



universität  
wien

# DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

“Representation of women characters in selected  
Southern novels of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century”

verfasst von / submitted by

Jacqueline Draxler

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2016 / Vienna, 2016

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme code as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

A 190 299 344

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

Lehramtsstudium UF Psychologie und  
Philosophie UF Englisch UniStG

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Emer. o. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Waldemar  
Zacharasiewicz



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Zacharasiewicz who supported me with valuable advice throughout the writing process of this paper. His immense knowledge in this field and his professional feedback were an invaluable help to me.

I would further like to thank my family for believing in my academic career. It cannot be taken for granted that you decided to support your daughter in her wish to strive for more than any other person in this family before.

Elisa, Anna and Kerstin. It is hard to put into words what your friendship means to me. You gave me the necessary distraction and motivation whenever I was discouraged. What would I have done without your shoulders to cry on and a glass of wine in my hand?

Last but not least, Sebastian, my love. You are my tower of strength, not only when it comes to this thesis but in all respects. I cannot thank you enough for your and your parents' belief in me.



# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Background</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1. Author: Life and Work	3
2.1.1. Grace King	3
2.1.2. Kate Chopin	6
2.2. Local Colour Fictional Movement	9
2.3. Louisiana	11
2.3.1. Historical Context	11
2.3.2. Reconstruction (1865-1877)	14
2.3.3. The Female Situation and Female Rights	20
2.4. Female Roles	27
2.4.1. The Ideal Woman – Lady and Belle	27
2.4.2. Plantation Mistress	30
2.4.3. Black Mammy	33
<b>3. Monsieur Motte</b>	<b>35</b>
3.1. Plot Summary	36
3.2. Language and Narration	37
3.3. The Plantation – Bel Angely	39
3.4. Life in the Crescent City	42
3.5. The Importance of Education at St. Denis	44
3.6. Class Differences	48
3.6.1. Aristocracy	48
3.6.2. Black workers	50
3.7. Female Roles	54
3.7.1. Marcéline Gauouis	54
3.7.2. Marie Modeste Motte	59
3.7.3. Eugénie Lareveillère	64
3.7.4. Aurore Angely	69

<b>4. At Fault</b>	73
4.1. Plot Summary	74
4.2. Language and Narration	75
4.3. The Plantation – Place du Bois	77
4.4. Life in St. Louis	79
4.5. Class Differences	82
4.5.1. Aristocracy	83
4.5.2. Black Workers	86
4.6. Female Roles	89
4.6.1. Thérèse Lafirme	90
4.6.2. Melicent Hosmer	97
4.6.3. Fanny Larimore Hosmer	103
4.6.4. Belle Worthington	107
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	112
<b>6. Bibliography</b>	118
<b>7. Index</b>	122
<b>8. Appendix</b>	125
8.1. English Abstract	125
8.2. German Abstract	126

## 1. Introduction

MAN must be pleased; but him to please  
 Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf  
 Of his condoled necessities  
 She cast her best, she flings herself.  
 How often flings for nought, and yokes  
 Her heart to an icicle or whim,  
 Whose each impatient word provokes  
 Another, not from her, but him;  
 While she, too gentle even to force  
 His penitence by kind replies,  
 Waits by, expecting his remorse,  
 With pardon in her pitying eyes;  
 And if he once, by shame oppress'd,  
 A comfortable word convers,  
 She leans and weeps against his breast,  
 And seems to think the sin was hers [...] (*The Angel in the House* IX.1.1-15)

*The Angel in the House* is a poem by Coventry Patmore published in 1854 that portrays courtship and the female role in the household. The passage above is called *The Wife's Tragedy* and has been selected to show the common portrait of women during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Victorian England and in the United States. Women were solely restricted to the domestic sphere and did their best to please men in all respects. The way women were represented in literature, thus, was related to the situation in real life. With the American Civil War came a tremendous change upon the country. The slaves were freed, and also women raised their voices to gain some major rights. It was Virginia Woolf who said, "Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer." (Woolf *Professions for Women*) With these words, she might have been slightly ahead of female writers like Kate Chopin and Grace King. However, those women were part of an early feminism that paved the way for authors like Virginia Woolf.

Having experienced the pre-Civil War period Kate Chopin and Grace King internalised a romanticised picture of the relationship between master and slaves and were cautious to keep this attitude even after the Civil War. Both authors lived in a time when the South was changing, and especially the diverse female roles in their fiction shall be part of this paper. I have chosen these authors because they both lived at the same time in Louisiana; they were early

emancipated women who were able to earn a living with their writing and because both of them are regarded as fictional realists. In particular, the novels *At Fault* (1890) by Kate Chopin and *Monsieur Motte* (1888) by Grace King will be contrasted in respect of several points. Generally, the focus will lie on the representation of women characters and how certain female roles are portrayed by the authors. How emancipated are these women, or do the authors present rather weak or traditional women? Do the male characters aid or hinder them in their development? Furthermore, a closer look will be taken on the difference between rural and urban life and whether social differences are discernible. How are black woman portrayed in contrast to white women, and are coloured women represented in a respectful way?

Regarding methodology, a detailed analysis of these questions will be conducted in chapters three and four, taking into account the development of the female characters and the influence their surroundings have on them, as well as the way the authors present the plots of their books.

Chapter two offers background information in order to build a solid basis for the analysis of the selected novels. The lives of the authors, as well as the historical situation and the development of female rights will be addressed. Additionally, four female roles, namely the lady, the “belle”, the plantation mistress and the black mammy will be introduced. These roles will then be matched with selected female characters from the novels *At Fault* and *Monsieur Motte*.

Chapter three will present a textual analysis of Grace King’s *Monsieur Motte*. A brief look will be taken on the language of the novel before the contrast between rural and urban life will be addressed. As one of the novel’s major themes is education, chapter 3.5<sup>1</sup> informs on this topic. Furthermore, a discussion of class differences between black workers and what is left of the pre-Civil War aristocracy will lead over to the female characters. Some of these women will more, others less match the female roles presented in chapter two.

Chapter four will discuss Kate Chopin’s *At Fault* and will be very similarly constructed as the preceding chapter. However, there will be no part on education as Kate Chopin’s focus lies more on moral decisions and on its female characters.

---

<sup>1</sup> “The Importance of Education at St. Denis”

Finally, chapter five will compare and contrast the analysis of *Monsieur Motte* and *At Fault* with regard to the questions presented above. The aim is to demonstrate that both authors introduce diverse female characters that on the one hand, live a traditional, domestic life as the typical lady did, but, on the other hand, pursue a more emancipated and self-defined path in life. The city offers entertainment and the countryside makes a hard worker of a lady. Nevertheless, it seems that the plantation mistress has a decent character whereas the lady in the city tends often to develop vulgar and flirtatious features. Eventually, the contrast between the classes and races cannot be ignored even though Grace King shows in *Marcélite* that a coloured woman has the possibility to break out from her predetermined life as a worker on the plantation and become a hairdresser of the elite.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Author: Life and Work

A story needs its context in order to be understood as it has been intended by the author. This is the reason why a closer look shall be taken on the lives of Grace King and Kate Chopin. Not only their lifestyles but also their motives to write these works add to the argument of this paper. Both women lived in (post-) Civil War Louisiana. Thus, they were shaped by the traumatising events of the Civil War and its aftermath, also known as the Reconstruction period, and, as a consequence, found in their own experiences the motivation to write (Taylor 1).

#### 2.1.1. Grace King

Grace Elizabeth King was born on November 29, 1852, in New Orleans and spent almost her entire life there (Bush 2). The main subject of her work is concerned with gender and race in the post-Civil War period, with a strong focus on the Creole society, even though King herself was not a pure blood Creole (Jones 95). Her father, William Woodson King, was born in Georgia and moved to New Orleans working as a prominent lawyer in the 1830s. Grace King's mother, Sarah Ann Miller, also came from Georgia, but was born in New Orleans (Bush 2). Grace had three brothers and was the eldest of three daughters, whom she loved dearly. Her mother was William's second wife and

the marriage can be considered successful and happy. Sarah herself comes from a prestigious family (her father was a lawyer too) and William was ambitious and highly esteemed by his colleagues (3-4). Therefore, Grace's parents were able to afford a Catholic Creole education for their child, even though she was Presbyterian. This already set the base for her later attitude "to represent the new American intellectual drive that took Creole civilization within its embrace." (4) Together with his brother, her father owned a large sugar plantation that served as a major income for the family, and later as a refuge during the war.

Regarding King's ancestors it is clear that they had no Creole blood. However, they had Huguenot forefathers, but would themselves only consider a Franco-Spanish and Catholic person as Creole. Grace "was to become the Protestant American *par excellence* who championed the Creole in New Orleans" (Bush 5).

When, during the Civil War, Federal troops occupied the city in 1862, William King refused to swear loyalty to the enemy, and, as a consequence, had to leave to avoid imprisonment (Bush 7). Sarah and the children managed to follow William to the family-plantation L'Embaras with the help of a general who was charmed by Sarah (8). The plantation life had beautiful, but also dangerous facets. On the one hand, the Kings enjoyed the comfort of owning 60 slaves, but, on the other hand, illnesses like malarial fever or typhoid promised to be a demanding challenge for the family (10). Fortunately, the children were educated on the plantations by their grandmother and parents over a period of three years. Grace was especially talented in and enthusiastic about French (11). As a gentle father, William decided to educate his boys and girls equally, and by doing so, avoided the one-sided education a girl at this time would get, namely being trained to find a husband and to be the perfect lady. As an addition to that, William frequently exposed the children to farm life, showing them all the marvellous things young people could learn from it (Bush 12-13). This background obviously formed the strong, emancipated character of the woman she would become later and explains the choice of topics in her literary career. Her own experiences serve as a model for her picture of the ideal woman.

In 1865, William already made preparations for his family's return to New Orleans. About one year later, they followed William and arranged themselves in a five-roomed house near the barracks of the city. Even though they moved around in roughly the same area, they were not able to return to their standard of living. Nevertheless, it was possible for the children to go to school again. Grace and her sisters went to a Creole school, the Institut St. Louis, where usually white Catholics were sent to, but Protestants were respected as well (Bush 22). This would later serve as a model for the setting of her first short story *Monsieur Motte*. Grace had a special interest in history and modern languages (French, German and Spanish), which would have an influence on her writing career. After her graduation she went to the Institut Cénas where she focused on "the study of English composition" (24). Regarding religion, Grace frequently attended a Presbyterian Church.

In 1881 William King died, which left her devastated (Bush 36). For Grace this event stood as a milestone in her life because she realised that she needed to find a way to earn a living and that she did not want to be dependent on her brothers or a husband. This might be one of the reasons why she stayed single for her entire life (40). Additionally, she had a strong urge to realistically portray the people from the South, whom she felt a strong connection to. All these thoughts led to the beginning of her writing-career (43).

Finally, *Monsieur Motte*, King's first short story, was published anonymously in 1885 by the *New Princeton Review*, where she had found a friend in Charles Dudley Warner (Bush 60). In the story she makes use of her own experiences. For example, she uses the Institut of St. Louis as the location, and borrows the characters of the hairdresser, Marcéline, and the headmistress, Madame la Reveillère, from real life, which makes her work more realistic than romantic (King *Memoires* 61). In 1888 King published her first novel *Monsieur Motte*, an extended version of the short story with three added chapters and, as a consequence, reached her goal of financial independence (Bush 61).

It needs to be added at this point that King's noble depiction of a master who respects his slaves and who has a warm-hearted and just relationship to them, stands in contrast to the work of George Washington Cable, who "reveals the inhumanity of slavery and racial bigotry and the pretension of the ruling caste."

(Nagel 58) For King a master and his slaves loved each other and the subordinate ones would even come back after being freed (58).

