras-Coupé, the mighty African slave who was captured, sold into slavery, and purchased by Agricola. He refused to work and attacked the overseer. Palmyre was called to interpret between Bras-Coupé and Agricola, but an agreement was made that she has to marry him in exchange for his obedience. Although she does not love him, she marries him. But Bras-Coupé attacks the overseer again, curses the plantation and runs away. Agricola punishes Palmyre for his actions. Eventually, Bras-Coupé is captured, and Agricola argues for the maximum penalty. However, Honoré pleads for his life and Bras-Coupé is "only" mutilated, his back galled, ears cut off and tendons behind his knees slashed. Bras-Coupé becomes mute and refuses to lift his curse. However, after his master's death, when he is dying, he calls for the master's widow and revokes the curse. He dies thinking about Africa.

The story of the African prince moves Frowenfeld, and he turns the conversation to the plight of quadroons and urges Honoré f.m.c. to use his intelligence, influence, and wealth to advocate for the rights of others.

Joseph gets injured by Palmyre's maid in a misunderstanding and rushes back to his shop with a bloody wound on his head, causing a scandal. Clotilde encounters him and becomes distraught by his state. She confesses her interest in the man to her mother.

Honoré Grandissime wants to put right Agricola's wrongdoings to Aurora, whom he has developed feelings for but does not want to let down his family. Honoré Grandissime struggles to find the solution which would ease Aurora's and his own family's financial situation, and help Joseph avoid scandal.

Eventually, everything is resolved. Honoré has made the long-awaited restitution of land to Aurora and Clotilde; Palmyre clarified the situation with Joseph and the two

brothers become business partners called Grandissime Brothers. Honoré also acknowledges his half-brother, the free man of colour, as the rightful heir to their father.

Furious Agricola gathered a mob and vandalized Frowenfeld's establishment, Honoré's building. The chapter highlights the division within the Grandissime family and escalating tensions in the city.

After the commotion, Palmyre receives a love letter with the confession of quadroon Honoré Grandissime but becomes outraged by the revelation that the other Honoré, the object of her love, has another woman. She wants revenge against the ones who wronged her and uses voodoo against Agricola. Agricola does not believe in the supernatural power of voodoo curses but becomes fearful and takes precautions when several charms are found around the house and on his pillow. Clemence is caught placing the charms for Palmyre. She awaits punishment.

Agricola is angered by his relatives who defend Honoré and gets excluded from the council due to his advanced age. He feels humiliated and heads to Frowenfeld where he meets Honoré, f.m.c. Agricola angrily prompts Joseph to cast him out and attacks him with his staff. Quadroon Honoré defends himself and stabs Agricola, fleeing the scene.

In the meantime, Members of the Grandissimes have gathered to hang Clemence. They are stopped at the last moment but as she attempts to run away, someone from the laughing crowd shoots her dead. Agricola also dies of his injuries, surrounded by his family, reminiscing about his love for Louisiana.

Palmyre and Honoré f.m.c. managed to flee New Orleans. They sailed away and the police were not looking for them. However, Palmyre still rejects Honoré's love and he commits suicide. She lives comfortably in Bordeaux.

Joseph Frowenfeld and Clotilde have fallen for each other. Clotilde was the angel that Joseph saw caring for him during his feverish dreams at the start of the novel. Honoré Grandissime proposes to Aurora Nancanou, but she vehemently refuses. She rejects him because of fear of dying soon. As Aurora attempts to give Honoré an explanation, she gives in to his persuasion and embraces him.

### 3.2 Cable's Portrayal of Women

George W. Cable advocated for social and racial equality which can be seen even in his treatment of women. Cable gives his female characters depth and agency, as well as the ability to act and change their and others' fates. However, there are still constraints to their abilities by the period in which they live.

Women in *The Grandissimes* (1880) are multi-dimensional characters with a range of motivations, emotions, and experiences unique for each of them respectively. Their strengths, weaknesses, and internal conflicts are realistic which makes them relatable and authentic.

Although the novel is called *The Grandissimes* (1880), other than the two Grandissime brothers are among its main characters. Joseph Frowenfeld is often recognized as the main protagonist and Aurora Nancanou and Palmyre la Philosophe are crucial characters for the plot. Cable highlights the individual lives of these two women and acknowledges their importance in the narrative.

It is important to remember that Cable's portrayal of women is shaped by the historical context in which he wrote. This context includes both religious and cultural factors, Catholicism and Creole culture respectively. A fascinating phenomenon in terms of religion is voodoo, practised by both main female characters.

Although Cable does attempt to push against societal norms, his works still reflect the limitations of the time he wrote about and in which he wrote the story. Hence some of the female characters might appear excessively helpless and fragile. After all, Cable wrote the *Grandissimes* to raise awareness about the social and racial tensions in Louisiana among which can count gender disparity. The purpose of Cable's characters is to evoke both admiration of New Orleans, and judgement of the society.

### 3.2.1 Palmyre la Philosophe

Palmyre is one of the main female characters of *The Grandissimes* (1880) and perhaps the most intriguing. Upon her initial introduction, she is described as:

(...) a woman of the quadroon caste, of superb stature and poise, severely handsome features, clear, tawny skin and large, passionate black eyes (Cable 1988: 57).

Palmyre is a quadroon and a slave in the De Grapion household where she became a playmate and slave maid of Aurore De Grapion. Since she was a young girl and “despite her heritage”, she was described as remarkable.

Palmyre had, at only fourteen, a barbaric and magnetic beauty, that startled the beholder like an unexpected drawing out of a jewelled sword. To these charms of person she added mental acuteness, conversational adroitness, concealed cunning, and noiseless but visible strength of will; and to these, that rarest of gifts in one of her tincture, the purity of true womanhood (Cable 1988: 57).

Such a vivid portrayal of her beauty, intelligence, cunning and strength of will is meant to captivate the reader and emphasize her significance within the story. Palmyre has just entered the narration and is already a complex and intriguing character.

At the age of fifteen, Aurore was to become a lady and Palmyre lady’s maid but they had to be separated as Palmyre had become the dominant figure and overshadowed Aurore. Hence Palmyre was, like a property, rented by Agricola for ten years to be his niece’s, white Honoré’s twin sister’s, maid.

In the novel, George W. Cable explores conventions of roles and identities- and through the use of irony can be seen the absurdity in prescribed roles. As a white pure-blood lady, Aurore is supposed to excel in every aspect, yet her slave maid of mixed heritage possesses greater intelligence and eloquence.

Such portrayal is tragic and brings attention to the dire fate of all enslaved people who have to conceal their talents to appease their oppressors. In such a description,

Cable exposes the unjust limitations based on race and emphasizes the difference between perceived roles and actual individual capabilities.

As lady's maid at the Grandissimes' house, Palmyre loved her mistress and even more her brother Honoré. Yet she and Agricola hated each other with all the strength they had.

He knew not only her pride but her passion for the absent Honoré. He hated her, also, for her intelligence, for the high favor in which she stood with her mistress, and for her invincible spirit, which was more offensively patent to him than to others, since he was himself the chief object of her silent detestation (Cable 1988: 173).

Agricola's wishes for Palmyre to be overtaken by a disaster came true when an African slave Bras-Coupé fell in love with her and demanded her as his wife. Despite Palmyre's inner aversion to this, she agreed – to maintain her pride, spite Agricola, and silently hoped her consent would prompt Agricola to prohibit it. Palmyre is portrayed as a woman who does not show her weakness and acknowledges defeat.

Cable employs the character of Palmyre as a mediator to introduce the tragic legend of Bras-Coupé. Palmyre holds boundless admiration for Bras-Coupé, yet her love for Honoré persists. The pair eventually marries and as a result of Bras-Coupé's rebellion against Agricola and the institution of slavery, Palmyre endures punishments and personally witnesses its consequences in the form of the mutilation inflicted upon Bras-Coupé. Consequently, Palmyre's enmity towards Agricola intensifies and she seeks revenge.

Palmyre's animosity towards Agricola stems from his role in the institution of slavery. This animosity is parallel to the resentment and anger felt by enslaved people who are oppressed. Palmyre is a part of the story of Bras-Coupé which draws on the themes of oppression, freedom, desire for justice and dignity.

After Bras-Coupé's tragic fate, Palmyre relocates to New Orleans and assumes the name Palmyre la Philosophe. As a free woman of colour, she gains fame as a highly-skilled hairdresser, but her most notable attribute is her ability to cast spells and practice

voodoo. She employs voodoo to aid Aurora in her desperate financial situation, and to seek revenge against Agricola. As a voodoo priestess, her character gains cultural significance.

Presumably, Palmyre's enduring love for Honoré and hopes to be with him were an anchor for her sanity. However, she discovers Honoré is infatuated with another woman. Ironically, due to her heritage, she cannot be with white Honoré and yet does not even acknowledge the romantic advances of his quadroon brother. Palmyre sheds all inhibitions and becomes consumed by a desire for revenge against Agricola, the one who has wronged her the most.