During the subsequent years she became friends with Mark Twain (Bush 65). Proud of her work and indulging in her profession as a magazine writer, King described herself as a “southern woman of letters” (67). In the same year in which King published the short story *Monsieur Motte* she also wrote *Bonne Maman*, or as it is also known, *Grandmother* (Jones 117). Criticism and different interpretations of the story became public. King saw herself as a decent person who held Southern traditions dear. However, she was aware that “white and black cultures do not meet on the street, dancing.” (120)

Her mother’s death in 1903 was a huge tragedy for Grace. In the years after *Monsieur Motte* she travelled a lot, for example, to Europe. Her sisters, both unmarried, helped her with domestic duties in order to give her time to grieve. This enabled Grace to write short stories like *The Little Convent Girl* in 1893, which eventually would be part of her *Balcony Stories* (Jones 121). Thereafter, she wrote biographies and history, for example *New Orleans, the Place and the People* (1895) or *Stories from Louisiana History* (1905) (Jones 126). Again, she tried to start a novel, rewrote it five times and, in the end, it did not even get published. King wrote two more novels, namely *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard* (1916) and *La Dame de Sainte Hermine* (1924), and also composed the history *Creole Families of New Orleans* (1921). The very final work of Grace King was to be her autobiography *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (1932), published after her death (Bush 305). Grace Elizabeth King died peacefully and mentally alert on January 14, 1932, with her sisters at the bedside (306). Her death was more shocking for New Orleans than Cable’s in 1925, as King “stay[ed] faithful to the old city and the old class and the old section, and none of these will forget [her] [...]” (307)

### 2.1.2. Kate Chopin

Kate Chopin was born Katherine O’Flaherty on February 8, 1851, in St. Louis, Missouri (Seyersted 13). The city was dominated by French Creole aristocracy, which may be the reason why Kate, not being from the South, felt so close to Louisiana. Her forefathers can be traced back to the founding of St. Louis and even further to “French settlers who came to America around 1700.” (13) Eliza

Faris O'Flaherty, Kate's mother, was part of such an important family. Her father, Thomas O'Flaherty, was an Irish immigrant, who came to St. Louis in 1825 (14). As a merchant he was highly successful and soon accepted among the local residents. He married into a reputable family, but lost his wife in childbirth (with Kate's half-brother). In 1844 Eliza, his second wife was only 15, was led to the altar by Thomas. Kate had an elder brother, a half-brother who she adored, and a sister who already died in early childhood (14-15). Kate's father was a faithful Catholic, who supported, for example, the Institute of St. Louis (Seyersted 15). In 1855 Thomas had a fatal accident at work. Kate, only four years old, was probably too young to understand the impact of her father's death, but she was clearly upset. Her grandmother, Victoria Verdon Charleville, who lived with the family and her mother, and all Chopins were in deep mourning (16). In 1860 Kate began "her formal education as a day student at the St. Louis Academy of the Sacred Heart." (18) During her further Catholic education in convents Kate stood out as a little rebel. She was "reading books of her own choice and writing schoolgirl poems and imaginative short sketches." (Lewis 80) Her affection for the South may have gone hand in hand with her love for her half-brother George who died of typhoid fever (Seyersted 20-21, qtd. in Rankin 45).

When the war was over, Kate performed the role of a "belle" flawlessly and married Oscar Chopin, "a banker and cotton broker of Louisiana" in 1870 (Lewis 80). Oscar came from a French-Creole family from Louisiana, which again tightened Kate's bond to the South (Seyersted 35). Victoria Chafin, a strong defender of female rights, advised Kate to be aware of the fact that a woman does not necessarily have to be degraded to a domestic life. The Chopins moved to New Orleans and in 1879 to their plantation McAlpin in Natchitoches (Lewis 80). Both her home city St. Louis and also Natchitoches will later serve as a setting in the novel *At Fault*. Kate seemed to have taken Victoria Chafin's advice seriously, as

she dressed unconventionally, smoked cigarettes, and though a devoted wife and the mother of six children, she enjoyed escape from household duties by taking long exploratory walks through the streets of New Orleans and horseback rides through byways of back country Louisiana, meeting and talking with people of all kinds of classes. (Lewis 81)

These habits already set her apart from the stereotypical white lady who only lived for her social and domestic duties, and to care for her husband and children. Kate's strong character also helped her to endure the time after her husband's death in 1883, when she had to take over the plantation and all the concomitant duties (Lewis 81). The same situation can be found in *At Fault* when Thérèse Lafirme becomes the exclusive mistress of her husband's plantation. Thus, the experiences she had made on the plantation, the life she had lived there and the working situation she had been watching, helped her to portray a realistic picture of the South. A bit more than one year later Kate and her children returned to St. Louis (Jones 136).

However, after having lost her mother in 1885 the 34 year old Kate finally began to write poems and short stories, for example *Wiser Than a God* and *A Point at Issue* which both were published (Seyersted 52). In 1890 Kate Chopin finished her first novel *At Fault*. This helped her to look back on and reappraise the past. She received high praise for her first novel which gave her the motivation to start writing *Young Dr. Gosse*. The novel was presumably destroyed without having been published (53-54). "During the next three years [Kate wrote] forty short stories, sketches, and vignettes" (54) and they could be read in local periodicals. A collection of 23 tales and sketches was published under the name *Bayou Folk* (1894) adding to her high reputation (56). Part of the collection was *Désirées Baby*, one of Kate's best known stories, dealing with the consequences of miscegenation (Seyersted 94). Kate seemed to be interested in the racial diversity of Louisiana, which can be seen in her portrayal of "the Negro, the Cajun, and the Creole." (80) As a contrast to, for example, Cable and King, Chopin had no distinctive interest in the history of Louisiana, even though she was dedicated to it (81). *The Awakening* (1899) was Kate's landmark novel and a major reason why she is still discussed today. It was a huge scandal to write about a woman's sexual awakening and desires at that time. Her work was considered vulgar and immoral (Seyersted 176). The criticism of people who were not yet ready for an emancipated woman like Kate Chopin drove her slowly but surely to end her writing career (Lewis 82). Nevertheless, it needs to be said that she was "a pioneer in the amoral treatment of sexuality, of divorce, and of woman's urge for an existential authenticity." (Seyersted 198) For the first time in American literature female

passion was described and accepted. Chopin was praised as a writer, but her choice of topic has always been criticised. On August 30, 1904, Katherine Chopin died from a brain haemorrhage at the age of 53 (Lewis 82).

## 2.2. Local Colour Fictional Movement

Grace King and Kate Chopin, together with Ruth McEnery Stuart, Charles Gayarré, Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Lafcadio Hearn were part of the so called Local Colour fictional movement in Louisiana during the years from 1877 to 1887 (Richardson 199). Local Colour is a term

for much of the writing produced in the American South between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the century. In the context of Southern literary history it covers the many different landscapes, tones, purposes, and forms of writing developed and used, along with a Southern setting, in the late nineteenth century. (M. Skaggs 219)

The term itself came to life in the 1830s in France. Théophile Gautier's school of writers addressed *La couleur locale* as an "exotic romanticism of Gautier, Prosper Mérimée, and the Flaubert of *Salammbô*." (Taylor 17) French realists later used this appellation to talk about realism. This paved the way for native American naturalism, added to the reputation of the short story and strongly influenced authors like Willa Cather and Ellen Glasgow (17).

Predominantly, white middle-class women from the South were part of the Local Colour fictional movement (Taylor xii). They described regional characteristics by putting a focus on the Creole New Orleans and Acadian Louisiana (Richardson 199). A completely new scenery was discovered, full of diversity and contrasts. New Orleans was home to a vast mixture of cultures and, therefore, offered a rich repertoire for creative fiction. New magazines appeared and were the perfect medium to publish these stories dealing with the past reality of their readers (Nagel 1). The short story was the most favoured piece of literature during Local Colourism (2). More than 100 000 copies of these publications were sold in magazines like the *Galaxy*, the *Scribner's Monthly* in America, but also the *Philadelphische Zeitung* and others per month (1). On the borders of the Mississippi these writers had almost 200 years of history at their disposal. Looking back from the 1880s a historical record started to emerge from the feathers of Grace King, Kate Chopin and their colleagues. "[Y]ellow-

fever epidemics, quadrone balls, duels, the *Code Noir*" (Richardson 200) were used with pride and a sense of patriotism. The decline of the Creole aristocracy and various conflicts shaped the literature after 1865 (200). Both King and Chopin lived at this time, they inhabited New Orleans and thus, were able to portray a perfect historical picture of the (post)- Civil War period. King, Chopin and R. M. Stuart were among the first women from the South who could earn a living by writing stories and hence, called themselves professional writers (Tylor xii).

Coming back to the topic of Local Colour, Grace King always thought of herself as a realist (Bush 112). Indeed, also Warner decisively argues in 1892,

*Monsieur Motte* was a striking example of the unconscious expression of the life of a community, without the slightest effort on the part of the writer to make that life visible by exaggeration of peculiarities. There was no question here of the truth of dialect or the external characterizations of race; the author wrote out of her experience; this was a life she knew so thoroughly that she was not trying to exploit it in telling her story. The result, as we know, was as perfect a representation of creole conditions and social life as Hawthorne ever made of New England. And the two results were produced exactly in the same way. Neither author used "local color" as a varnish. (155-156, qtd. in Bush 110-111)

These words of admiration were a huge compliment for a woman who mostly gained recognition from her home city New Orleans, but, sadly nowhere else. Even later, Grace King was predominantly mentioned in relation to Kate Chopin or George W. Cable as part of the Local Colour fictional movement (Jones 127). Nevertheless, her strong connection to New Orleans and their aristocratic Creoles made her an authentic representative of this movement.

As a contrast to King, Chopin was never really acknowledged as a native from Louisiana (Taylor 139). Chopin was born in St. Louis but later spent approximately 13 years of her marriage in Louisiana. After she had left for her home city, Chopin started writing about this state. Because of her Creole relations she had no difficulty adjusting to the city of New Orleans and its plantation community. This also made it possible for her to use Local Colour techniques and she also addressed "regional and historical themes and allusions, that challenged European male and English and American female fictional definition of femininity and female sexuality." (Taylor 139) What is more,

she did not directly address political questions of race and made no reference to the War or the Reconstruction period. Even though she was strongly attracted to the state, Chopin would have never called herself a Local Colourist. King and Stuart do not even refer to her in letters or other pieces of writing. Nevertheless, Chopin “quickly established herself in the eyes of the northern reading public as a ‘Louisiana writer’” (139).

## 2.3. Louisiana

The importance of the state and its inhabitants for Chopin and King as an inspiration cannot be ignored. It has already been stated that both authors felt a strong connection to the South, especially to New Orleans, but also the plantation life in the countryside.

A brief historical context shall be given in order to understand why New Orleans and its surrounding bayous came to be such an interesting topic and, thus, served as the perfect setting for Chopin and King.

### 2.3.1. Historical Context

The southern region around the Mississippi River was inhabited by Native Americans like the Atakapa or the Natchitoches before European adventurers came to America in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The North served as the home for French settlers, especially Canada and the Midwest. Colonies began to spread and in 1682 Robert Cavalier de La Salle gave the name *Louisiana* to the Mississippi River area (including what would be called New Orleans in 1718) to honour the French King Louis XIV. German settlers found a home in the same region that was called the German Coast. Caribbean and African slaves came in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, accompanied by their native traditions like “voodoo, stirring music, and sexually explicit dances, all of which gradually merged into the local social fabric.” (Nagel 5) During the French and Indian War most of the French territory was lost, but the French dominance over New Orleans was retained. Yet, in 1763 Louisiana came under Spanish rule. The so-called Spanish interregnum (1763-1803) did not change the land dramatically. French and Spanish people continued to stream into the country. Also Acadians (or Cajuns) came to Louisiana who had been exiled from Nova Scotia (Canada) by the British (5). “The vast majority of the agrarian, lower-class Acadian [...] population worked

small farms and did not operate plantations” (Picone and Lafleur 217), like the Creole did. Yet, they were a major ethnic group of Louisiana who also spoke French.

The slave trade led to a considerable increase of the African population. Slaves were needed to cultivate the fields and produce tobacco, rice and sugar cane, even though the area stayed “dependent upon France, Spain, or the West Indies for supplies.” (Thompson 737) The French people of Louisiana tried to drive out the Spanish but were not successful until Napoleon again brought it under French rule 40 years later (Nagel 6). In 1803 Louisiana was sold to the United States under Thomas Jefferson (Thompson 739). The Creoles were not particularly content with this development. At this point, a brief definition of what Creole means seems necessary. Creoles were “white descendants of the original French and Spanish settlers” (Richardson 200). This refers to those people who were native-born in Louisiana, but had French or Spanish parents. For Chopin and King it was important to distinguish this definition of Creole from those mixed-blood Creoles of colour who were called mulattos or quadroons (Nagel 6). Creoles of colour enjoyed many privileges, very similar to white Creoles. Often they were plantation owners and even attended similar schools (Picone and Lafleur 216). An African person would not have been called coloured, but always “Negro”, being inferior to the *gens de couleur* (the Creoles of colour). “To the whites, all Africans who were not of pure blood were gens the couleur.” (King *New Orleans* 333). A human being had to be white to be of pure racial extraction, but even among the *gens de couleur* there had to be clear differences. For instance, an octoroon or a griffe was purer than a quadroon (333).

At the time of the Louisiana Purchase (1803) slaves and free blacks made up the majority of the population of Louisiana. However, old French codes, also called Code Noir, or Old Black Code, still restrained the life of slaves and were part of the Louisiana Civil Codes. The Code Noir had become law in 1724 and persisted until 1870. It excluded all Jews from Louisiana and made sure that Roman Catholicism was the only religion. Racial segregation in public areas was introduced and the punishment of slaves addressed (no torture, but cruel corporal punishments under certain conditions). Additionally, former slaves were allowed to marry and own land (Nagel 8-9).

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Louisiana became part of the United States, its official language was now English and its currency the dollar. Even though the territory still felt a strong attachment to their French history they had to accept the new law (Nagel 7). On April 8, 1812, President James Madison declared that Louisiana now officially counted as one of the United States (Thompson 740). The aristocratic inhabitants of New Orleans, however, were not willing to let go of their past. They continued a rather elitist way of life, importing expensive wine and putting a focus on arts and a European lifestyle (Nagel 7).

Adding to these exclusive habits, arrangements were made on so-called quadroon balls, another reason why Louisiana, and especially cities like New Orleans were inhabited by so many different ethnic groups. These were tolerated ways of finding a partner through the so called *plaçage* in the 1820s and 1830s. As a consequence, relaxed attitudes towards marriages between races were common (Taylor 4). "Plaçage was a custom among white French and Spanish Creole gentlemen throughout the colonies" (Nagel 10). Usually young quadroon or octoroon ladies were the object of desire of wealthy Creole men, which led to a comprehensive mixture of races. Only wealthy Creole men would be invited to these events (13). Many Creole gentlemen found themselves in a situation where they wanted to live with a free woman of colour, but never married a white woman. These circumstances, of course, aroused displeasure among white women who felt that the marriage market became smaller (Nagel 10-11). It has to be considered that most of these quadroon ladies were not in love with such a man, but prostituted themselves. What is more, children of these arrangements were considered free people of colour, inherited their father's name and "had the right to a third of his estate." (12) In 1840 "free people of color owned 40 percent of the property in two of the quarters of the city" (Nagel 13). Finally, the Civil War brought an end to the *plaçage* system.

The beginning of the Civil War in 1861 meant for Louisiana that in order to maintain slavery and their cotton and sugar-trade they had to join the Confederacy (all in all eleven Southern states opposing the Northern Union). Confederates and Yankees were the two opposing forces. The Yankees fought defending the Union, "dying to make men free; the Confederates fighting for

great constitutional principles, defending their homes from invasion.” (Stampp 4) In other words, Yankees wanted to preserve the Union, but the Confederates fought for Southern independence and their own constitution. Federal troops took New Orleans in 1862 and stayed there even after the surrender of the Confederacy in order to restore the Union and protect the new rights of freed slaves (Nagel 8).

### 2.3.2. Reconstruction (1865-1877)

The end of the Civil War meant freedom for slaves but also destruction. Railroads, land and buildings were ravaged. Louisiana's families were affected by the loss of relatives, or had to treat crippled sons or fathers. Furthermore, the loss of the Negro as property meant financial ruin to many families. “[T]he banking system shattered, and Confederate paper money and bonds worthless, Louisiana lost one-third of its wealth.” (Taylor 2) Only Southerners who were able to prove that they had never worked with the Confederacy could ask for a refund of their losses (Coulter 3-6).

Additionally, a new labour system replaced slavery. Cotton, tobacco, sugar and rice were still the most valuable raw materials of the South and Negro workers were needed to cultivate them. Louisiana had been the main producer of cotton and of the South's sugar crop. However, by 1877 only a third of its erstwhile output could be brought to the market (Taylor 2). In 1865 many former slaves wanted to come back home to their masters who, in return, tried to pay them, but often had not the means to do so. This led to the sharecropping and crop lien system, an opportunity for black people to take care of a part of their employer's land and, as a quid pro quo, share the crops and receive supplies instead of money. This was a time of poverty among many labourers, because productivity fell dramatically (Trelease 1032).

The Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson tried to accelerate a reunion and demanded little more than support of the Constitution and a vow to respect the Thirteenth Amendment (abolition of slavery). Even though slavery was forbidden after the Civil War, blacks suffered many disadvantages and discrimination. They were exploited by their employers and treated as a second class citizen (1033). In the course of time, new black codes determined that black people had no say in politics or in jurisdiction. In 1866 the Civil Rights Act

had been passed, making sure that all citizens, including Negroes, were equally protected by the law. These new rights were written down in the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States. Finally, the Reconstruction Acts of 1867-1868 led to “the Fifteenth Amendment, intended to make Negro suffrage permanent and nationwide.” (1033) A vast majority, especially former rich people and Conservatives, were against the Negro suffrage and any other advantage for them. The Republican government made the United States more democratic, “[m]ore offices were elective, and property qualifications for voting and officeholding disappeared.” (1034) Railroads were expanded and education supported. Even though many desirable improvements were made, South Carolina and Louisiana still suffered from corruption. After 1868 money was used to stimulate business but not to help the poor, the laws for integration differed from state to state and even racial “[segregation] was universal in the schools except in New Orleans.” (1034) In 1868, when the “black suffrage and Republican governments came into being”, (1034) the Ku Klux Klan spread from Tennessee all over the South, aiming at white supremacy and fighting against the rights of Negroes. In 1871, however, the Ku Klux Klan was suppressed. Only the compromise between Conservatives and Republicans in 1876 to accept the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes as President if Conservatives were allowed to have a say in Southern finances for economic development, finally brought an end to the Reconstruction era (1034). As a consequence, the last federal troops left the South and the power over Louisiana, South Carolina and Florida was again passed to the Democrats. Reconstruction ended, leaving the Negroes unprotected and handing over political control to white men, which meant home rule under white leadership (Stampp 186-187). On the one hand, Reconstruction meant a victory for the Northerners, but, on the other hand, it was a tragic era for the South, shaped by crime and corruption, especially for blacks.

### 2.3.3. City – Countryside

In the following some significant characteristics of life in the city (mainly New Orleans) as opposed to the countryside during the Reconstruction era shall be mentioned. The reason why this contrast has to be made explicit is obviously

because Chopin and King both used the disparity between rural and urban settings for their writings, as will be seen in the more detailed analysis.

Apart from the fact that the setting of Louisiana provided the perfect amount of inspiration for writers living in a (post-) Civil War period, there can be much and more said about the way of living in a city like New Orleans, as opposed to the plantations in the countryside.

New Orleans “had long been an important world port and commercial, cultural, and social centre” (Taylor 2), built on the banks of the Mississippi River. Many goods passed these gates by steamboats, contributing to the flourishing of the city. The Crescent City, as it is also called, was once inhabited by many different ethnic groups with cosmopolitan attitudes. For a long time, free blacks made up a majority of the city’s population (2). It is also said that New Orleans was

the most European city in the United States [...]. The Creoles, tracing their lineage to the best blood in France and Spain, maintained a proud aloofness, frequenting the opera and the theatre, reading the newest books from Paris, and having no more than necessary to do with the pushing , commercial *Américains*. (Turner 6)

It was a very complex city with an “amalgam of languages and customs, its French legal system, ethnic codes, music and literature, marriage and courtship practices, and a legacy of slavery and racial stratification [were] quite unlike any other area of the country.” (Nagel 5) Especially before the war New Orleans had been a place of liberal attitudes. Mulattoes, who have a black and a white parent, and quadroons, who come from a biracial and a white background (one fourth black), were the result of interracial sexual contacts and just added to the population of Italians, Spaniards and French people (Taylor 5). In its origins the name mulatto was used to refer to the amount of black blood in a person. However, more frequently the term mulatto referred to a black woman who had an affair with a French settler (Gehman 48).

During the city’s occupation by Union troops from 1862 onwards its reputation deteriorated and most of its wealth was lost. New Orleans was in huge financial debt, fostered by the immense corruption of businessmen and politicians. Many blacks wanted to leave their masters after they had been freed, only to find themselves looking for shelter in a criminal city or, in the end, going back to

their former masters (Taylor 2-3). New Orleans was well-known for its crimes and disastrous living conditions. Diseases like the yellow fever were fostered by dreadful hygiene standards and frequent floodings of the city. Until 1890 New Orleans was a dangerous place to live (3).

After the beginning of the Civil War white people started to turn on the black population because they were blaming their coloured neighbours for the horror of the war. Black codes and increased hatred were the result. In the pre-Civil War years free Negroes enjoyed suffrage, public education and land ownership, but then they again lost everything. A small white elite made sure that black codes restricted the rights of Negroes (Taylor 3-4). The situation had now advanced to the point that freed blacks had to work under very similar circumstances as when they had been slaves. They owned no land, had no capital and were intimidated when it came to voting. Additionally, they experienced “unemployment in towns and cities [...] and [...] constant harassment, victimization, and murder of individual blacks in all parts of the southern states.” (Taylor 4)

The climax was reached when already in 1866 34 blacks were killed by white residents “furious at the reconvening of a black suffrage convention [...]. In the 1860s, over three thousand people, mostly black, were killed or wounded in massacres” in Louisiana (Taylor 5). During these days the Republican governor hired their own mostly black police (King *New Orleans* 324). White supremacy was what the remaining aristocracy sought. They could not understand the new rights of black people and felt degraded. Grace King’s brother and Kate Chopin’s husband were part of these groups, the so called White Leagues. This made it possible for King and Chopin to get an additional insight into the post-Civil War disturbances. The White Leagues’ goal was to destroy the government of Louisiana which aimed at Reconstruction (Taylor 5).

The other side of the medal had been New Orleans’ political elite. They had enjoyed their living standards before 1861. New Orleans was famous for its fantastic music-events, its balls, and other opportunities for amusement. Nevertheless, many members of the upper class were impoverished by losing the war. The brilliant ball-room and the Orleans theatre were burned down (King *New Orleans* 361). After Louisiana had got back its own government, the state tried to offer a future for the children through education by reestablishing the

Academic department (385). Before the Civil War there was little public education, and after the destruction of vast parts of the region even less. During Reconstruction time the South understood that in order to rebuild the economy, education had to be a major tool. It was a hard challenge as the South clearly lacked the resources, but gradually improvements were noticeable (Scott 110). In sum, New Orleans certainly was exploited and had to endure a lot during and after the Civil War, but after all, there was an elite left who wanted to preserve the living standards they were accustomed to before the war and they were willing to work for it.

Turning to the more rural part of Louisiana, it needs to be considered that the plantations suffered extremely from the war and its aftermath. The antebellum “Louisiana had produced 95 percent of the South’s sugar crop; by 1877, it was producing a mere one-third of that output.” (Taylor 2) Thus, the once so highly productive sugar and cotton plantations were under sad conditions. One of the reasons clearly was that before the war black slaves were deployed for their hard work. Afterwards, not everybody was able to pay for workers, even though many former slaves wanted to come back to their masters (Kirby 104). Notwithstanding these dramatic changes, 15 years after the end of the Civil War 50 percent of the plantations were still in the same hands as before. Concomitantly, slavery was replaced by sharecropping (also see 3.2.3). The workers did not live on the plantation itself any more, but took up residence on subdivided tenant farms. Additionally, this so called fragmented plantation arrangement was hardly different from the slave system, as the sharecroppers would never own their harvested crops. Nevertheless, it is important to say that they benefited from a new legal system.

On those plantations where white tenants dominated, a clear distinction of status was made because superior workers would not tolerate as much supervision as blacks. From 1880 onwards, many blacks fled into the cities and quit the field for white sharecroppers, who formerly were farm owners or tenants. Between 1935 and 1955 the sharecropping system finally found its end (Kirby 104).

Having said that, it is important to add that before the war the plantation “life included social classes with subtle boundaries, but common to all of them was a

taste for regional foods, the prevalence of folk customs, the importance of blood relationships, and a sense of Old World origins.” (Clark 106) Yeoman farmers had the chance to climb the career ladder to the aristocratic or patrician planter class. Thus, they also introduced their traditions to the elite. Clark claims that the class boundaries only became relevant after the Civil War. It was the beginning of a technological and social advancement, interrupted by war and separated by (rail-) roads and stream channels, who would continue to be dependent on yeoman farmers (106-107). As a contrast to the North, the South lacked vision and the facilities to cultivate and take care of the existing resources. As a matter of fact, the South was now a poor region. “It developed no important universities, supported no notable libraries, and sustained only a limited number of banks.” (108) But what the country folk with their yeoman farmers and planters all had in common was their traditions and their social customs (Clark 108). They perfectly understood how to share the workload. From 1820 to 1920 the South had an immense number of black and white women who worked vigorously in the agrarian sector. Not only did they care for the children and fulfilled their domestic duties, but they also did the job of a “spinner and weaver, knitter, seamstress, quilter, fruit and vegetable preserver, butcher and supplemental field hand.” (Clark 109) Even though the Southern rural family was highly patriarchal, women were respected for their knowledge of “folk rhymes, ballads, party games” (109) and the like.

Having all this information about the city and the countryside in mind it is no wonder that Grace King and Kate Chopin had a lot of material for writing at their disposal.

New Orleans and its surrounding plantations and bayous provided a virtually inexhaustible wealth of issues for literary exploration. The French Creole obsession with culture and refinement gave elegance to the city, but the predilection for gambling, drinking, and duelling weakened the foundations of society, and the stratifications of race, caste, and wealth further separated the elite from the mass of the population. (Nagel 160)

The plantations and their nostalgic atmosphere before the Civil War, as opposed to the ruin and alterations in the entire system afterwards, served as excellent inspiration for both authors.

#### 2.3.4. The Female Situation and Female Rights

As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the role of women in the post-war period should not be underestimated. Men's absence led to the need of women to take over many duties their husbands had performed before. It only seems appropriate to make a digression into the subject of female rights development in order to understand their standing in society.