In the culmination of the story, Palmyre relies on voodoo to carry out her bidding and exact revenge on Agricola, using Clemence to deliver voodoo charms to his home. However, her voodoo fails and her efforts only cause the tragic death of Clemence, who is caught in a bear trap, condemned to death by an enraged mob, and shot while fleeing. Although Agricola meets his demise, it is due to injuries inflicted by quadroon Honoré who acted in self-defence after being struck by a cane. Agricola dies surrounded by his family.

Palmyre and Honoré flee the city to escape the consequences of their actions but find no happiness. Honoré, rejected by Palmyre once again and having no home, commits suicide, while Palmyre lives out her days in solitude. The most prominent quadroon female character is denied a happy ending. Throughout the novel, Palmyre transforms from a beautiful and remarkable girl to a voodoo priestess seeking vengeance.

From my perspective, Palmyre emerges as the most significant character in the novel. Her journey encompasses love, revenge, resilience, and the pursuit of freedom, driving the plot and influencing other characters. This shapes her multi-dimensional and pivotal character.

### 3.2.2 Aurora De Grapion-Nanacanou

The main white female character of *The Grandissimes* (1880) is Aurora Nanacanou. Born as Aurora De Grapion, she grew up without brothers or sisters on a plantation at Cannes Brulées on the coast of the Mississippi River. According to the plantation customs, she had been given a quadroon playmate and slave maid Palmyre. Presumably, she does not have racial prejudice and treats Palmyre with respect, staying her friend through adulthood.

The De Grapion family is small, and instead of marrying her to a Grandissime, likely Honoré, Aurora married a man from the Nanacanou family. They were initially content until her husband gambled with Agricola Fusilier and lost everything. Agricola was accused of cheating and for his Creole pride, Agricola challenged the young man to a duel and killed him. To uphold appearance, Agricola offered Aurora a choice: either agree that he won fairly, or he would seize her home in retaliation.

In this situation, Aurora showed her Creole pride and the quality of her character. She politely refused Agricola's proposal and let him take her home with grace. In Creole society, pride is significant, and Aurora is portrayed as its epitome.

Did you ever hear of a more perfect specimen of Creole pride? That is the way with all of them. Show me any Creole, or any number of Creoles, in any sort of contest, and right down at the foundation of it all, I will find you this same preposterous, apathetic, fantastic, suicidal pride (Cable 1988: 32).

Even after her father's death, Aurora maintains her dignity. Despite being left with debt and having no property or money, she presents herself as content. She resides with her daughter in a rented home, making a living by giving music lessons and selling the few valuable possessions they have remaining.

Aurora possesses numerous admirable qualities such as strong will, wit, beauty, charm and being a caring mother. Her daughter Clotilde closely resembles her mother and they share a loving bond.

They are, without exception, the finest women – the brightest, the best, and the bravest – that I know in New Orleans (Cable 1988: 15).

(They are not sisters) You see, that is one of their charms: one is a widow, the other is her daughter and both as young and beautiful as Hebe (Cable 1988: 30).

Aurora and Honoré Grandissime, who could have possibly become her husband eighteen years ago, encounter each other at the masquerade ball and ignite a spark of affection that further in the story develops into inflation and love. This creates a love triangle since Palmyre, Aurora's former quadroon maid and current friend, has been in love with Honoré since youth. On the other hand, no other than Honoré's half-brother, Honoré f.m.c., is madly in love with Palmyre.

Overall, the intricacy of Aurora's narrative serves to amplify her significance within the plot and highlights the depth of her character. Throughout her journey, Aurora has demonstrated remarkable resilience in overcoming numerous obstacles, all while maintaining commendable qualities, Creole pride, and dignity. She is resourceful and strives to maximize the quality of life for both herself and her daughter.

In the end, Aurora experiences a happy ending as her property is restored, her daughter content, and Honoré by her side.



## 4 Kate Chopin (1850-1904)

Katherine O'Flaherty, later known as Kate Chopin, was born on February 8, 1850, in St. Louis, Missouri (Bloom 2007: 205). Although she became an influential American author best known for her works set in Louisiana, she was not born there. Kate Chopin had Irish and French Creole ancestry and moved to New Orleans only after marriage (Wheeler 2007: 119). New Orleans and other places in Louisiana settings of her landmark novel, *The Awakening* (1899), which sparks discussions among readers and scholars generations after the publication (Ostman 2020: 1). Overall, Kate Chopin predominantly employs Louisiana as the place setting in all her work. Although not her birthplace, Louisiana and its unique attributes had a strong influence on her work

Katherine O'Flaherty was born to an Irish immigrant and successful businessman Thomas O'Flaherty and his second wife Eliza Faris who was from a French Creole family (Toth 1999: 6). Kate was the third out of five Thomas' children, but all her sisters and brothers died at a young age. The specific details about Kate's childhood are limited but *Toth* (1999) speculates that she was heavily influenced by her parents' relationship which was defined by their power imbalance, age difference, and Thomas' possible infidelity with his slave servant and illegitimate children (Toth 1999: 8). At the time of Kate's birth, Eliza was only twenty-two while Thomas was at the age of forty-five older than her father, among the slaves of O'Flaherty household was a young woman with two small "light-skinned" children of unknown paternity and Kate was a curious child (Toth 1999: 6).

Despite the family drama and humourless and stern personality, Thomas O'Flaherty was a responsible provider who valued education and religious tradition. Kate was brought up in Catholicism and remained a practising Catholic until the death of her husband in 1881 (Ostman 2020: 2).

At the age of five, Kate was sent to a private boarding school at the Sacred Heart Convent where she was to receive a strict Catholic education (Wheeler 2007: 119). Nonetheless, the young Katherine's first term ended after mere two months in 1855 when her father suddenly died in an accident (Toth 1999: 9). Her mother, Eliza O'Flaherty, was only twenty-seven when she became a wealthy widow, could make her

own decisions, and bring Kate home to be raised among her powerful female relatives who also widowed at a young age (Toth 1999: 11). From 1855, Katherine was tutored at home by her great-grandmother Madame Charleville who taught her French, piano, love for storytelling and independency. After two years, Kate went back to the Sacred Heart Academy run by nuns two years later. She attended the Convent until her graduation with honours in 1868 and developed a love for reading, writing, and storytelling there. (Toth 1999: 11, 62). At the Academy, she shared an intimate friendship with Kitty Garesché from St. Louis with whom she read fiction and poetry (Bloom 2007: 13).

Katherine O’Flaherty grew up during the Civil War and although she was only eleven years old when the war came to St. Louis, the events of the period made a significant impact on her life. O’Flaherty and Garesché family were slaveholders and supported the Confederacy hence their family members, including Kate’s brother George and Kitty’s father, enlisted for the South (Toth 1999: 75). In 1863, only two months after the death of her beloved tutor and great-grandmother Madame Charleville, Katherine’s brother George died of typhoid fever and Kitty Garesché was expelled from St. Louis (Toth 1999: 26). The Garesché family not only supported the Confederacy, but the father also refused to take the oath of allegiance and enlisted for the Southern army. (Toth 1999: 28). The O’Flaherty’s also lived in fear. Eliza was only thirty-five and yet protecting vulnerable girls and their home from German American soldiers who invaded their home, threatened them with weapons, and eventually forced Eliza to comply and display the Union flag. (Toth 1999: 31). It is unknown if any of the O’Flaherty women were abused, but Kate attempted to escape the emotional impact of the war by reading fiction, and poetry and admiring the works of Sir Walter Scott (Toth 1999: 31).

After the war, the family moved to a different house to leave “terrifying memories” behind, and Kitty came back to St. Louis (Toth 1999: 36). The two girls remained friends until 1870 when Kattie joined the Sacred Heart nuns and Kate met a cotton trader from Louisiana and French Creole, Oscar Chopin.

In June 1870, Kate married Oscar Chopin at nineteen years old and became Kate Chopin. Oscar. They spent their honeymoon in Europe, Oscar valued Kate’s intelligence

and independence, and they moved to New Orleans after their arrival (Ostman and O'Donaghue 2015: 71). In New Orleans, Kate Chopin met her father-in-law Dr Chopin who was a Frenchman, a master of a plantation, and an abuser. He heavily abused his wife Julie and became famous amongst his neighbours for brutality towards slaves (Toth 1999: 63,64). Although Kate's family had supported the Confederacy when she was a child, she developed an adverse response to slavery and criticized it and people like Dr Chopin in her writings (Ostman and O'Donaghue 2015: 71). She was a capable woman with a strong personality and stood in opposition to Dr Chopin.

Kate enthusiastically studied New Orleans and collected material for her future works as she became fascinated with the local Creole culture through poetry, music, drama and stories of locals. Between 1871 and 1879, Kate and Oscar had 6 children, five boys and one girl (Wheeler 2007: 119). Kate and Oscar were in love, capably ran the household and, raised their children but they had to worry about financial issues. Oscar's business was struggling, and the family had to move several times. Eventually, they settled in a small village Cloutierville where Kate's behaviour was seen as scandalous, and Oscar ran a general store and a few plantations (Toth 1999: 210).