Before the Civil War the place of women was solely restricted to the domestic domain. The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau perfectly put their opportunities for anything different than household management into words,

Thus the whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life agreeable and sweet to them – these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy. (263)

A woman was not supposed to know a lot about the world. Men would not find it desirable if a woman started to complain or to think critically. She was physically weak, innocent and only lived to make existence easier and pleasant for her husband and children (Scott 4). "From earliest childhood girls were trained to the ideals of perfection and submission." (4) People of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seemed to believe that a woman's brain was different from a man's. It was considered smaller and thus, clearly subordinate to the male counterpart. Even in 1812 upper class women only had the need to learn things like "embroidery, painting, French, singing and playing the harpsichord." (Flexner 23) Mathematics or any sort of formal education would not be graspable for the female brain (25). Therefore, they were either educated at home or sent to a boarding school, depending on the financial capacities of a family (Censer 12). In their courses an emphasis lay on a lady's proper behaviour, which was seen as preferable to a woman's intellectual development (Scott 7).

All this should prepare the "belle" to find her place in a patriarchal household where she was supposed to raise children, care for her husband, watch over slaves and organize daily routines (Scott 16). Additionally, she had to be pious and pray regularly. There were clear instructions how often the bible should be

consulted: Before and after breakfast, prior to dinner and before she went to bed (10).

A woman's duties differed depending on her social position and her husband's profession. Many women lived on plantations. The wife of a plantation owner, for example, did not work as hard as a woman who lived on a small plantation or farm. There she would do field work as well. Nevertheless, every woman knew how to spin, weave and sew (Scott 30). An aristocratic lady would not supervise the butcher but she might produce soap or dresses anyway.

When the Civil War came closer, many women were clearly discontent with their life. One of the reasons was that they had barely access to education and gradually found out that they could be equal to men if they only had the chance to learn. Furthermore, their relationship to slaves often was troublesome. They always had to be supervised and guided, which was a huge burden for many women. Others regarded slaves as true friends. No matter whether mistress and slave had a good or bad relationship, both states of feeling led to the same conclusion: they wanted slavery to end (Scott 46-48). To top it all, women often saw parallels between themselves and slaves. "You know how women sell themselves and are sold in marriage, from queens downward, eh? You know what the Bible says about slavery and marriage; poor women! poor slaves!" (Chesnut 13) Even though some considered motherhood as a holy blessing, others feared endless pregnancies. There was always the danger of dying in childbed. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the increasing labour by a growing number of children (Scott 37). Sarah Grimké impressively depicts women's life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*. She was one of the first women to openly fight for women's suffrage and female rights. For her it was obvious that the female sex was suppressed by men and the fact that they were cut off from education made them flee into marriage, which seemed to be their only purpose in life (Scott 61-62). Grimké even criticized that men and women were not payed equally in the same position. Eventually, arguments for female education were raised, for example, that men would also feel more attracted to a woman who was able to live up to a man's intellect and get involved in a demanding discussion (63).

By the year 1830 public speakers often addressed the topic of education for women (Scott 68). Reverend William Hooper mentioned in 1847, "Shame on

man, he said, with all his opportunities for education if he could not keep up with an educated woman.” (69)

It was not possible to ignore the voices that grew louder and louder. A need for change was imminent. Finally, in 1848 five women decided to hold a meeting and discuss women’s rights, which eventually became famous as the Seneca Falls Convention (New York). The convention was announced in the *Seneca Country Courier*. It has to be added that it was absolutely uncommon for women to hold a meeting in public (Scott 74). The first day had been reserved for women only. However, about forty men appeared among an audience of about 300 people. The convention lasted for two days and adopted a declaration for equality (76). It was a great success that “sixty-eight women and thirty two men (a third of those present) signed their names to the Declaration of Principles.” (77) For the first time in history it was possible for women to stand up against injustice and inequality. There were many more conventions to follow.

The outbreak of the Civil War changed America tremendously, but women in particular. They stayed at home to take care of the property, while husbands, brothers and sons were sent to war. There was hardly a job women were not supposed to do, as there were no planters, millers and merchants left who could continue their duties. Wives of plantation owners were accustomed to command a household and, therefore, could live up to the expectations of their husbands. Often soldiers sent instructions about cultivating plants and how to manage slaves, but in many situations women had to improvise (Scott 82). Not only small farmers, but also wealthy ones were challenged during this war. While a yeoman farmer’s wife did hard physical work like ploughing, an aristocratic lady learned how to “calculate lumber measurements well enough to run a sawmill [...]. War widows [...] became clerks in government offices.” (82) Women also came to be school teachers, a profession they would engage in passionately.

The end of the war brought home broken men, who encountered traumatised women. During their manifold jobs women had seen terrible things; especially as nurses who had to treat wounded soldiers from the South (86). “A quarter of a million men had died in the war” (106), which meant way more women than men lived in the South. Many towns had been burned or devastated, the transportation system was brought to a halt and farmers faced completely destroyed plantations. This meant that their livestock was dead and their plants

ruined, often also the houses were burned (Scott 92). The post-war conditions showed women that they could not give up their newly won independence any more, which led to a gradual end of patriarchy (93). The destruction of the plantation system and the abolition of slavery also changed women's lives (Scott 106). The entire South, apart from a few families who still owned a fortune, was in debt and could not pay their workers. There were no slaves any more but free blacks. This made it necessary for women to continue their jobs. Many took up the profession of a teacher; others gave music or French lessons (109).

A change in thinking could be noticed. Many parents had had great plans for their children before the war, but even the richest aristocrats had often lost everything and could not even afford proper education for their children (Censer 19). It was extraordinary that sometimes mothers wanted their daughters to learn an instrument so that they one day could give young girls music lessons (17). Before the war it would have been completely impossible for a mother to think of a future for her daughter other than marriage. Afterwards, for many women family became the centre of their life and they would never marry. Becoming someone's wife always meant losing the tight bonds to their mother and father. This is also what Grace King concluded. She had decided never to lose her autonomy and family for a man's love. Therefore, she had chosen her own career, which only became possible after the war (Censer 34-35). One factor that fostered the single-life of women was the fact that a high number of men had died in the war (32). They simply had no other choice but to learn how to support themselves.

As has already been mentioned, many women were working as teachers in the post-war period. During Reconstruction time the educational system underwent a notable change. Louisiana was lucky, as it "was one of the first of the southern states to be reconstructed [...] in 1864 under the plan of President Lincoln." (Dabney 369) In order to revive the economy, public schools boomed and offered an opportunity for many upper-class women to start a teaching career (Scott 110-111). Some even opened their own private school. As a logical consequence, proper teacher training was required. However, before 1880 teachers had no noteworthy hope for training in the South (Dabney 117). Finally, in 1884 the State Industrial Institute and College (Mississippi) launched

the “collegiate education, normal training, and industrial preparation to the young women of Mississippi.” (Dabney 356) This was the first college of the South that was supported by the state and allowed women to study (356). Slowly but steadily a few women were college-educated and became “lawyers, doctors, and college professors” (Scott 114). In 1903 the Southern Association of College Women was brought to life. Only women with a college degree were allowed to become members. Three years later already 334 members participated. Education reached into the South and offered many teaching opportunities and also fostered literacy among children of all classes (115). However, apart from a teaching-career many other professions came into reach. On the one hand, women became professional writers, like Grace King or Kate Chopin, and could earn a living by writing for magazines or newspapers (Scott 118). Nevertheless, at the beginning they used to publish under male pseudonyms in order to be taken seriously (119). On the other hand, manual labour and factory work was a newly discovered sector for women’s work (121). Because of the lack of opportunities for educated women it was often necessary to work in textile mills, together with women and children of all social classes (122). This was the natal hour of the New Orleans Woman’s Club in 1885. Its purpose was to help female citizens to find a job, and get proficient in different areas. The Club

ran an employment bureau which in 1887-88 placed women as teachers, librarians, stenographers, typists, bookkeepers, governesses, music teachers, canvassers, agents, collectors, nurses, housekeepers, dressmakers, cashiers, and saleswomen. (Scott 123)

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century single women could choose an autonomous way of life. Teaching seemed to have become a profession of the weaker sex, like typing and stenography. In the countryside it was harder to break the habitual patterns. Women were still expected to marry, but, as an addition, had the choice to go into a larger town and work in a mill or learn how to teach (Scott 129). It was not the wish of society to give more freedom to women; it was simply a consequence of a changing world. The war made it necessary to invest into education and the state had to cope with the loss of a high number of men. Correspondingly, women lived up to the challenge and discovered that marriage was not the only way to make life worth living. However, for those middle-class

women who were wed, it was hard to compete against a female Negro who was willing to work for very little money (135).

Women's clubs and missionary societies came into being (Scott 136). Church work was an important first step towards independence. Improvement of society and going abroad to reform other countries as well, were an essential part of their commitment for the Lord (138). In 1878 a Woman's Board of Foreign Missions was accepted, which only ten years later featured about 57 000 members in many different places (like China). A completely new task for these women was to handle tremendous amounts of money (139). After the turn of the century Methodist women launched a gospel programme which dealt with "the abolition of child labour, the reduction of illiteracy, prison reform, an end to the convict lease system, [and] the cultivation of 'sympathy between all races'" (Scott 143-144). In 1874 the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) became the most prominent woman organisation (144). Among other topics, they aimed at social purity in the sense of the prevention of venereal diseases. Wives also did not want to hope for their husband's abstinence any more, but demanded prohibition laws (Scott 147). They saw a reason for men's behaviour in their consumption of alcohol and, as a consequence, held anti-alcohol classes in schools and went to see alcoholics in prisons (148). In the years from 1884 to 1887 many clubs mushroomed in the South, because women everywhere either supported woman suffrage, or sought higher education (mostly both) (152). Not only clubs, but also expositions and world's fairs raised awareness and united women (156). Today it is hardly possible to believe that there was a time when a wife could not divorce her husband. "Until the 1830s, divorces were granted only by petition through the state legislature, and were difficult to obtain throughout the antebellum period." (Clinton 79) Divorce laws simply did not exist. As a consequence, the state legislature had to look into each case and based on petitions rendered a verdict (79). The fact that a woman could no longer coexist with her husband was not reason enough to end a marriage (80). Crimes like infidelity, violence against the wife and abuse of any kind were common reasons for divorce. As an example, in 1831 (North Carolina) 41 petitions were brought to discussion, among them 28 from women. "Women generally fared better than men: of the twenty-one petitions approved, twenty were submitted by women." (Clinton 81) One of the men who was

granted a divorce, cited his wife's sexual behaviour as a reason. For women it was most commonly abandonment, which means that their husband had already left them and they only wanted it to be made official (81). Children would most likely stay with their father because women "had no legal right to their children." (Clinton 84)

A struggle for over four decades was necessary to clear the way for women's rights and suffrage. Men were concerned about what would happen if a Negro woman was allowed to vote as well. Interestingly enough, there were a few female citizens who could not see any advantages in casting a ballot (Scott 168). Women like Caroline Lee Hentz were active in their fight for woman suffrage. For many years she was actively engaged in reform movements. In 1879 she even collected 500 signatures for woman suffrage and presented them to the Louisiana Constitutional Convention (174). After 1910 women increasingly fought for their rights, because they were the first generation that was born after the Civil War and, thus, were raised with new options for their life and could not understand why they were not allowed to vote. Newspapers, men's leagues for woman suffrage and college suffrage leagues were working hard towards their goal.

A century of immense persistence finally led to the eagerly-awaited right to cast the ballot in 1920 (Scott 180). After the first World War the United States were finally ready to grant women this fundamental right. Nevertheless, women still fought for the abolition of child labour, for equal wages, amelioration of the working conditions and improvement of the education system (186). Notwithstanding all these fields of further work, Bainbridge Colby<sup>2</sup> signed the Nineteenth Amendment on August 26, 1920 and by doing so gave the right to vote to 26 million women. Two more years had to pass until the United States Supreme Court made sure that there was nothing that could take away this privilege from women (Flexner 337).

For a very long time mothers and daughters fought for the right to become more equal to men and finally accomplished something that would have never been considered as possible a hundred years earlier. Even though southern women still had a lot of work before them, this was a milestone in the US history of

---

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of State,

female rights. From this day on, women had a say in politics and thus, had a chance to decide what happened in their state.

## 2.4. Female Roles

After this historical introduction there can be no doubt about women's paths of trial and tribulation. Especially during the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction they emancipated themselves. Grace King and Kate Chopin both experienced the abolition of slavery and the steps towards full emancipation of women. Thus, it is no wonder that their works *At Fault* and *Monsieur Motte* were inspired by an autobiographical background and furthermore, led to complex, strong female characters who faced difficult challenges that eventually were overcome (Taylor 1-2).

In the following, four roles of women shall be introduced: The "belle" is a legendary mythic and idealised figure, childlike and innocent. She was deliberately prevented from any access to education in order to keep her naïve and submissive. Her flirtatious nature is only discernible when she is looking for a fitting husband.

The lady, who is the grown up and married version of the "belle" only lives to serve her husband. She handles all domestic duties, bears his children, makes his house a pleasant place to live in and never complains. Thus, her own wishes are only secondary as her priorities are always her husband and children.

The plantation mistress is a down-to-earth, hard-working but still feminine woman who is very similar to the lady in her caring nature but is used to handle difficult situations on the farm. Looking after slaves (or later the black workers) and sorting out any potential problems were her daily tasks.