In 1882, Oscar got ill with what seemed to be swamp fever but was malaria. A local doctor had mistaken his symptoms, treated him for it until his illness was in an advanced stage and gave him the correct medicine when it was already too late (Toth 1999: 92). Oscar Chopin died on December 10, 1882.

Kate Chopin took over her late husband's business and skilfully managed it while paying off his debts (Toth 1999: 94). It took her only fifteen months of hard labour and negotiating to settle all debts. (Toth 1999: 94).

During her time in Cloutierville, Kate had an affair with a married man Albert Sampite. She was a widow who often attracted the attention of men and he was a wealthy, daring and unhappily married man. The affair presumably started after the death of Oscar in 1882, but some authors speculate it had started before (Toth 1999: 97). Alcee, the character in *The Awakening* is based on him.

In 1884, after 15 years of living in Louisiana, Kate Chopin decided to sell all her property and move with her children back to her family in St. Louis, Missouri. For one year, Kate and her children were content in the world of women whom they loved. Unfortunately, Eliza died the next year of cancer and Kate was devastated (Toth 1999: 102).

Kate's doctor encourages writing as a way to deal with her immense grief. Kate was struggling with depression and was facing a difficult task as the head of the family, raising her children alone and providing for them. Her escape from the complicated times was writing about the people she encountered in Louisiana. She used her talent for storytelling and wrote short stories and articles about women's lives, experiences, and societal roles.

Kate Chopin's first published literary work was a love poem *If It Might Be* (1889). It was soon followed by a story about a young pianist who refuses to marry, *Wiser than a God* (1889) which was printed by the Philadelphia Musical Journal (Bloom 2007: 18). Her next work about a newly married couple, *A Point at Issue!* (1889), was published by St. Louis Post-Dispatch. In the following years, Chopin wrote for multiple journals and magazines and developed a writing routine while raising her 6 children, working on multiple stories at once, and already taking notes for her most famous novel, *The Awakening*. In her initial stories, Chopin mostly drew on contemporary controversies about women of her time (Toth 1999: 111).

Chopin's first novel, *At Fault* (1890), draws on the topic of desire and had to be released at her own expense (Toth 1999: 15). In the same year, she wrote another novel *Young Dr Gosse*, but the work was rejected multiple times, and she destroyed it (Toth 1999: 271). During the 1890s, Kate Chopin wrote several short stories and articles that were critically well acclaimed. In 1892, one of her stories was printed in *Vogue* under the title *Desirée Baby* (1892). The plot is set in the antebellum and postbellum South and exposes the hypocrisy of French Creole society (Bloom 2007: 54).

Throughout the 1890s, she closed contracts with several notable journals and magazines, regularly submitting stories, essays, and articles. Chopin's first collection of short stories was published in 1894 under the title *Bayou Folk* (1894) and contains

twenty-three stories. Her second collection, *A Night in Acadie*, was published in 1897 and its first short story is unique in its writing style and content which is indistinguishable from Chopin's diary entry (Bloom 2007: 171). She began working on her upcoming novel right after publishing *A Night in Acadia* (1897).

The most scandalous of Chopin's novels is also her most recognised work. *The Awakening* (1899) is a novel which describes the struggle of a woman to conform to the traditional societal role of mother and wife which prompts her to rebel, have an affair and commit suicide. The novel sparked controversy, received negative reviews, and critics dubbed the plot immoral (Bloom 2007: 206). Nonetheless, *The Awakening* (1899) attracted attention again in the 1960s, this time favourable, and became recognised as a major feminist work of the South and feminism in general.

After 1900, the unfavourable reviews hindered Chopin's literary career and she received crushing news about her upcoming story collection (Toth 1999: 229). Although some of her works were admitted and published in early 1900, the unfavourable reviews prompted her publisher to cancel the contract on her third collection of short stories *A Vocation and a Voice* (Toth 1999: 229). Other reasons for the termination might have been the fact that Chopin's writing style and mood changed over the years and the stories might not sell well. Her works were no longer bright Louisiana local colour tales, but rather strange stories about loneliness, betrayal, and death (Toth 1999: 229).

At the end of her life, the critics scorned her for her openness, and her health began to deteriorate after she reached fifty. Kate Chopin became quieter and focused more on her family than writing. She still wrote but seldom published.

Kate Chopin died of cerebral haemorrhage during her visit to the World's Fair on August 22, 1904 (Toth 1999: 239).

While Kate Chopin had a devoted readership, she faced consistent criticism for writing too openly about controversial topics such as sex, race, infidelity, desire, alcoholism, and unhappy wives. However, it is worth noting that her literary contributions were not overlooked. Kate Chopin's work generated notable acclaim and recognition in the latter part of the twentieth century (Bloom 2007: 206).

## 4.1 The Awakening (1899)

In 1897, Kate Chopin started writing a new novel titled *A Solitary Soul*. But after urging from her editor, she changed it and published the novel within two years under the name *The Awakening* (1899) (Ostman and O'Donaghue 2015: 33).

During her life, Chopin became a recognized writer for her short stories but today her most famous and influential work is her second and last novel, *The Awakening* (1899). However, the book created controversy among literary critics and her already short literary career was hindered. Chopin began publishing in 1889 and although her last publication was released in 1904, she lost writing deals and became discouraged after 1899.

*The Awakening* (1899) is a realistic novel which tells of the awakening of Edna Pontellier. Edna is a mother and wife but struggles to fulfil societal expectations and wishes to be her true self in upper-class Creole society. Like many of her short stories, the novel explores themes of female identity, sexuality, marriage and divorce, maturing and developing of a woman, and the consequences of defying societal norms within the Louisiana Creole culture. For these reasons, *The Awakening* (1899) is today recognized as a significant work of early feminist literature, a bildungsroman dealing with Edna's transformation, and a local colour novel.

The story of Edna Pontellier is narrated by an omniscient third-person narrator in a continuous linear narrative. The plot is developing throughout thirty-nine chapters which are set initially on Grand Isle<sup>11</sup> and then in New Orleans during the 1890s. The story moves back to Grand Isle only in the last chapter when Edna returns to a place where she felt free (Ostman and O'Donaghue 2015: 40).

Edna seeks freedom represented by independence and solitude. Perhaps by changing the title of the novel from *A Solitary Soul*, Chopin might have unintentionally shifted the focus away from the fact that her heroine's greatest desire is to be simply left alone (Ostman and O'Donaghue 2015: 33).

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<sup>11</sup> *Grand Isle* is a resort in the Gulf of Mexico where the Pontelliers spend the summer (Walker 1993: 7).

The Awakening (1899) follows a story of a woman who awakens from the binding role of a wife and mother to a woman exploring her emotions, desires and individuality.

#### 4.1.1 Plot

Edna Pontellier is the main character of the novel. She is currently spending the summer months with her family on the Grand Isle near New Orleans. Edna is only twenty-eight and married to an older Creole businessman Léonce and together they have two young sons Raoul and Etienne. The family stays at a resort owned by Creole Madame Lebrun and her sons Robert and Victor, while other guests also belong to the upper-class Creole society.

Edna finds herself bored by the role of a mother and frustrated by her marriage. Her husband is stern and distant, so she spends her days with her close friend Madame Ratignolle who embodies the idealistic motherly woman and urges Edna to fulfil her societal duties. However, Edna begins to befriend Robert Lebrun and engages in playful flirtation. The twenty-six-year-old and charming Robert is known for being attentive to married women. This summer, he seeks Edna's attention.

Edna is moved by the performance of pianist Mademoiselle Reisz. Mademoiselle Reisz is independent, talented, blunt, and refuses to conform to societal norms, representing the stark opposite of Madame Adèle Ratignolle. Mademoiselle gives Edna the confidence to face her fears and influences her journey to self-discovery.

As Edna and Robert spend days together, their connection deepens. Edna's desire for freedom awakens, while Robert becomes captivated by her beauty and independent spirit. Nonetheless, the increasing seriousness of their connection and its impossibility prompt Robert to announce his departure. Robert leaves for Mexico in the guise of a business matter which he has planned for years.

The summer comes to an end and Edna spends her remaining days at the resort swimming and longing for what she had held but lost. Robert has left and she was denied

what her newly awakened being demanded (Chopin 1976: 49). Additionally, Edna confides to Madame Ratignolle in Chapter XVI (Chopin 1976: 51):

For my children, I would give up the unessential; I would give my money,  
I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. It's only  
something I'm beginning to comprehend.

The family returns to New Orleans and Edna pursues her own interests rather than tending to her duties of mother and wife. She spends her time painting and visits Madame Lebrun and Mademoiselle Reisz to gain information about Robert. Her search is successful as she discovers Robert has been writing about her to Reisz.

In the meantime, Léonce consults the family physician Doctor Mandelet about Edna's mental state. The more Edna behaves like herself, the less Léonce recognizes her. Dr Mandelet advises Léonce to give her more freedom and time to return to normal. Later, Léonce departs for New York and the boys are sent to his mother's. Edna is left alone.