Finally, the black mammy who often is a dear family member is charged with the job to raise her master's children and support the mistress in the house. She always sets her master's wishes before her own, is obedient and diligent but dominated by her passionate, animalistic nature.

### 2.4.1. The Ideal Woman – Lady and Belle

Both female roles, mostly found in ante-bellum fiction, are depictions of women idealised by men. Especially the young southern "belle" is a character of the

imagination, a portrayal of how the southern aristocracy saw their superiority. Deep within, the social elite identified with the British Victorians who could not bear to see their perfect world fall apart. The Industrial Revolution was regarded by the aristocracy with utter dismay. As a reaction to this changing world they retired to their households. Here they could live the ideal of the monarchy, which was clearly not compatible with Jefferson's democracy. The Victorian England and the South seemed to be in agreement about the status of the home which became a sacred refuge. The guardian of the home was the master's wife and mother of the children. In superior classes it was common to treat sons like princes and daughters like princesses (Seidel 4-5). The little princess, also known as the "belle", was displayed as a cliché by popular literature. Even though she is depicted in different forms, she usually is seen as the perfect woman in the prime of her life. She is "idle, leisured, long-suffering, sexually pure, innocent, and childlike, conspicuously consuming her husband's wealth, and symbolizing racial purity." (Taylor ix) She is not only pure in the sense of being an unsullied maiden, but she also has immaculate white skin colour with no taint of black in it. The world should not affect her stainless soul and she would be locked away until she finds her prince. Her education was very different from her brother's. For a "belle" it would suffice to learn how "to be obedient, to ride, to sew, and perhaps to learn reading and writing." (Seidel 6) Even going to a boarding school was seen as a huge risk for a daughter's delicate nerves (Censer 12). Many girls had private teachers or were educated by their parents. Those families who lived in bigger towns or cities, however, sometimes gave the chance of a very brief and basic education to their daughters. They learned "music, embroidery, and more esoteric arts and crafts, such as netting, china painting [...] music (both instrumental and vocal), French, Latin, natural philosophy, and algebra." (15) The "belle" knew how to be charming to gather potential husbands around her and finally would choose the perfect one. From the moment of her wedding a new life unfolds, a life the naïve "belle" dreams of as romantic and perfect (Seidel 6). Sooner or later she would learn the truth.

After a flirtatious time of courtship the "belle" gives in to her future husband and as a consequence, becomes a lady.

Anne Firor Scott describes the lady as innocent and submissive to her husband. She only lives to serve the master of the house, to amuse him and to bear his children. She is considered to be weak and, therefore, needs to be protected by men. The lady is fascinating, gracious and charming and thus, deserves to be safeguarded. Among her talents, the lady possesses intuition, which enables her to assess relationships and to be sensitive. For a lady it is important to feel for her husband, to listen to his stories and to bring up his children. A logical mind does not serve her well (Scott 4). In a marriage it was the wife's behaviour that determined whether the match would last or end in misery.

She must resolve at the outset never to oppose her husband, never to show displeasure, no matter what he might do. A man had a right to expect his wife to place perfect confidence in his judgement and to believe that he always knew best. (Scott 6)

A good wife knew where her place was and she would never doubt her husband. Scott adds that not later than her teenage years should a girl know what society expected from her and should have already internalised the myth of the "belle" (7). Women wanted to reach a degree of perfection in order to please God and man (8). A pious wife did not only want to please her husband, but also God. For this reason she read the bible a lot and constantly prayed to become more patient and to be aided with her unruly affections (Scott 10). A perfect wife should in short try to be the perfect saint. Women were in regular psychological pain about their deficiencies and blamed themselves for it. The British poet Coventry Patmore also accurately depicts how sacrificing and devoted women were.

MAN must be pleased; but him to please  
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf  
Of his condoled necessities  
She cast her best, she flings herself.  
How often flings for nought, and yokes  
Her heart to an icicle or whim,  
Whose each impatient word provokes  
Another, not from her, but him;  
While she, too gentle even to force  
His penitence by kind replies,  
Waits by, expecting his remorse,  
With pardon in her pitying eyes;  
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,

A comfortable word convers,  
 She leans and weeps against his breast,  
 And seems to think the sin was hers [...] (*The Angel in the House* IX.1.1-15)

Even though a woman always held back criticism and tried to soothe her husband when anything was amiss, she also possessed remarkable power. The wife was the one who raised the children and made sure that they knew how to behave. Servants (or slaves), children and wife all had to know their place beyond the master of the house. Everything had to be perfect when the husband came home after work, exhausted and hungry (Scott 19).

This chapter had the purpose to present ideal womanhood from adolescence (“belle”) to adulthood (lady). Naturally, not every upper middle-class woman from the South in the antebellum period resembled this perfect picture. It is important to state that the descriptions above are myths taken from literature and the immaculate wife might not have existed at all. However, Anne Firor Scott conducted a thorough study and produced an account of many diary entries taken from real life. Idealised in literature, the character of the lady was an image women before the war desperately wanted to achieve and many might have come close to it (Scott x). What is more, women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century found themselves confronted with a

contradictory set of values. For the image wearing Dixie’s Diadem is not a human being; it is a marble statue, beautiful and silent, eternally inspiring and eternally still. Rather than a person, the Confederate woman is a personification, effective only as she works in others’ imagination. Efforts to join person and personification, to make self into symbol, must fail because the idea of southern womanhood specifically denies the self. (Jones 4)

The southern lady therefore resembles the British Victorian lady who also has no right to selfhood. She has to be silent, find her place in the domestic sphere, and always aim at a state of perfection she might never reach (4).

#### 2.4.2. Plantation Mistress

Very similar to the lady and often even seen as one, appears the plantation mistress (Clinton 17). She has once been a “belle”, having enjoyed an equivalent education as a lady. Nevertheless, in the same ways as the persona

of the “belle” is being mystified, also the role of the lady stands for an ideal, for a divine creature of perfection who is not a secular being, even though many upper class women tried to come close to it.

This myth, Scott observes, was at odds with the realities of the lives of plantation mistresses. It represented what they ought to be, not what they were. Assuming that the psychological contortions could be managed, only the great ladies of urban centres could manage to be entirely ornamental. (Leslie 19)

Leslie clarifies that only upper class women from the city had the chance to personify what constitutes a real lady. This image had nothing to do with the reality of a plantation mistress's life.

As a consequence, the way I shall interpret the character of a plantation mistress throughout this paper thus draws on a more realistic picture, as opposed to the lady who stands for a creature of imagined perfection.

It is a fact that a plantation mistress's work was not easy. It included all sorts of domestic duties “from food and clothing to the physical and spiritual care of both her white family and her husband's slaves.” (Clinton 18) She was the contact person for complaints. Only for the crops could she count on the overseer's competence. Serving as an intermediary between all participants on the plantation, she can be regarded as a highly valuable person in the house (18).

She was the first person who woke in the morning and sent up breakfast for her children (20). Childcare was one of her major duties. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, however, wet nurses and slaves who looked after the children were common (Clinton 47-48). Educating the perfect little gentleman and the beautiful, pious “belle” was a demanding job regarding the various temptations on plantation, especially for boys. This is why a close contact between white children and slaves was firmly prohibited. The risk for interracial contact was too big, especially when the children were already grown up (49). Apart from childcare, plantation mistresses managed the financial affairs. Especially after the secession when the husband was away for longer periods of time women had to care for the household budget and often even make decisions on their own, for example, if they needed to hire another helping hand or not ( Clinton 31-32). Plantation mistresses always kept records of the stock that would be butchered later and the working animals. Similarly she registered how much she

was planting (23). After the crops were harvested she was the one who would preserve it. She salted pork, produced any sort of dairy products and even some plantation mistresses would kill hogs (21-23). Mothers and already married sisters often visited the newly wed wife and helped out. They showed the young woman how to make soaps or candles and other duties she did not feel comfortable with yet (25). In the antebellum period plantations were self-sufficient, which means that mistresses was extremely occupied with their extensive duties (Clinton 29). The head of the domestic area had to provide clothes, blankets and similar textiles for her own family and the slaves alike. If there were less than 30 slaves on the plantation, the mistress would manage the knitting on her own. If the number was higher, she needed to teach black women how to knit (28). Indeed, there was no area in the household that would not be supervised by the mistress. What is more, she even worked as a doctor or nurse and was responsible for the medical treatment of her family and the slaves respectively (143). Large plantations even had their own hospital with old black nurses who were still supervised by the mistress (28).

Generally, a woman led an industrious but not socially active life. Her common contact persons were slaves and their family. Other than her husband she had no opportunities to visit towns or go abroad. This is also the reason why women had such a strong bond to their family (Clinton 38). From the moment they were married, they left their familiar surroundings and left for their husband's plantation (37). There they would stay for the rest of their lives. Visits from friends and family were quite common and helped to distract from their monotonous way of life (175). Occasionally they would give great feasts and balls (178). As a contrast to this, northern women had a chance to socialise and established communities around themselves (165).

To top it all, the southern mistress's exile started at a very young age. The average age of marriage for women between 1765 and 1815 was 20, whereas men were already 26 years old (Clinton 60). Even though many marriages were happy ones, "[c]ontrary to the popular myth of women's higher status in plantation society, women of the planter class were treated as reproductive units, replaceable if necessary." (Clinton 61) If a wife died, a husband usually looked for another woman to marry. Regardless of whether a woman was a lady or a plantation mistress, her defined goal was to please her husband (68). She

basically led the entire estate and above all always set her husband's wishes before everyone else's (especially hers).

This means that a plantation mistress was a very hard worker, a perfect mother and a devoted wife likewise.

#### 2.4.3. Black Mammy

The last female character that will be introduced is the black mammy. It is known that Kate Chopin was accustomed to a Negro mammy's love and had a good relationship to their black slaves (Seyersted 21). In comparison to Chopin, we only know about Grace King that the family had two Negro maids before they fled to their plantation. It can be assumed that King's mother and grandmother were responsible for the prevailing part of her education (King Memoirs 9).

Coming back to the black mammy, she represents "a cultural image, based on myth, that was developed in the South by the privileged class during slavery" (Jewell 170). She was seen as "both legend and real historical person" (Morton 35) and serves as "a figment of the combined romantic imaginations of the contemporary southern ideologue and the modern southern historian." (Morton 201) Interestingly enough, Catherine Clinton argues that the black mammy is only a fictional character and has never existed in the Old South. Nevertheless, Clinton allows the existence of black women who were assistants to the plantation mistress, but even those cases are rare (201).

The mammy is usually described as a black, corpulent and middle-aged slave or servant wearing "a drab calico dress with a handkerchief tied on her head." (Jewell 170) Hence, the mammy is the outward antithesis of the white lady. As an addition, she is joyous, never complains and is highly devoted to her employer's needs. Towards white people she is an agreeable member of staff, but towards African Americans she can be quite aggressive. The reader never gets the feeling that she is discontent. On the contrary, she accepts her social standing and would rather place her own family at a disadvantage than the white family she is working for (171). The image of the mammy emerged during slavery and especially as a response to the abolitionist claims that slavery was cruel. The figure of the mammy was intended to convey the belief "that the institution of slavery was benign, humane, and benevolent. Thus, the

mythological cultural image of the mammy served the social, political, and economic interest of the slaveholding community, which was determined to preserve this system.” (Jewell 171) This means, that the image of the mammy was used to cast a very positive light on slavery and emphasised the good relationship between servant and employer.

This character emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in literature and was portrayed as a compliant woman who helped the plantation mistress in raising her children, but at the same time she put her own family aside (Morton 36). As a consequence, she served as a connecting link between black and white, and was the complement to the octoroon concubine, who was possibly the master’s lover. Even though the mammy’s portrait ordinarily was a positive one, she is sometimes seen in a sexual context because she nurses the white master’s offspring (Clinton 202). However, in this paper I will illustrate the black mammy’s positive image.

Her role was restricted to the domestic sphere. Primarily, she was preoccupied with child care, and only secondly, other household duties in order to relieve the plantation mistress, were relevant (Parkhurst 351). The mammy reflected the status of the family she lived with. As an intelligent woman it was possible that she learned how to read and write, but only if someone on the plantation taught her. When there were problems between the family members or the slaves, she was the diplomat who solved them (353). Additionally, she was a family member usually residing with the upper-class family, even though she had her own family who lived in a cabin on the plantation. Usually, there was no reason to dismiss a mammy. Only when she became too old to work, her own family life became more important (354).

In very rich households black mammies even had assistants. The age of women who became black mammies varied. Even young women who were not even married could take up the work of such a domestic servant (Parkhurst 355). However, commonly daughters of former black mammies inherited their mother’s job after spending a lifetime on the plantation, playing with the white children of their masters. Thus, black mammies are generally visualised as mature black women (356).

Their hierarchical standing on the plantation was superior to all the other slaves. This is fostered by the fact that she takes care of the master’s children whom

she loves dearly. From the day of their birth she accompanies her protégés, and eventually, when the time comes, looks after their children too (Parkhurst 360). Etiquette and social behaviour were things children were taught by their black mammy (362). All the same, when they already grew into adulthood the relationship between the mammy and her charges stayed the same. For her they would always be her children (363). Even though the black mammy was a Negro, she was a member of the family and highly estimated by the children she was raising. Not only was the relationship between the mammy and her fosterlings admirable, but also between the mammy and her mistress. Oftentimes, she was a dear friend of the plantation mistress, which was facilitated by the fact that there usually was no other white woman on the entire estate (apart perhaps from the overseer's wife) (Parkhurst 365). The mammy comforted the mistress in sad times and was by her side when she died. If the black mammy deceased first, the mistress stood watch at her bed (369). Even though the character of the black mammy is not as well recorded as the lady, "belle" or plantation mistress, she is still a mythical figure that is worth our attention. She was a devoted friend and guardian, but not to forget also a slave who could be bought and sold.

### 3. Monsieur Motte

On the following pages a detailed analysis of the role of female characters in *Monsieur Motte* shall be offered. In the process, I benefited from the works of Anne Goodwyn Jones, Helen Taylor and Anna Elfenbein<sup>3</sup>. For the sake of completeness a plot summary, as well as some information on narration and language will be included. The contrast of rural and urban life cannot be ignored and the importance of education should not be underestimated. Additionally, class differences go hand in hand with racial discrimination, which will be covered as well. The main part of this analysis will concentrate on the role of selected female characters from the novel.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jones' *Tomorrow is Another Day* (1981), p. 99ff.; Taylor's *Gender, Race and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin* (1989), p. 50ff.; Elfenbein's *Women on the Color Line* (1989), p. 92ff.

### 3.1. Plot Summary

The story is set in June 1874 at the Institute of St. Denis in New Orleans, which is a convent school for “belles” who either stay permanently as boarders or go home after their lessons. The last two days of the school term end with a grand exposition where prizes are awarded and the graduated girls are taken home by their family. The orphan girl Marie, who lost her parents during the Civil War, has lived at the Institute since she was four years old. Now, at the age of 17, she is curious to get to know her uncle Monsieur Motte who presumably paid her school fees. What Marie does not know, but the reader discovers quite early in the story, is that Marcélite was her secret benefactor. The gentle quadroon works at the Institute as a hairdresser and is well respected by the staff. For Marie she takes up the role as a foster mother and they love each other dearly. On the day of the exhibition, also called the “*Grand Concert Musicale et Distribution de Prix*” (King *Monsieur Motte* 25), Marcélite cannot be found. She suffers from the knowledge that there will be nobody to take Marie home and care for her future. Leaning against the school wall she does not prepare the girls and the staff for their important day. To Marie’s great disappointment neither Monsieur Motte nor Marcélite appear. As a consequence, she sleeps at the Institute.

The next day, the headmistress Madame Eugénie Lareveillère wants to help Marie and “they search out the school’s records for Monsieur Motte” (Jones 98), without success. This is when they decide to consult the lawyer Monsieur Armand Goupilleau, who is secretly in love with Madame Lareveillère. In the end, Marcélite admits that there is no Monsieur Motte and confesses that she has been Marie’s benefactor. Marie is devastated and Marcélite is desperate to lose her beloved girl. In order to help the poor orphan, the headmistress and Monsieur Goupilleau decide to “be a father to her [...] [and Madame Lareveillère] shall be her mother.” (King *Monsieur Motte* 101)

Madame Lareveillère’s old school friend Aurore Angely invites the women to stay at her and her brother Felix’ plantation for three months in autumn. Marie and Marcélite accompany her. During their visit Goupilleau’s letter in which he declares his love for Madame Lareveillère is lost and, as a consequence, he decides to come to the plantation to propose. Aurore insists that the wedding

has to take place on her property and, therefore, the ceremony is held there. During their honeymoon Marie stays at Aurore's.

In the third chapter, *The Drama of an Evening* (King *Monsieur Motte* 181ff.), Marie falls in love with the young beau Charles at a debutante ball. Marcélite tends to the young ladies' toilette, especially to Marie's. Also the gentleman Morris Frank, who owns "the Ste. Marie plantation of the Parish of St. James" (220) is introduced. Charles is the stepson of Madame Montyon, a Parisian aristocratic lady who sold Charles's nanny Nourrice when he was young. This matter is discussed when suddenly old Nourrice appears among the black spectators and pleads for Charles' support. Without a second thought he consents to finance her. As a result, he argues with Madame Montyon that she is only his stepmother but Nourrice was selected as his nurse by his *real* mother.

The final chapter *Marriage of Marie Modeste* (King *Monsieur Motte* 263ff.) deals with the wedding (and its preparations) of Marie and Charles. Because Marie has no money Madame Montyon wants her to sign a dubious marriage contract. Only one year after her graduation, Marcélite presents Marie with a workbox filled with gold dollars on her wedding day. This is what the quadroon has collected for Marie since she was born. At first Marie is startled and Marcélite interprets her silence as not wanting to accept money from a black woman. Quite the contrary is true; Marie thanks her nurse for the money. Simultaneously, Monsieur Goupilleau talks to Morris Frank. The lawyer has found out that Monsieur Frank's father was an overseer who worked for the Motte family. Thus, he took over the possession of the plantation when the Mottes died and Marie vanished with her nurse. This makes Marie the owner of a rich plantation and not the slightest bit inferior to Charles. He now owns less than she does. In the end, Morris Frank becomes sole manager of the plantation. Marie, Charles and Marcélite lived happily in their new home, and so does Madame Lareveillère and Monsieur Goupilleau.

### 3.2. Language and Narration

*Monsieur Motte* is a novel published in 1888, consisting of four chapters, namely *Monsieur Motte*, *On the Plantation*, *The Drama of an Evening* and

*Marriage of Marie Modeste*. It had originally been designed to be a short story but was extended to a 327 pages long novel (Jones 108-109).

The story is set in New Orleans in 1874 (King *Monsieur Motte* 13) and opens on a “mid-day in June” (11). King approaches “issues of key importance to Louisiana and the South in the first decades after a war that had rendered all economic and social relations unstable and precarious, and that had led to redefinitions of class, race, and gender.” (Taylor 33)

A third person omniscient narrator critically and ironically assesses every event in the story. Both Anne Goodwyn Jones and Helen Taylor remark that already the title is highly ironic by mentioning a man who does not even exist. Monsieur Motte indeed is only an invention of Marcélite Gaulois who cannot tell her charge Marie that she has no family left and the person who pays her school fees is her nurse Marcélite (Jones 99 & Taylor 51).

Using an authorial voice Grace King allows the reader to encounter the characters’ inner perspective (Jones 104). Repeatedly the reader is informed about the inner thoughts of a character, for example the narrator talks about Marie’s feelings, “Where it [(her future)] had been, the girl saw only a blank space, or a world thick with strangers, aliens. Was there then no living person among them all to hold her, to connect her, with humanity?” (King *Monsieur Motte* 104) The narrator also comments on events, for instance, “Where could so many voices, so many emotions, be assembled as in a ladies’ dressing-room before a soirée, - a début soirée?” (185) “[M]ultiple points of view” (Jones 111) are presented that enable the reader to oftentimes know more than the characters. For example, the reader is well aware in advance that Marcélite has a secret that concerns Marie. From her behaviour and what the narrator explains one can guess that there is no uncle Monsieur Motte who will take Marie home.

Regarding language, the author realistically draws on the Creole usage of French. All the characters in the novel repeatedly use French phrases. Especially Marcélite usually addresses Marie with “*mon bébé*” (King *Monsieur Motte* 31), “*ma petite chérie!*” (31) or “*ma mignonne!*” (30). Also Madame Lareveillère uses the French lexicon, “*Ah! c’est toi*<sup>4</sup>, Marcélite!” (45) Even the

---

<sup>4</sup> It is you, Marcélite!

narrator uses French and sometimes suddenly exclaims, “*À la fin des fins!*”<sup>5</sup> or, “[They] [...] were *amies de coeur*”<sup>6</sup> and *toute dévouées*”<sup>7</sup> on every class-book, from the *abédédaire* up to the ‘Histoire de France’” (125). Every girl is looking out for a “*parti*” (227) and all people from New Orleans know the “*coiffeuse*”<sup>8</sup> (225) Marcélite. There is no character who does not occasionally use French. Furthermore, Madame Lareveillère once addresses Marie with the Middle English second person singular pronoun and the archaic version of *are*, “Thou art sure?” (267)

King’s authorial voice makes it possible for the reader to see through the characters and know much more than, for example, a first person narrator might be able to convey. Her elaborate use of language shows that she is the admirable fictional realist that chapter 2.2 claims her to be.

### 3.3. The Plantation – Bel Angely

Grace King shows a contrast between the rural and the urban settings by presenting these counterparts through the chapter headings of *Monsieur Motte*. The first chapter approaches school life of aristocratic Creole girls at the Institute St. Denis, a school in New Orleans. Already the second chapter is called *On the Plantation* (King *Monsieur Motte* 110), representing the rural setting on the Bel Angely plantation as an opposition to urban life, only to come back again to the city in chapter three, *The drama of an evening* (181).

This means that only one chapter is concerned with plantation life. Nevertheless, these pages impressively show that Grace King lived on a plantation herself and that she is a worthy representative of the Local Colour Movement who knows how to describe rural (and also urban) life realistically.

The “Bel Angely plantation, [in the] Parish of St. Charles” (King *Monsieur Motte* 118) is located on the banks of the Mississippi River (111) and, like many other large farms in Louisiana, produces sugar cane. The narrator informs the reader that it is autumn (110) and even goes further into detail, that it is October (112). “It was the busy time of the year, and the anxious time too, - the roulaison”

---

<sup>5</sup> Finally

<sup>6</sup> Friends deep within the heart

<sup>7</sup> Highly devoted

<sup>8</sup> Hairdresser

(115), which was the grinding season of the year, when everyone tried his/her best to make the harvest a big success.

There is one person who is, above all, responsible for the success or failure of the harvest and this is the plantation manager. Unfortunately, Monsieur Félix Angely “is ill in bed of sciatica” (117) and, has therefore, handed over his duties to his sister Aurore Angely. Félix instructs his sister and occasionally even screams orders from his window. As a formidable plantation mistress she takes care of her household duties and she also “placed herself at the disposition of every functionary on the place, - sugar-maker, cooper, engineer, blacksmith” (120) respectively and, thus, supervised everything that happened on the plantation.

The atmosphere is portrayed in a very positive way, for instance “[t]he cane in the fields stood in thick, solid maturity, with long, green, pendent leaves curling over and over in bewildering luxuriance.” (111) Also “the dreamy inertness of summer” (110) was gone in order to introduce the *roulaison*. Everyone was motivated and confident that the harvest would be successful. Even the “trees were in the full glory of their rich green foliage” and “[t]he sunset clouds [were] [...] bursting with light and color [...] and illumined like a halo the familiar features of plantation life.” (111) Already the first pages of the chapter encourage the reader to think that everyone is happy, eager to harvest the fruits of their hard work. Even the black workers “were happy in the thoughtless, unconscious enjoyment” and they felt “the subtle [sic] satisfaction of honestly tired bodies” (114). An important emphasis on the equality of men and women is shown by the remark, “the women are not behind the men then!” (151), when it comes to cutting the cane.

Furthermore, the narrator gives long descriptions about the routines on the plantation. For example “[t]he blacksmith laid down the half-sharpened cane-knife and began covering up the fire [...] and the hostlers, old crooked-legged negroes, hurried about with food for the mules.” (111-112) Young women tended their babies and old women, “the house dragons” (112), carried water buckets around and cursed because of their efforts. They also had cows to milk and mules to carry heavy loads (112).

The descriptions of the sugar-house illustrate that this is the most important building on the plantation.

Always dominating the place, the material importance of the sugar-house became tyrannical, oppressive, as cane-cutting approached. It reared itself – an ugly, square, red-brick structure – menacingly before the fields; it dwarfed the “big house” into insignificance, and [...] it shut out the view of the river from the quarters [...]. (King *Monsieur Motte* 115)

As the quote shows that this building is also feared to a certain extent. The success of an entire year depends on the day when the commission merchant comes to give his verdict.

One consequence of the abolition of slavery for the upper class was the fact that the owner of a plantation had to pay his/her workers. As has already been said in Chapter 2.3.3 many farmers could not afford that anymore. In *Monsieur Motte* this is clearly not the case. During a conversation between Aurore and Eugénie the reader learns that the black workers became more expensive and the Angelys were forced to hire Italians to work for them during the *roulaison*. Aurore was deeply disgusted by the thought of hiring Southern Europeans instead of black workers, but “negroes [were] running from place to place to get five cents more pay” (139), so they had no other choice. The reader is not informed whether the Angelys would be able to afford black workers, but being business-people they would act unwisely to spend such an amount of money if there was a cheaper option.

Not only the new workers but also modern inventions were disdained by Aurore. “[V]acuum-pans, condensers, steam-trains, bagasse-burners, a perfect ‘galimatias’ of machinery. As if gentlemen needed all that” (140).