Edna savours her freedom and solitude. She can reflect on her life and pursue her desires while continuing to visit Reisz to read Robert's letters. In her pursuit, Edna is often accompanied by a notorious womanizer Alcée Arobin who eventually becomes her lover. At the same time, she escapes the big family house and moves into a small bungalow. The gossip about her and Alcée begins to spread.

Unexpectedly, Edna encounters Robert at Mademoiselle Reisz's house. They dine together at her house and discuss their feelings. Within the next few days, Edna is unsure about her future and begins to sense hope, when Robert approaches her again and admits that he left for Mexico to avoid her and fight his feelings for her.

Nonetheless, their conversation is interrupted by summons from Adèle Ratignolle who wants Edna at her childbirth. Robert begs Edna to stay but she promises to return. During the childbirth, Madame Ratignolle vehemently pleads for Edna's morality. Naturally, Edna is shaken both by the childbirth and her friend's request, but Doctor Mandelet offers support and condemns Adèle's actions.



Edna returns to her house but finds it empty. Robert left only a note: *I love you. Good-by – because I love you* (Chopin 1976: 121). After reading the words, Edna appears numb and remains awake all night. The next morning, she leaves for Grand Isle.

In the final chapter, the story moves back to a place where Edna felt free. She comes alone to Grand Isle with an excuse to rest and goes to the beach. She sees an injured bird drowning in the ocean and decides to swim. Taking her swimsuit off, she begins swimming and reminisces about her childhood, family, Léonce, and Robert. Her body becomes tired, but she continues swimming farther from the shore and thinking about her loneliness. Edna grows indifferent toward the world and seeks freedom, which she finds out in the sea, reliving her childhood memories. Presumably, Edna freed herself by committing suicide.

## 4.2 Chopin's Portrayal of Women

Mrs Chopin tells of the awakening from the easy comfort of a marriage of convenience to a realization of what the deeper soul needs (Fletcher 1963: 92).

Kate Chopin draws on the themes of female independence, self-discovery and the limitations placed on women by society. Her female characters often challenge gender roles and strive to pursue their desires and individuality.

Moreover, Kate Chopin's portrayal of women in Louisiana, especially in *The Awakening* (1899), emphasizes not only feminist themes but the influence of Catholicism and Creole culture. Chopin's woman is shaped, and often bound, by Louisiana's environment which is Creole and Catholic.

Finally, love is a significant motivation for Chopin's heroine. Fletcher comments (Fletcher 1963: 82):

The important thing with Mrs Chopin is character rather than situation or incident, and she is most often concerned with the response of the characters – especially the women – to the passion of love.

For Chopin, the inner world of her characters is put above real-life events. She is concerned with feeling and how her characters discover themselves. Edna Pontellier is an ideal example of a woman who re-establishes her priorities when exposed to love.

#### 4.2.1 Edna Pontellier

Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period, she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.  
(Chopin 1976: 14)

At the beginning of the novel, Edna Pontellier is a young woman of twenty-eight who lives in a passionless marriage to Léonce Pontellier. They have two children, but she is not a “mother-woman”. She appears to conform to the societal expectations of a perfect mother and wife placed upon women of her time, but as the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that Edna is dissatisfied with her life and longs for something more.

Her family spends summer at Grand Isle, a beautiful resort island, where her transformation begins. There are many “mother-women”, who idolize their children like her closest companion Adèle Ratignolle, but several situations trigger Edna’s growing awareness of her desire for individuality and begins to question the traditional female roles and her ability to conform to them. She would give up everything for her children, but not herself (Chopin 1976: 51).

That summer at Grand Isle she began to loosen a little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her. There may have been—there must have been—influences, both subtle and apparent, working in several ways to induce her to do this; but the most obvious was the influence of Adèle Ratignolle (Chopin 1976: 14).

During the summer, Edna is influenced by the other guests. She is fascinated by Adèle’s charm yet repelled by the idea of assuming her binding role; infatuated with the

free-spirited Robert Lebrun who helps her escape her everyday life; and lastly, attracted to Mademoiselle Reisz's boldness, freedom of expression and rejection to conform.

On the island, Edna overcomes her fear of the ocean which reflects her hesitance to awaken from the dream that was her previous life. Now, she longs for the ocean, the freedom. She gives in to her feelings towards Robert and becomes living a new life where she puts herself first, refusing to live in an illusion – even if she suffers on another level. At the end of her story, Edna contemplates her awakening:

“The years that are gone seem like dreams—if one might go on sleeping and dreaming—but to wake up and find—oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life.” (Chopin 1976: 120)

In Edna's pursuit to explore herself, she suffered from the weight of societal prejudice. She experienced disdain, gossip and even her closest companion, Adele, criticizes her actions and pleads for her to stop. Edna's last hope is Robert Lebrun who she associates with the fulfilment of her desires and a potential escape to freedom.

However, Robert realizes the consequences of their actions and shatters the illusion. Edna's journey culminates with an act of defiance and independence when she surrenders herself to the ocean and the liberation it represents.

Edna's awakening and refusal to conform were, in part, a rebellion against Creole culture and Catholicism. In Creole society, women are expected to conform to gender roles and fulfil their duties. Edna grew up in Kentucky apart from the Creole culture and finds herself suffocated by its restraints. Similarly, she was raised Presbyterian, yet the dominant religion in Creole culture is Catholicism. Edna's desires conflict with the teachings of the Catholic Church which emphasize the importance of obedience, self-sacrifice, and the sanctity of marriage.

Edna thought of Léonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul (Chopin 1976: 123).

## 4.2.2 Madame Adèle Ratignolle

If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adèle Ratignolle (Chopin 1976: 8).

Adèle Ratignolle is a Creole woman from the upper-class Creole society in New Orleans. In the story, she serves as a foil – contrasting opposite – to Edna Pontellier.

As already mentioned, Adèle represents the ideal Creole woman of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, embodying all the expectations which are placed upon women by society and religion (Walker 1993: 15). Adèle finds fulfilment as a mother and wife while being beautiful, charming, and graceful. She finds joy and satisfaction in her domestic duties and is considered the best among “mother-women”. Everyone in the community respects and admires her.

On the other hand, Edna is seen as a neglectful mother and unfaithful wife. But despite their differences, Adèle is a source of friendship and even support to Edna. She does not understand the depth of Edna’s desire to be free but Edna can confide in her. Overall, Adèle attempts to navigate Edna in the direction she deems as the best. She genuinely cares for Edna.

The last scene with Adèle has a deeper meaning and tragic consequences. Edna is about to fulfil her desires by being with Robert when she is interrupted by the summons from Adèle. Robert pleads with Edna not to leave, but she expects Robert to wait for her and leaves to support her friend during childbirth.

Edna witnesses the suffering of mothers. Additionally, Adèle begs Edna to fulfil her motherly duties and think about her children. However, she is unable to presume this role and realizing Robert abandoned her, Edna finds liberation in the ocean.

Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!”  
(Chopin 1976: 119).

### 4.2.3 Mademoiselle Reisz

During her journey, Edna Pontellier can choose from two possible role models who represent opposite extremes: the already discussed mother-woman Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, a rebellious pianist (Walker 1993: 13). However, neither life seems attainable to Edna and instead of choosing, she struggles to find her path.

Mademoiselle Reisz is an ageing concert pianist who is portrayed as a solitary, disagreeable and unsociable woman. She is living alone and has no family and only a handful of friends. She is a free artist and represents one potential path for an independent woman during the 1890s. However, Edna does not choose her path as an artist because she is not committed enough to her painting.

During her stay as a guest at Grand Isle, she encounters Edna who is profoundly moved by her music. Edna has an exceptionally strong and passionate response to her piano play and the two women form a friendship.

The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready (...) (Chopin 1976: 27).

Mademoiselle is portrayed as a reserved woman among the guests on Grand Isle, but realizes Edna truly appreciates her music and becomes friends not only with her, but Robert Lebrun as well. After Robert leaves Grand Isle and Edna arrives in New Orleans, the two women seek out each other and their friendship continues.

Mademoiselle's lifestyle is drawing in Edna who envies it and decides to follow her example by living alone. Mademoiselle's portrayal stresses the importance of individuality and the pursuit of personal fulfilment. Through her character, the novel showcases the life of those who decide to break free from societal constraints. That life might be filled with self-expression and freedom but also solitude.

#### 4.2.4 Madame Lebrun

Madame Lebrun was giving orders in a high key to a yard-boy whenever she got inside the house, and directions in an equally high voice to a dining-room servant whenever she got outside. She was a fresh, pretty woman, clad always in white with elbow sleeves (Chopin 1976: 2).

Madame Lebrun is a matriarch of the Lebrun family. Her husband died in the early years of her marriage and left her with two sons, charming Robert and hot-headed Victor. She owns the luxurious resort on Grand Isle where the Creole upper-class from the French Quarter (in New Orleans) spends their summer.

Bloom (2007: 25) points out that Grand Isle is an oasis for women's culture. It is not only run by a single woman, but the prevailing number of guests are mother-women and their children. Madame Lebrun has created a place for women outside the patriarchal culture.

She is a strong-willed and capable woman who secured herself an easy and comfortable life (Chopin 1976: 4). Overall, Madame Lebrun is portrayed as a traditional and conservative woman. Her characteristic efficiency and charm represent the resourcefulness and respectability associated with the bourgeois Creole class.

## 5 Ernest J. Gaines (1933-2019)

Ernest James Gaines stated that he came from “a place where people always sat around, chewed sugarcane, told tales, and went into the field – an ideal background for a writer (Carmean 1998: 1).

Gaines was born on January 15, 1933, on the River Lake plantation near Oscar, Louisiana, where his family had lived and worked for five generations (Abrams 2010: 22). His parents, Adrienne and Manuel Gaines, worked as sharecroppers<sup>12</sup> on the same plantation where their ancestors laboured as slaves and had seven children, Ernest being the oldest (Carmean 1998: 1). The Great Depression of the 1940s limited the education and job opportunities of African Americans even more than before, and the family lived in poverty (Carmean 1998: 2). Supporting themselves by working on the fields their ancestors did, the family lived in a wooden shack, former slave quarters, without running water or electricity (Clark 2020: 22). Manuel abandoned his wife and their seven children when Ernest was only eight years old, and Adrienne was forced to move to New Orleans to support her family (Clark 2020: 23).

While Adrienne was away, Ernest’s paraplegic aunt Augusteen Jefferson, affectionately called Aunt Teen, was put in charge of raising the siblings. Ernest helped to support his family by working in the fields from a young age, sometimes even for sixteen hours a day (Abrams 2010: 23). Gaines recalls his childhood in detail and describes Aunt Teen as “the greatest person he had ever known” (Abrams 2010: 25). Although Aunt Teen was paralyzed from the waist down, she taught the children discipline, caring, humility, and courage to face their hardship (Carmean 1998). Gaines states that Aunt Teen had “the greatest impact on my life, not only as a writer but as a man” (Clark 2020: 17). She encouraged him to go to school, and so he became the first literate person in his family. Schools in Louisiana were segregated, and children of sharecroppers could attend school only off harvest season, from October to April, and could afford to hire only an underqualified African American teacher to teach them without proper equipment in an inadequate classroom created in a local church (Abrams

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<sup>12</sup> Sharecroppers (,a sharecropper’, Merriam-Webster, n.d.) is a term used for tenant farmers, especially in the southern part of the US, who worked the land in exchange for a part of each crop.

2010: 26). However, Gaines was a bright child, and what he could not learn in school, he was taught by his aunt and her visitors. Augusteen was beloved in the community, and hence she could not travel easily, guests often came to their house and spent hours talking on the porch (Abrams 2010: 27). Young Ernest listened to the tales of the rural South which gave him insight about the world around him and inspiration for his literary works.

In New Orleans, Gaines' mother met her second husband Ralph Colar and together they sought work in Vallejo, California, because the opportunities for African Americans in the still racially segregated South were immensely limited (Clark 2020: 17). Ernest and his siblings remained on the River Lake plantation in the deplorable living conditions which reminded them of their ancestors' lives (Clark 2020 18). Ernest's family found support in their community. Ernest discovered his desire to write as a young boy when he became literate and wrote letters for the people in his community that could not read or write (Abrams 2010: 29). Eventually, he began writing mini-plays for his sisters and brothers.

In 1945, Gaines started attending a Catholic school for African American children, St. Augustine (Carmean 1998: 3). He spent there three years and began writing and directing plays that were later performed in his local church (Carmean 1998: 3). However bright he was, his origin prevented him from obtaining high school education in Louisiana and he had to join his mother and stepfather in Vallejo to pursue it (Abrams 2010: 33). Gaines was only fifteen years old and quickly adapted to his new life. He walked to his first library and became an enthusiastic reader of all literature he could find. His interest was drawn to Russian, French, and American authors such as Ivan Turgenev, Guy de Maupassant, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner (Abrams 2010: 39). However, he still missed his home in Louisiana and especially his aunt.

Ernest J. Gaines was unable to discover what he wanted to read in the library. He had just discovered the world of books and yet he began to write his novel (Abrams 2010: 40). The melancholic story centres around two lovers, a dark-skinned man and a light-skinned Creole woman, who fight prejudice in society in rural Louisiana (Clark 2020: 24). At age sixteen, he sent the manuscript to a publisher and although the story would



one day serve as a foundation of his first published novel *Catherine Carmier* (1964), it was rejected and sent back (Clark 2020: 24).

Following Gaines' high school graduation in 1951, he attended Vallejo Junior College for two years, served in the U.S. Army for two additional years and enrolled at San Francisco State University. He received monthly payments from the G. I. Bill, supported himself with part-time jobs, and managed to publish his first short story, *The Turtles* (1956) in the college literary magazine, *Transfer* (Abrams 2010: 44). In 1957, he received a degree in literature and a yearlong writing fellowship at Stanford University.

He attended Stanford University, took creative writing classes, and worked as a mail clerk while writing the first draft of his story *A Long Day in November* which he would publish several years later in 1964. In 1959, he signed on literary agent from New York City, Dorothea Oppenheimer (Abrams 2010: 48). Oppenheimer saw potential in Gaines and supported him until her death three decades later. Gaines' short stories were a success but a visitor editor at Stanford told his class that "you could never make money on short stories," and hence he decided to work on a novel (Doyle and Gaines 1984: 68).

While working on his first novel, Gaines published two stories, *Just Like a Tree* (1962) and *The Sky Is Gray* (1963). Even after three years of writing, Gaines struggled with writer's block and found it impossible to finish the novel in San Francisco (Abrams 2010: 51). The book was set in Louisiana, and he had been in California for years, thus he decided to return to his childhood home and his roots. He spent six months in Louisiana in 1963 and published the novel within eight months after his arrival back in California (Abrams 2010: 51). Gaines recognizes two pivotal moments in his life that helped him reach his success – the first is leaving Louisiana to pursue education, the second is going back to the source to refresh his sense of place, language, and character needed to write about Louisiana (Carmean 1998: 7). This pattern would continue, Gaines would come back to a place still stagnated by the Jim Crow laws to inspire his writing.

Despite Gaines' high expectations, *Catherine Carmier* (1964) received little attention from readers and reviewers. The few who did review it noted Gaines' evident talent but criticized him for addressing the racial issues too indirectly.

In the following years, Gaines focused on writing about the bohemian artist lifestyle in San Francisco, but he never published any of the three finished novels (Abrams 2010: 53). He faced financial issues when he received an offer for a novel and collection of short stories from *Dial Press* that he could not decline. *Of Love and Dust* (1967) is set in 1940s rural Louisiana and revolves around Marcus, a young African American man, who works on a plantation and has an affair with the owner's wife. Gaines' next book was the promised collection of short stories *Bloodline* (1968). It received positive reviews and put Gaines firmly on the literary map (Abrams 2010: 56).

Despite the success of his last two books, Gaines' writing was not enough to support him, and he relied on the financial aid from a Rockefeller Grant-in-Aid he earned in 1970. An idea came to his mind about writing a folk biography that would tell a story of one person's life from several narrators. This book would finally distinguish Ernest J. Gaines as one of the best American authors (Carmean 1998: 9). *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) is a novel and Gaines' most famous work (Abrams 2010: 62). Gaines recalled that he did extensive research in the archives, history books, and interviewed people to ensure that the story of Miss Jane is as authentic as possible (Doyle and Gaines 1984: 6). The novel captures Miss Jane Pittman who is one hundred and ten years old and recalls her life and its major events from the time when she was a slave to the era of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The novel received widespread critical acclaim, became a best-seller, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, and its television adaptation from 1974 won 11 Emmy Awards (Carmean 1998: 9).

Gaines' next book, a novel *In My Father's House* (1978) took him several years to finish. Unfortunately, the novel received negative reviews and proved to be a failure (Abrams 2010: 73). Gaines was once again under financial pressure and became teaching English at the University of Houston and the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Among his following works is a critically successful novel *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983).

In 1993 at the age of sixty, Ernest J. Gaines married Dianne Saulney, a Louisiana native who admired his work (Abrams 2010: 90). The year 1993 was a success both professionally and personally. Gaines' seventh book, *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and received the 1993 National Book Critics Circle Award

for Fiction. Most importantly, Gaines won the Genius Award of the MacArthur Fellows Program worth \$335,000 and Oprah Winfrey's praise significantly widened its audience outreach (Clark 2020: 205).

Gaines continued to receive recognition in the twenty-first century. In 2000, he was honoured with the National Humanities Medal by President Clinton, the Louisiana Writer Award, the National Governors' Arts Award, and became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2006, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation established the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence to appraise and support young African American writers (Clark 2020: 217). In 2010, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette founded the Ernest J. Gaines Center to study his work (Clark 2020: 217). In 2013, President Barack Obama awarded him the National Medal of the Arts.