What is more, the highly ironic narrator mentions the master’s house and its gardens. “[T]he big house, as it was metaphorically called – stood aloof in fastidious isolation from, but in watchful proximity withal of, the money making sugar-house and plebeian quarters.” (128) It seems important for King to mention that the house was not changed by modern society. The narrator makes clear that “[i]t was never intended to be an ordinary, common dwelling-place for ordinary, common people” (128) and that “a rigid quarantine had kept all but the inevitable revolutions of Nature and reform from the house and its inmates” (129). Like all upper-class citizens who lived after the Civil War, it was of tremendous importance to keep the notion alive that there was still an elite who sits enthroned above the common folks. Therefore, the house should

“express [...] caste, wealth, power, pride, government, religion.” (129) The narrator compares the beautiful gardens with Versailles. 100 years ago lovers would make their walks across the property and would admire the lovely flower beds. However, the “riotous growth of roses had tangled them into such a wilderness that the original gardener would have needed divine guidance through his own work” (129-139), and the orange trees, magnolias and oaks grew without being properly trimmed. “Here it was always seventeenth century and retrospection and regrets; but on the other side of the house, where the trees had been cut and the sun shone [...] it was always nineteenth century with the latest change of date” (130). It is impossible to ignore the melancholy of the aristocratic caste about the loss of their wealth and status. The Civil War had changed everything and the Southern upper class desperately clung to the old life.

Without a doubt, Grace King gives the reader a realistic portrait of post-Civil War rural Louisiana and, thus, has deservedly been called a Local Colourist.

### 3.4. Life in the Crescent City

From the first page of the novel it is clear that Grace King does not present the idea of a ruined New Orleans after the Civil War, but a rather romanticised one. The reader gets the impression that he/she is still in pre-Civil War Louisiana when the upper class enjoyed impressive feasts and luxurious balls. No illnesses like the yellow fever are mentioned and, overall, black and white people seem rather content. Nevertheless, this is how the rich Creoles at this time dealt with their situation. They did not want to accept that they were not in power any more, as before the war. Occasionally, minor characters in the novel refer to some shortcomings, like “[t]he crises, the revolution, the reconstruction” (190), or they complain about the fact that some of the elite do not even “pay house-rent, not pay office-rent, not even pay interest on their debts! debts reduced to ten cents on the dollar!” (190) It cannot be ignored that Madame Montyon came back from France to settle the debts of many formerly rich people from New Orleans who had to borrow money from her to get through the Civil War. Thus, New Orleans is described as “[p]oor old New Orleans!” (200) This shows that the upper class pretends to be in charge but if they were honest they would see that their sovereignty was over. “[W]hat can you expect, since

the war?" (202), a guest at Madame Fleurissant's soirée aptly asks. Some are brave enough to utter their worries, for example, "Ah! our creole blood is degenerating; we have no more men, only manikins." (223) If all the good (which equals white and rich) men are married to black women (or if they only take a concubine), there will be no continuity of the pure aristocracy.

As a contrast to this, the only concern of the girls at the Institute of St. Denis is that after their graduation they will "look out for a good *part*" (King *Monsieur Motte* 56). They are in complete ignorance of the events in the South. When they have finished their school career the whole world is open to them. "[T]here is so much outside – dancing, music, beaux." (54) These (young) women still dreamed of an idealised world, full of pleasures.

Tomorrow there would be no wall between them and the world, - the great, gay, big world of New Orleans. [...] the future [...] held for them a *début* in society, a box at the opera, beautiful toilettes, balls, dancing, music. (King *Monsieur Motte* 58)

The young "belles" were excited about the new life they were about to be introduced to and all the possibilities this grand city held for them. New Orleans, through these descriptions, is a city full of amusements, motion and entertainment, especially for a young woman.

As has been said in Chapter 2.3.2, there was a huge racial diversity in New Orleans. It is obvious that "Grace King's principal subject matter was found in the society of Creoles – the descendants of European aristocrats" (Jones 94). The Institute of St. Denis is proof enough of this. It is an "aristocratic school for girls" (King *Monsieur Motte* 49) and, thus, Creole girls. In contrast to this elite, New Orleans was also inhabited by black citizens. One example is Marcélite, the tender quadroon who enjoys a superior position to many other coloured people. "[...] [I]n New Orleans, in the *Quartier Créole*, there was hardly a man, woman or child, who did not call her by name; Marcélite Gaulois." (20) As a hairdresser of the elite she was well respected and even needed by Creoles.

Additionally, at the soirée Madame Fleurissant hosts at carnival time in New Orleans, not only upper-class Creoles but also an "expected if uninvited [...] not inconsiderable gathering from an old ostentatious superfluous retinue" (184) would come to the ball. One of them was the old nurse Nourrice, who cursed the other blacks and was jealous of their social standing, "And those

mulattresses! those impudent mulattresses in their fine clothes! As if they had not been freed too!" (238) Nourrice is also the one who complains about the black policemen<sup>9</sup> and how brutal they are even against their own women. "The policemen drag me off. They club me; they beat me all over; they tear my clothes! – nigger policemen, little master!" (235) It must have been difficult to understand that, on the one side, you might have a chance of being supported by your own race who now possess power, but on the other hand, feel completely helpless because they decide to turn on you.

As a contrast to this, Madame Montyon herself "was Parisian now! she is not a common creole! Oh, no! she had to bring white servants with her from Paris. She cannot stand the color!" (214) This illustrates that even after the war the elite of New Orleans still compares themselves to their forefathers from France and Spain. Another nationality that could be met at Madame Fleurissant's soirée was the German, represented by Monsieur Frank (241). This arrangement of different nationalities and social standings shows that it is indeed true that New Orleans was one of the most European cities in the United States.

Furthermore, as it is typical of Grace King, the overall theme of the novel was not hatred against blacks or the racial distinction, but *Monsieur Motte* "had to do with the female gender, black and white." (Jones 99). The author even chose a quadroon as a main character and gave her an elevated social standing. This has to be seen in clear contrast to George Washington Cable who "followed the political example of the antebellum antislavery writers" (Taylor 42) by pointing out the injustice committed against black people. As opposed to this, Grace King always wanted to put an emphasis on the love between slave and slave owner and, thus, after the war, the relationship between the master and his black workers.

### 3.5. The Importance of Education at St. Denis

The importance of education in *Monsieur Motte* cannot be ignored, especially because already the first pages introduce the setting, namely the boarding school which is called the Institute St. Denis (King *Monsieur Motte* 11). King extensively describes the school building and its gardens, even the smell of

---

<sup>9</sup> Compare Chapter 2.3.3, black police

oleander and jasmine is mentioned (11-12). The reader is informed in precise detail about the time the story is set. "It was near mid-day in June." (11) Additionally, one of the protagonists, Marie Modeste Motte, is in "[t]he graduating class of 1874" (13), and, thus, experiences her "last days of the scholastic term" (12).

The Institute St. Denis perfectly resembles the kind of pre- (and post-) Civil War schools where young "belles" were sent to in order to be properly educated for marriage (as has been said in Chapter 2.3.4). Indeed, Bush explains that King draws on "her own experience as a student in the late 1860s at the Institut St. Louis, a private school for girls; she took from life the school's headmistress and the quadroon hairdresser Marcéline." (Bush 58) In this school for aristocratic Creoles Marie has spent her entire life. Therefore, she is one of the so called "internes", whereas the "externs" lived with their families and only spent a few hours each day at the Institute (King *Monsieur Motte* 75). The externs enjoy the service of their servants (from their own home) and, as a consequence, are always perfectly dressed. As a contrast to this, the internes rely on Marcéline, who is responsible for all of the boarders. These circumstances lead to the feeling that "the *internes* [...] [are] all in one communal family" (Jones 100). Marie came to the Institute when she was four years old (King *Monsieur Motte* 29). The girls from the graduation classes now where 17. This does not allow any other conclusion than her being shaped by this school. "Romances and poetry had been kept from her like wine and spices." (28) It was well known that reading novels would spoil a young lady's character. A woman should not try to find true love, on the contrary, "a good *parti*" (56) was needed, a husband who would care for her. Notions about love at first sight and the phantasies of women who did not want to marry for the biggest purse but for love were contra-productive for the education at schools like the Institute St. Denis. Here they would learn the "l'Histoire de France, par D. Lévi Alvares, père" (12) and even earn a prize at their annual "fête of St. Denis." (25) This final exhibition should show how much they knew and make their families proud, who would afterwards take them home to enjoy their last days of naïve girlhood.

As a contrast to female education stands the education of boys. It is repeatedly mentioned that Félix, Madame Aurore's brother, was educated in France. Aurore is rather annoyed by his knowledge about Voltaire and Rousseau, which

might be because she knows nothing about them (124). “Aurore was determined to drive Messieurs Voltaire and Rousseau from the heart of Monsieur Félix.” (160) Boys’ education can be seen as the counterpart to women’s. They learned about philosophy and mathematics, but women were only trained in proper behaviour.

What is remarkable about a school like the Institute St. Denis is that they even have their own hairdresser, a black quadroon called Marcélite Gaulois, who is well known to the elite in New Orleans (19-20). It is significant to state at this point that a “négresse” (18) like Marcélite, is well respected by teachers and students alike. Therefore, she is not only the hairdresser, but also “messenger, and advisor of teachers and scholars.” (19) This shows that a person whose only responsibility is beauty and looks, could have a certain status, even though she is black. Jones has already looked critically into this matter. “But Marcélite is a hairdresser: she is essential to the school’s students and faculty, showing where the real values of the school lie – in appearance.” (Jones 100) This perfectly fits into the picture presented in Chapter 2.3.4. Women should not be trained to think critically or to study something that would help them earn a living on their own. Other than this, they should be beautiful, innocent, humble and at all times submissive to men. Marcélite makes sure that all the girls looked alike.

They were all dressed in calico dresses made in the same way, with very full, short skirts, and very full, short waists, fastened, matron-fashion, in front. They all wore very tight, glossy, fresh, black French kid boots, with tassels or bows hanging from the top. With big sun-bonnets, or heavily veiled hats on their heads, thick gloves on their hands, and handkerchiefs around their necks, they were walking buttresses against the ardent sun. (King *Monsieur Motte* 22)

Individualism was not what school (and society) was looking for. Perfectly trained female “soldiers” who would tackle marriage with a predetermined plan, woven by their parents from the day they were born, were the products of such an education. They were innocent, naïve girls, who led “conversations in sweet, low voices, with interrupting embraces” (22) and did know nothing of the world yet.

Even among these girls who were so much alike a hierarchy existed. When lunch was distributed, which was always bread and butter, the best pieces of bread “were the prerogative of the big girls; inside slices the grievance of the

little ones.” (24) Also for the “*Grand Concert Musicale et Distribution de Prix*” (25) the girls were arranged in a rather superficial way.

The young ladies were placed on a high platform of steps, and rose tier above tier like flowers in a horticultural show, - the upper classes at the top and the best-looking girls well in the centre, as if the product of their beauty as well as their study went to the credit of the institute. (74)

The institute definitely was intent on bragging with the beauty of their students. Their intelligence seems only to be a little addendum to their perfect behaviour and looks. It was clear that “a woman’s first duty [was] [...] to be beautiful.” (61) It is self-evident that a girl would never go to such a school in order to be able to earn a living. It is not even true that it was their choice to go there. A girl of four would be hardly able to make such a choice for herself. These young “belles” had commendably internalised that they studied for somebody else, for a husband they soon wanted to please. Marie’s only aim is to make her uncle proud with her efforts. This is also the reason why she is so devastated on the evening of the exhibition when Monsieur Motte does not come to take her home. “And her studies, had they been learned only for herself?” (105) There would be no future for her, if there was no man to take her home and care for her. Marie is all the more happy, when she finally meets her prince charming at the “*soirée* [...][,] the official gate of entrance into the great world of society” (181) Marie was so relieved to find out that it was not all in vain but for Charles. “And, Marcéline, all the time I was studying, I thought it was for my uncle; but I see now it was for Charles.” (292) This awareness finally turns her into a woman. Eventually, there is an end to school and an end to learning. The doors are opened for “dancing, music, beaux.” (54) The girls are now allowed to look for a good *parti* and Marie already found one. In the end, they apply their entire knowledge “experimenting with looks and smiles and winsome address; using their dangerous woman-eyes with childish hardihood” (206). All of the girls make sure to find a man who is worth their attention. The long school career should not have been in vain by choosing the wrong *parti*. This could be the day their childhood was over and the mysteries of married life might unfold before them. Eugénie perfectly sums up a woman’s chances in life by saying,

Yes, our lives are surprise-boxes to us women; we never know what is going to come out of them: our own plans, our own ideas count for nothing. Look at our schoolmates: not one turned out as she expected. Those who had a vocation to religious lives, who would be nothing but nuns, they were the first ones married and having children christened. Those who were ready to fall in love with every new tenor at the opera, they became *devotes*. Those who cared only for money fell in love with poor men; and those who made their lives a poem, with love for the hero, they, - they married for money. When we are old and *passées*, we get what would have made our youth divine. Men are the serious occupation, women are the playthings, of fate. (158-159)

This shows that even though women are educated only for marriage and childbirth, they are still able to choose their own way to some extent. Nevertheless, it is true that women's lives at this time were "surprise-boxes" and, depending on the man or career chosen, it was more or less likely that a woman became a real lady or only a poor outcast.