With advancing age, Gaines published less and focused more on contributing to the literary world. His most recent literary work includes a non-fiction autobiographical collection *Mozart and Leadbelly* (2005) about his childhood and rise as an author (Abrams 2010: 96). The last published work of Gaines is a novel *The Tragedy of Brady Sims* (2017). Simultaneously, he influenced young writers while he was a writer in residence at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette from 1983 to 2004. After his retirement, he continued to give interviews, speeches, and occasional lectures.

Ernest James Gaines died on November 5, 2019, at his home in Louisiana. Till his death, he worked to give a voice to individuals who were often overlooked and preserve the legacy in South Louisiana the way he remembered it.

Clark (2020: 12) appropriately summarizes the significance of Ernest J. Gaines:

In 1970, Alice Walker proclaimed Ernest Gaines the most gifted young black writer of today. Although Walker was only twenty-six when she stated this, it proved to be a prophecy. Gaines' career blossomed over the next five decades and he is today recognized as the most acclaimed black southern male writer since Richard Wright.

## 5.1 Catherine Carmier (1964)

In 1949, at only sixteen years old, Ernest J. Gaines began writing his first novel and wrote a simple love story about a young man who falls in love with Catherine Carmier. However, he burnt the manuscript after receiving a rejection. It took Gaines several years to revisit the story and start rewriting it. Eventually, fifteen years after the initial rejection, Gaines published his first novel under the title *Catherine Carmier* (1964). Gaines described the creation and title of the novel in his interview with Doyle (Doyle and Gaines 1984: 11, 12):

I wrote and rewrote that (novel) for five years. (...) It was about the problems of Black and mulatto people on either side of a stream of water. (...) It is titled *Catherine Carmier* because I finally couldn't think of a better title. Initially, I called it *A Little Stream* and even published part of it as *Barren Summer*.

The book is a romance novel split into three parts and explores the love lives of its two central characters, Jackson Bradley and Catherine Carmier, and their complicated and impossible love.

The story is set in the fictional town of Bayonne in rural Louisiana during the 1960s. The community of Bayonne is small, and its members linger in a fragile equilibrium due to racial tensions and complex relationships. All the land except one piece on the Bayonne plantation is run by white Cajuns who look down on everyone with darker skin.

Origin is vitally important for Gaines' characters on the plantation. On the top of the social ladder is the owner of the plantation Bud Grover of European English descent. After him are Cajuns of white French descent who manage most of the land. Under them are Creoles of mixed descent connected partly to Africa, represented by the Carmiers. The last are African-descended blacks. The Carmiers stand in the middle of two worlds, black and white, while not being part of any. Raoul Carmier vigorously rejects his African ancestry.

### 5.1.1 Plot

Part one starts in Bayonne with the arrival of two outsiders, Jackson Bradley and Lillian Carmier. Jackson is a twenty-two-year-old black man who left the town ten years ago to get educated in San Francisco, California. His beloved aunt Charlotte supported him financially, hoping he would return to her, settle down, marry his childhood girlfriend Mary Louise, and teach in their community. However, Jackson just graduated college and plans to stay only for a few weeks.

On the same bus arrives Lillian Carmier, a light-skinned Creole girl, who is picked up by her older sister Catherine. When Lillian was only a month old, her father Raoul sent her away to New Orleans to be brought up as a lady. Raoul did this after his wife, Della, had an affair with a black man, and a black son, Mark. Mark died tragically while with Raoul, Lillian was sent away, and the only remaining child was Catherine.

Catherine and Jackson meet briefly at the bus station after many years, but their affection for each other is apparent. Jackson is promptly taken away by his friend Brother to Aunt Charlotte, and Catherine leaves with Lillian. Aunt Charlotte greets Jackson at her house, and they discuss the state of the plantation. The Cajuns have taken over the land, the only non-Cajun farmer being a Creole, Raoul Carmier.

Della reminisces about her lonely life. Ten years ago, she lost a son and she has no relationship with Lillian. Additionally, Raoul has forbidden her to engage with the black members of their community and white Cajuns look down on them. Lillian voices her plan to leave Louisiana, go up North and blend with the white folk. Lillian attempts to persuade Catherine and her small son to leave with her.

Jackson feels alienated from his family and friends. He spent too much time in California and can no longer be satisfied by the rural Louisiana. Jackson cannot find the courage to speak about this with Charlotte but alarms her with a confession that he no longer attends church.

In part two, Catherine is with her son Nelson and Jackson sees them. Catherine used to be in a relationship with a black man and had a son with him, but Raoul chased the young man away. Raoul wants his daughters to pass as white to avoid discrimination. Jackson and Catherine begin to meet in secret and become lovers, though Catherine

feels bad for betraying her father's wishes and sends Jackson away. The couple argues and Catherine ends their relationship.

Jackson goes to his aunt and reveals his intention to leave Bayonne. Charlotte's hopes are destroyed, her health deteriorates, and Jackson feels guilty. Charlotte gets ill and deals with her heartache by finding consolation in her faith. At the end of part two, Lillian sends a letter to Jackson to tell him about a dance in Bayonne where Catherine is going to be. Lillian wants Jackson to come and reconcile with her.

In part three, Lillian, Catherine, and Raoul head to the city for the dance. The two girls leave for the event and Raoul stays with his sister where they play cards and discuss his marriage. Jackson is at the ball and talks to Lillian, admitting to her his love for Catherine. The couple goes outside the ballroom, reconciles, and Jackson is persuading Catherine to take Nelson and leave with him.

In the meantime, Raoul is visited by two black men who were hired by the Cajuns. The Cajuns want to anger and hurt Raoul with the news of Catherine having a relationship with a black man. The white Cajuns would never accept mixed Raoul and use the blacks, that he detests, against him. Raoul does not initially believe the men but gets in his car and looks for the couple.

Catherine decided to leave with Jackson. To put her life behind her and start anew. Jackson waits outside while Catherine goes inside the Carmier house to pack the necessities and get her son. Della is there and tries to persuade Catherine not to leave for the sake of Raoul who cannot lose her because she and the field are everything to him.

The plot culminates outside Carmier's house. Raoul catches Catherine leaving and aims a gun at Jackson, pleading with him not to take her away. The two men fight but not before Raoul confesses that he already has blood on his hands, presumably Mark's. Jackson manages to defeat Raoul who breaks down. Catherine is emotionally shaken and cannot bring herself to leave her father right away. However, she gives Jackson hope. Even Della asks Jackson to wait for her, even if it takes twenty years.

Jackson waited outside, hoping that Catherine would come out. But she never did. (Gaines 1981: 248). The story does not end with a happy ending but with the

realisation that Jackson and Catherine's love is impossible. Raoul is a tragic character and the main antagonist of the story, but Catherine loves him more than she can love any other man.

## 5.2 Gaines' Portrayal of Women

Ernest J. Gaines draws in his works on themes of race, identity, the power of education, the and importance of family and community. His first novel, *Catherine Carmier* (1964), explores all of these themes.

In Gaines' works, female characters often play vital roles in the narratives, representing the resilience, strength, and complexity of African-American women in the face of adversity. They are depicted as multifaceted individuals who manoeuvre through challenging social, racial, and economic circumstances.

In his most famous work, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), Gaines portrays the main character, Miss Jane Pittman, as a strong African American woman who endured slavery, racial segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement. She is praised for her perseverance and resistance.

In *Catherine Carmier* (1964), Gaines portrays female characters rather somewhat stereotypically. Nevertheless, the seemingly submissive and passive Carmier women actually determine their lives (Carmean 1998: 37). They make their own choices and accomplish rebellions in various ways. For instance, both Catherina and Della rebelled against Raoul by having extramarital children with men he does not approve of. Similarly, Lillian determines her future by rejecting Louisiana society, and Raoul's world, and seeks escape.

Each of the three women either rejects or rebels against Raoul who accurately symbolizes the Southern society and patriarchy. Carmean (1998: 37) points out:

While Gaines may use female characters in fairly stereotypical ways, he nevertheless imbues them with strength and integrity, characteristics relatively atypical of fictional females of the early 1960s.

### 5.2.1 Catherine Carmier

Catherine Carmier was Negro, but with extremely light skin. With her thin lips and aquiline nose, with her high cheekbones, dark eyes, and dark hair, Catherine Carmier could have easily passed as an Indian (Gaines 1981: 8).

Although the title of *Catherine Carmier* (1964) suggests that she is the main protagonist, she is a love interest to the actual protagonist, Jackson Bradley.

By choosing Catherine as the title character, Gaines inadvertently directs readers' attention towards a seemingly passive character (Carmean 1998: 36). In her community, Catherine is admired for her beauty and kindness, but she is constrained by societal traditions and her father's expectations that limit her role and aspirations.

Catherine Carmier is a light-skinned young woman of mixed African and European descent and very beautiful. She may have opportunities, but she lacks a strong sense of individuality, an independent sense of self, and remains living with her parents. In this respect, she represents the middle-class values of her parents and society prevalent in the early 1960s (Carmean 1998: 36). The only reminder of Catherine's revolt is her son Nelson whom she had with a black man her father Raoul chased away. And of course, her friendship and relationship with Jackson.

The Carmiers are Creoles living in rural Louisiana who do not fit in with any other group in the community. They are too black for the Cajuns and whites to accept them, and too proud to socialize with anyone else. Or at least that is what Raoul, Catherine's father, demands of his family despite his wife's and daughter's isolation. Catherine has been controlled by her father since she was a small child and although she has not obeyed all his bidding and became friends with young Jackson, she could not disappoint him. She does not succumb to Raoul's racist tendencies but is afraid to hurt him.

When Catherine is reunited with Jackson after ten years, they are evidently drawn to each other. They start a romance and Jackson gives her an opportunity to leave the stagnating Louisiana, but Catherine is hesitant, fearful of her father's opinion and reaction. She struggles to decide what world she wants to belong to.



She had thought about leaving. She had thought about leaving with him when she heard he was coming back. But remembering them at home, she realized how insane that whole idea was (Gaines 1981: 219).

Overall, Catherine's portrayal is of a woman torn between societal expectations, her own racial identity, and personal desires. In the end, she is unable to leave her father, even if it meant a better life for her and her son. Catherine does not have a definitive ending within the narrative. Instead of that, the story is more focused on the exploration of race and identity rather than following individual characters. The ending can be seen as open, leaving room for interpretations.

### 5.2.2 Lillian Carmier

Lillian is a nineteen-year-old woman of Creole descent from New Orleans who visits her family in rural Louisiana twice a year. Despite her being quadroon and having African descent, she is described as having a light complexion and strong negative feelings towards her African roots.

I'm not black, Cathy. I hate black. I hate black worse than the white hate it. I have black friends, but only at a distance. I feel for my mother, but only at a distance. I don't let my black friends come close to me. I don't let her come close to me. (Gaines 1981: 48).

Lillian is the second daughter of Raoul and Della Carmier. When she was less than a month old, she was sent away to be raised in New Orleans. Raoul took her from Della after she had an extramarital child with a black man. Lillian was brought up by her aunts who taught her to be prejudiced against black people and to accept only Creole people. Despite their success at instilling prejudice in her, she rejects her aunts' manners. Lillian wants to escape backward Louisiana and start a new life North.

I haven't opened my heart out to that white world either. But I'm going there (North) because I must go somewhere. I can't stand in the middle of the road any longer. Neither can you, and neither can you let Nelson. Daddy and his sisters can't understand this. They want us to be Creoles.

Creoles. What a joke. Today you're only one way or the other; you're white or you're black. There is no in-between. (Gaines 1981: 48).

As a result of her rejection to conform, she struggles to form a relationship with her parents. Her mother loves her and yet she cannot forget they sent her away.

They're strangers to me. (...) I didn't walk out of this house – remember that. I was taken away from here – sent away from here – traded off like a dog.” (Gaines 1981: 48)

Through Lillian, Gaines sets up the racial and economic tensions of rural Louisiana in the 1960s. Lillian is straightforward, clever and does not hold back her opinion:

Catherine, listen to me. Daddy's world is over with. That farming out there — one man trying to buck against that whole family of Cajuns — is out-dated. Can't you see that? Can't you understand that? It's the same thing his sisters are trying to prove in the city. Can't you see that?” (Gaines 1981: 40)

Lillian Carmier is ambitious and seeks life outside the oppressive society. She portrays the active force. Despite her feelings towards African Americans, she loves her sister and supports her relationship with Jackson, arranging the two lovers meeting in the hope that she will then leave with her. Lillian sees Jackson as a way for her sister to have her own life and undermine Raoul's control (Carmean 1998: 29).

Overall, Lillian's character represents a departure from the traditional roles assigned to women in her community. She is portrayed as a strong-willed and determined woman who rejects the constraints of her community and culture. She seeks to escape the limitations of life in Louisiana and pursue her own path. Additionally, she also endeavours to persuade Catherine to join her on this journey. However, despite her efforts, Catherine ultimately conforms to her father's world.

### 5.2.3 Della Carmier

Della was happy when she first came up to that house. She was happy in the way that only a few people can be happy (Gaines 1981: 114).

Della used to be a happy, kind, and sociable woman who used to love talking to the other people in her community. However, she married Raoul who was Creole and nothing like her. He was too proud to let his wife talk to other black people. Della would speak to her neighbours for hours and then suddenly:

Then it all stopped. It stopped without warning. One day she was talking to you, the other day she was not. Everyone knew what had caused the change – Raoul; and everyone accepted it. Only she could not (Gaines 1981: 115).

Della initially aspired to be a dutiful wife, obediently following her husband's wishes. However, years of Raoul's neglect left her feeling isolated and abandoned. She rebelled against her husband's commands and had an affair with a black man.

Despite Della's initial portrayal as a seemingly traditional female character, her actions showcase a spirit of defiance. She allowed young Catherine to play with Jackson, had an affair, and unconditionally loved Mark, her extramarital child. There are several contradictions within Della's character of a traditional and obedient wife which only highlights the complexity of her character.

Unfortunately, Raoul punished Della for her actions, sending her youngest baby Lillian away and killing her beloved son, Mark, claiming it to be an accident. From that point onwards, he treated Della only as a servant.

From the day he found out that Della's second child was not his, Catherine has been the only person in the world to mean anything to him. Della is no more than a servant and the other one (Lillian) does not mean anything to him at all (Gaines 1981: 114).

After these events, Della Carmier changed. From three children, she suddenly had only one, Catherine, who was more Raoul's child than hers. She became a ghost of her former self, and her spirit was broken. Even after Raoul's actions, Della remained in

love with him and blamed herself for causing him pain. Della clings to her role as Raoul's wife to such a degree that many years after, she discourages Catherine's attempt to break free from Raoul's control and leave.

"I'm going with him." (Catherine) "You out of your mind? You know what you saying? With who? Jackson?" (Della)

"You ain't leaving this house," Della said, taking her by the arm.

"I knowed you would be his death," Della said. "I knowed that from the start." (Gaines 1981: 234-5)

After the final fight scene and Raoul's confession of killing Mark, instead of feeling repulsion, she pities him.

So he did kill Marky, she was thinking. All these years, I thought it was an accident. Oh, Raoul, Raoul – how you must have suffered all these years. And I thought I was suffering. Oh, my poor, poor husband; my poor, poor man (Gaines 1981: 242)

Raoul has admitted his guilt and yet Della's broken mind cannot blame him. Jackson has defeated Raoul and Della hopes he will need her and seek her attention. She hopes Catherine will leave with Jackson and she will finally have, after twenty years, an opportunity to take care of her husband.

Della is a complicated character. Among other female characters, she is the only one who goes through character development. She used to be a happy sociable woman who defied Raoul's commands and became a strict traditional woman, capable of enduring anything to serve her husband.

#### 5.2.4 Aunt Charlotte Moses

The main protagonist, Jackson Bradley, was raised by his great aunt Charlotte Moses, whose main motivation in life is to love and care for him. Charlotte supported him financially when he left for California to get his education and anxiously awaits his return. When he arrives, she is overjoyed and assumes he will stay with her.

Charlotte is portrayed as a religious, sympathetic, wise and caring figure. When he arrives, she is awaiting a kind of retaliation for the support she gave him. She assumes she will determine his future as a teacher in his community without his objection. When she finds out he no longer prays, she is hurt and unsettled.

Aunt Charlotte becomes disillusioned even more when Jackson reveals his intention to leave. He attempts to explain his action, but Charlotte holds him to the promise he made as a young boy. She initially cannot accept he would break the promise and gets severely ill. Charlotte refuses to speak with him and does not approve of his relationship with Catherine. She wants him to conform to the unwritten rules of the community. Eventually, the only way she can forgive him is by devoting the rest of her life to the church.

Charlotte embodies the traditional values and constraints of the older generation. Her character exemplifies the influence that elders have in shaping the younger generation. However, the story also conveys a message that the younger generation should have the autonomy to determine their own future and make their own choices.

### 5.2. 5 Madame Bayonne

Gaines introduced another significant female character in the novel, Madame Bayonne. As Jackson's former teacher, she possesses extensive knowledge about plantation life and events.

Madame Bayonne represents a source of information about the Carmiers, specifically Raoul and his relationship with Della and Catherine. She realizes Raoul's motivation which originates in his Creole status (Carmean 1998: 30).

With her comprehensive understanding of both the local community and the wider world, she offers Jackson an alternative way to deal with his problems. When Jackson arrives in his hometown, he feels distant and alienated. His absence allowed him to see it from a different perspective and he is unsure of what to do in his future.

When he meets Madame Bayonne, she recalls his childhood and states that he was always looking for something.

You were always searching. Always wanted to find something strong – something you call concrete. Always (Gaines 1981: 80)

Madame Bayonne understands Jackson and recognizes his search for place and purpose as something unattainable. He cannot find what he seeks in the North but still cannot stay in the South.

Because you're searching for something, Jackson, that is not there. It isn't in California, and it isn't here (Gaines 1981: 80).

As an elder in the community, Madame Bayonne is an authoritative woman who is recognized for her direct manner and knowledge. Her character serves as a moral compass and a source of guidance to the young Jackson. Her character embodies wisdom and acts as a source of support and direction for the protagonist.

## 6 Conclusion

As anticipated, the portrayal of women in the works of George W. Cable, Kate Chopin, and Ernest J. Gaines showcases both similarities and differences of Louisiana class, race, and marital status. All three authors depict women with their own unique perspectives and thematic focuses.

George W. Cable was born and raised in the South, specifically New Orleans, during a time when racial tensions and gender roles were deeply entrenched in society. As a former Confederate soldier turned an advocate for racial equality, he held progressive views for his time and depicted women with depth, showcasing their inner thoughts, desires, and struggles. Yet his portrayal of women in *The Grandissimes* (1880) is influenced by the lives of women living under the conservative Creole and Catholic traditions and highlights their roles as caretakers and preservers of cultural heritage.

From my perspective, by presenting progressive characters, Cable challenged the prevailing stereotypes of his time. Women in his works might still reflect certain limitations and biases of his time, but I choose to believe it is deliberate. In Cable's treatment of racial issues, he wrote about inequality to raise awareness which may apply to women's rights, specifically in the difficult life of *Palmyre Philosophe*. Palmyre's story is tragic, yet she is portrayed as resilient, resourceful, and steadfast in the face of adversity.

Although Cable's and Kate Chopin's literary careers overlap on the timeline, their perspectives and focuses are different. *Kate Chopin* was raised in St. Louis among formidable women and moved to Louisiana only after marriage. She was exposed to the limitations placed upon women in Southern society and themes of her works are based on her own experiences. Chopin's female characters challenge societal norms and expectations in pursuit of their freedom, sexual awakening, and self-discovery. She portrays free-spirited women seeking independence and fulfilment of their desires – such as *Edna Pontellier* and *Mademoiselle Reisz* – against the contrasting epitomes of Creole Catholic values – the female mothers like Adèle Ratignolle.

In general, Chopin's portrayal of women brings attention to women's desire for empowerment and highlights their struggle by juxtapositioning them with traditional

characters. For that reason, *The Awakening* (1899) is justly recognized as early feminist literature.

While Chopin focused on the personal liberation of both white and Creole women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ernest J. Gaines examines the challenges faced by African American people mainly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His first novel, *Catherine Carmier* (1964), is set in the same time it was written, the 1960s. He especially examines themes of race and identity.

Ernest J. Gaines portrays women with depth, strength, and resilience in the context of racial and social inequality. Gaines grew up during the racial segregation in rural Louisiana stagnated by the Jim Crow Laws. As a boy, he left his home and community to pursue education but found himself coming back to inspire his writing. Gaines drew on his childhood experience and described his characters authentically.

Gaines' women, for instance, *Aunt Charlotte* or *Madame Bayonne* in *Catherine Carmier* (1964), are often portrayed as strong characters within their communities who are sources of guidance and support. Through their storytelling and nurturing roles, they play a crucial part in preserving the cultural heritage, history, and traditions of their communities.

George W. Cable, Kate Chopin, and Ernest J. Gaines are all distinct authors with unique contexts, yet there are similarities in their portrayal of women. They all depict multidimensional women with a range of motivations, thoughts, and complexities; women challenging societal norms; women criticizing limitations and injustices imposed upon them and lastly, women advocating for greater freedom.

In conclusion, the thesis successfully provides a comprehensive analysis of the portrayal of women in *The Grandissimes* (1880), *The Awakening* (1899), and *Catherine Carmier* (1964). It sheds light on how the three original authors approached the depiction of female characters within their respective works, exploring their similarities, differences, and underlying themes. The research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the representation of women in Louisiana literature, highlighting the influences of culture, period, religion, and authors' perspectives.



## Resumé

Dle očekávání odhalilo porování znázornění žen v dílech George W. Cablea, Kate Chopinové a Ernesta Gainese jak podobnosti, tak rozdíly. Všichni tři autoři zobrazují ženy svým vlastním jedinečným pohledem a tematickým zaměřením.

*George. W. Cable* se narodil a vyrůstal v Louisianě, konkrétně v New Orleans, v době, kdy byly ve společnosti hluboce ukotveny rasové rozdíly a tradiční genderové role. Z pozice bývalého vojáka Konfederace, který se stal zastáncem rasové rovnosti, měl na svou dobu značně pokrokové názory a zobrazoval ženy mnohostranně s akcentem na jejich vnitřní smýšlení, touhy a strasti. Přesto je jeho zobrazení žen v románu *The Grandissimes* (1880) částečně ovlivněno také konzervativními kreolskými a katolickými tradicemi, které zdůrazňují jejich roli pečovatelek a uchovatelek kulturního dědictví.

Přesto dle mého pohledu představuje Cable pokrokové postavy, kterými zpochybňuje převládající stereotypy své doby. Domnívám se, že jeho postavy reflektují omezení a předsudky své doby záměrně. V Cableově pojednání o rasových otázkách psal o nerovnosti a příkoří, aby zvýšil povědomí společnosti o dané problematice. To samé pravděpodobně aplikoval na popis žen. Konkrétním příkladem jetěžký život *Palmyre Philosophe*. Příběh Palmyre je tragický, ale i přes všechny nástrahy života je vylíčena jako nezlomná, houževnatá a vynalézavá žena.

Ačkoli literární kariéra Kate Chopinové překrývá s kariérou George W. Cablea, jejich perspektivy a zaměření děl je rozdílné. Kate Chopinová vyrůstala v St. Louis mezi impozantními ženami a do Louisiany se přestěhovala až po svatbě. Tehdy byla ona sama vystavena omezením kladeným na ženy v jižanské společnosti, a témata jejich děl tak vycházejí z vlastních pozorování a zkušeností. Ženské postavy Kate Chopinové se ve snaze o osobní svobodu, sexuální procitnutí a sebepoznání vzpírají společenským normám a očekáváním. Chopinová znázorňuje ženu jako svobodomyšlnou bytost usilující o nezávislost a naplnění vlastních tužeb – mezi tyto ženy patří *Edna Pontellier* a *Mademoiselle Reisz* – a kontrastuje je ztělesněním kreolských katolických hodnot – perfektními ženami a matkami jako je *Adèle Ratignolle*.

Obecně lze říci, že Chopinová v zobrazení ženských postav vyzdvihuje jejich touhu po posílení své pozice a samostatnosti tím, že je staví do kontrastu s ženami v tradičních

ženských rolích. Z tohoto důvodu je *The Awakening* (1899) právem považováno za dílo rané feministické literatury.

Zatímco dílo Chopinové se zaměřuje na osobní svobodu žen na konci 19. století, Ernest J. Gaines zkoumá problémy, kterým čelí Afroameričané v převážně 20. století. Děj jeho prvního románu *Catherine Carmier* (1964) se odehrává v autorově současnosti, tedy v 60. letech 20. století, a zabývá se zejména tématy rasy a identity.

Ernest J. Gaines vykresluje ženy, které i v kontextu rasové a sociální nerovnosti vyzařují sílu a odolnost. Gaines vyrůstal v době rasové segregace, kdy Louisianu ovládaly zákony Jima Crowa. Jako chlapec opustil svůj domov a komunitu, aby se věnoval vzdělání, ale později se začal pravidelně vracet, aby načerpal inspiraci pro svá díla. Gaines čerpal zejména ze zkušeností z dětství a své postavy popisoval autenticky.

Gainesovy ženy, například *teta Charlotte* nebo *madam Bayonne*, v románu *Catherine Carmier* (1964), jsou často znázorněny jako opěrné pilíře své komunity, které jsou zdrojem vedení a podpory. Díky své vypravěčské a pečovatelské roli hrají zásadní roli v uchování kulturního dědictví, historie a tradic.

George W. Cable, Kate Chopinová a Ernest J. Gaines jsou odlišní autoři s jedinečným kontextem, a přesto lze v jejich znázornění žen z Louisiany nalézt podobnosti. Všichni zobrazují mnohorozměrné ženy se širokou škálou motivací, myšlenek, problémy a tužbami, které se často vzpírají společenským normám. Jejich postavy kritizují omezení a nespravedlnosti, které jsou jim ukládány společností, a bojují za svá práva a postavení.

Tato diplomová práce se pokusila poskytnout komplexní analýzu znázornění louisianské ženy v románech *The Grandissimes* (1880), *The Awakening* (1899) a *Catherine Carmier* (1964). Podařilo se jí zachytit způsob, jakým tři rozdílní autoři přistupovali k zobrazování ženských postav v rámci svých děl, zkoumala jejich podobnosti, rozdíly i stěžejní témata. Výzkum tak přispívá k hlubšímu pochopení postavení žen v louisianské literatuře, přičemž zdůrazňuje vlivy kultury, doby, náboženství a osobní zkušenosti autorů.

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