### 3.6. Class Differences

Grace King only slightly touches upon "racial, sexual, social, and economic conflicts" (Jones 117) but rather sticks to her major theme, namely the contrast between black and white women (99). In Chapter 3.7 a close look at the female roles shall be taken covering King's major theme. Nevertheless, the dichotomy between aristocracy and the black working class shall be examined as well.

#### 3.6.1. Aristocracy

As a matter of fact the author concentrated on the life of Creoles. Even though King herself was no pure blood Creole, she, nevertheless, puts an emphasis on these "descendants of European aristocrats" (Jones 99). Thus, in *Monsieur Motte* she in many ways describes her own life and, therefore, makes the story so comprehensible for the reader.

The main characters in the novel can all be considered upper-class citizens (apart from Marcéline). Madame Lareveillère and Monsieur Goupilleau, as well as Aurore Angely and her brother Félix all enjoy an elevated social standing.

Madame Lareveillère, who is the headmistress of the Institute St. Denis, "an aristocratic school for girls" (King *Monsieur Motte* 49), is the one whose job is to educate young "belles" to become a perfect lady. She is the woman who witnesses the opening of tender buds, the slow growth of innocent girls into the

female archetype of a lady. At St. Denis the next generation of an elite, who only has to choose an appropriate husband, is being educated.

What the results of such an education are may be seen in the characters of Madame Lareveillère and Aurore Angely. They were school mates and very close friends, so called "*amies de Coeur*"<sup>10</sup> (King *Monsieur Motte* 125). Both women were given the same chances in life, but they chose very different paths. Aurore never married and became the hard-working plantation mistress on the family's plantation under her brother's protection. Madame Lareveillère, as a contrast to this, married, was widowed, became head mistress of the Institute St. Denis and found her true love later in life in Monsieur Goupilleau. Even though Mademoiselle Aurore can be regarded as a rich woman, she is not part of the high society of New Orleans. As opposed to this, her school friend is at the centre of all events. As head mistress she is present at the girls' exhibition, and also at the soirée of Madame Fleurissant.

This evening, when the girls are introduced into society, serves as the perfect example of aristocratic life. The soirée was "the official gate of entrance into the great world of society" (182). A beautiful ball room was imposingly decorated with "[f]ield flowers, lilies of the valley, daisies, myosotis, and rosebuds" (182). The girls were dressed in their finest gowns and the most important people were invited to witness this spectacle and indulge in their ostentatious display of splendour. Even though many of the guests are quite in debt to Madame Montyon they pretend that their lives have not changed since before the war. Anne Goodwyn Jones aptly writes "King seems to envision a community that, although it recognizes the pragmatic necessity of material well-being, places other values above it, values that transcend race, class, and sex." (115) On the one hand, it is evident that the upper-class is not as rich as they used to be, but, on the other hand, they still feel "the need for the 'old' values of honor, love, and black-white community" (Jones 115). All of their problems might be the reason for their strong urge to marry off their daughters to some rich man. Madame Montyon's husband, for example, had only married her because she was a rich woman (King *Monsieur Motte* 273). Therefore, it is not possible for her to believe that her stepson Charles might want to marry a penniless girl like Marie. She wants him to go back to France and "marry a *partie*." (274) If he refuses,

---

<sup>10</sup> Friends deep within the heart

there is still the marriage contract that keeps him from losing money if the marriage is not successful. Aurore gives the reader her opinion on this matter,

Those marriage contracts, - they are all against the women, the poor women! That is the way with Eugénie there. Old Lareveillère made a marriage contract against her; she had nothing of her own, and all her life there he has held her. (King *Monsieur Motte* 312)

Madame Montyon's attitude towards this contract suddenly changes when it is clear that Marie is the rightful owner of the Motte plantation and that "[i]t is she who is too good for him, now" (324). With the words, "I am going to have an angel for a daughter-in-law" (324) she instantly changes her mind because of the knowledge of Marie's newly obtained wealth.

The upper-class of *Monsieur Motte*, thus, strongly sticks to their lifestyle before the Civil War. As a consequence, they have to understand that they are not rich slave-owners any more, but paid a high price by losing the war.

### 3.6.2. Black workers

After the war, the former slaves obtained freedom but were also confronted with a new struggle to find employment. Many planters, who were wealthy before the war, could afterwards not afford to pay their employees any more, which led to the migration of coloured people to cities, in the hope to find work there.<sup>11</sup>

Proof of the new possibilities for black people in *Monsieur Motte* can be found in Marcéliste's profession, even though her status may be presented with some artistic licence. In the story, she is a highly esteemed hairdresser of the elite in New Orleans, who did not only secretly pay for Marie's education but also managed to save a lot of money for her protégé. On Marie's wedding day Marcéliste presents the bride with a box full of gold dollars. "It is what I have saved for you, *Bébé!* – for your wedding day, - ever since you were born, ever since your maman gave you to me." (King *Monsieur Motte* 296) Grace King, thus, very impressively presents a quadroon who is respected among the white elite of New Orleans and is able to earn more than just a sufficient living, she even pays for a white girl and, to top it all, saves money for her wedding day. Having all this in mind, the author still wants this black woman to know her

---

<sup>11</sup> Also compare Chapter 2.3.1

place. Marcélite constantly worries about her skin colour, and what goes hand in hand with that, her social standing. This does not mean that she is not content with her situation, but she permanently fears that Marie could feel repelled by her. This becomes evident in the following passage when Marie does not instantly accept Marcélite's money, "You won't take it! You are going to refuse it! You despise it! You would rather go to the Montyons for money than take it from me! I know, I know, it's because I am black, it's because I am a negro!" (299) Even though Marcélite is like a mother to Marie, she still is black and Marie a white girl of the upper-class. It does not so much count how Marie thinks about this but the quadroon is convinced that she would never be good enough for the girl. This is also the reason why she cannot accept that Marie, after the first Chapter, when Monsieur Motte does not come to take her home, wants to go home with Marcélite. "Go with me! Go to my home! A white young lady like you go live with a nigger like me!" (100) Marcélite is completely shocked and would never humiliate Marie by letting her live with herself, a black woman, even though for Marie this would be perfectly fine regarding the circumstances. This means that even though Marcélite can provide for herself and Marie, she is still inferior to the white elite of New Orleans, only because she is black.

Nevertheless, her elevated standing among the black society is apparent on the Bel Angely plantation. "Between her and her people there was no good feeling; instead, the distrust of a class toward a superior member of it, and the disdain of an ascending member toward an inferior class." (137) Even though the narrator describes the workers on the plantation as "her people", they do not see her as one of them because Marcélite is a hairdresser and no field worker. She had found her own way in a big city like New Orleans. Thus, jealousy and resentment were the feelings that separated her from "her people".

The employees on the Bel Angely plantation are perfect examples of black workers in the novel. All of them are extremely hard working people, also women and children. The narrator characterises them by talking about their "savagely grace", their "soft sad eyes", and their "untamed desires of wild, free Nature" (113). They are intelligent but it is hard to ignore that they are wild in their behaviour. Even the "old women, the house dragons [...] send blood-curdling threats and promises after the children." (112) Nevertheless, the

narrator allows herself to reward them with the word “grace”, which gives them an outstanding, innate elegance coined by nature.

The men followed, aggressively masculine, heavy-limbed, slow of movement on their hampered, shod feet; wearing their clothes like harness; with unhandsome, chaotic faces, small eyes, and concealed natures. They watched the women with jealous interest, excluding them from their hilarity, and responding grudgingly and depreciatingly to their frank overtures. (113-114)

One could argue that there is some sexual tension between black men and women, but this seems rather irrelevant in this passage. The male workers are described with a focus on their physical dominance. They are “aggressively masculine” (113) but not considered handsome. However, all of them are happy and content with their work and enjoy the feeling of their tired bodies (114). Especially during the *roulaison* a strong tension can be felt among the workers. “It was the busy time of the year, and the anxious time too” (115). Everyone contributes to the success of the harvest and, thus, to the profit of the plantation. One of the Negros who always causes trouble is the “half-Indian, half-negro waif” (119) Gabi. He is one of Aurore’s favourites, because she “raised that child ever since he was a baby.” (157) Again it is easy to see that Grace King wants the reader to comprehend the relationship between the employer and the black worker. Aurore feels a strong connection to Gabi, because she wanted to “make a reasonable human being of him.” (157). Additionally, she even gives him a religious education, and “got all the children of the proper age in the quarters [...] [and] taught them the Catechism” (157). She really wants Gabi and the other children to have a chance. This is also the reason why she sends him for the mail, even though he is so ignorant as to leave the bag unguarded while he takes a long nap. He dropped it in the dirt and there the swine found it and tore it to pieces (121). This gives the reader the impression that he really does not care at all, even though Aurore instructed him so thoroughly before. As a result, the black society is deliberately portrayed in such a way, that the reader understands that a black person can also be very ungrateful. She was so proud that Gabi had “never missed church” and that he “had made such a good first communion last spring” (122) that she really wanted him to rise in Félix’ favour. Interestingly enough, Félix does not think

highly of Gabi. On the contrary, he would have driven him out of the plantation long ago if it was not for Aurore.

Not only Gabi, but also Stasie makes Aurore's life harder. The almost deaf servant constantly screams at her mistress because she cannot properly regulate her volume. "She screamed this beyond doubt of misunderstanding" (127). Aurore would love to replace her but somehow does not have the heart to do it. "If Stasie would only allow me to get a younger servant!", (164) Aurore complains when Stasie lets Goupilleau into the house without inquiring beforehand if he was a dangerous man.

The last situation where a difference in class between black and white is presented is Madame Fleurissant's soirée. The coloured lower-class citizens enter the ball room through "the back gate on the street in the rear." (184) These people are not invited but it is known that they could not be prevented from coming. They are "naturally considering their former intimate relations with the family" (184) and, therefore, think it is acceptable to attend the ball. Some of them wear "ante-emancipation costumes of flowered mousseline-de-laine gowns, black-silk aprons, and real bandana head-kerchiefs, [...] [and offered] volunteer service in the dressing room." (184) Also Nourrice, Charles' old nurse, comes with a purpose. She asks him for money because his step-mother Madame Montyon sold her without further support. All of the black people at the soirée come to earn money in any possible way, and some of them succeed. Nourrice is badly dressed and talks even worse, "His poor old Nourrice! His nigger! His dog! His Patate!" (232) She humiliates herself by calling herself dog, and *patate*, an idiot. In the same way as Marcélite is aware that she is *only* a black woman, Nourrice begs on her knees for support. In order to get what they want they even take aside their dignity and show that they know their place.

At all times people like Nourrice, Marcélite and the workers on the Bel Angely plantation are regarded as being inferior to white people. Even though there are differences in social standing among the blacks, they are always less valued than whites. Madame Montyon makes this clear by "bring[ing] white servants with her from Paris. She cannot stand the color!" (214)

### 3.7. Female Roles

“[...] [Grace King] imagine[s] a woman who is strong, independent, expressive, honest, intelligent, the mistress of her fate – and pose[s] her against foils who are puppets to fashion, to conventions, to men, even to religion.” (Jones 108) On the one hand, Grace King imagines strong, independent female characters who do not need a man to look after them. On the other hand, the cliché of the white lady who only lives to embody the perfect female stereotype stands as a contrast to this. Additionally, a “both conventionally and emotionally satisfying” (108) relationship to men is portrayed, giving the readership what they long for.

#### 3.7.1. Marcélide Gaulois

The black hairdresser definitely embodies the independent female role, but she is also in many respects a formidable black mammy. She is described by the narrator as being from

the African type, with a strong, sensuous expression, subdued but not obliterated. Her soft black eyes showed in their voluptuous depths intelligence and strength and protecting tenderness. Her stiff purple calico dress settled in defining folds about her portly limbs. A white kerchief was pinned over her untrammelled bosom; her large, full, supple waist was encircled by the strings of her apron, which were tied in a careful bow at her side. [...] Her smooth, round hands and taper fingers had been polished by constant friction with silken locks; her familiar, polite, gentle, servile manners were those contracted during a courtly life of dependent intimacy with superiors. (King *Monsieur Motte* 19-20)

Taylor asserts that “Marcélide is characterized largely in terms of her physical presence and her passionate sensuous relationship with the orphan Marie.” (Taylor 57) Indeed, King describes Marcélide with a focus on her race, for example by her “inferior, ‘grosser’ sexualized nature” (King *Monsieur Motte* 51) who only has a chance at her own happy ending because of her endless love for Marie. By mentioning her strong affections, King sets her apart from all the restrained ladies in the novel. “Her untamed African blood was in rebellion” (51), which again shows how passionate she is, in contrast to the other female characters in the story.

However, Marcélide enjoys a relatively high standing as a black woman in New Orleans and the elite of the city appreciate her for that. Even at Madame Fleurissant’s soirée she is recognised, “See that big, fat quadroon! That is

Marcélite Gaulois, the *coiffeuse*. She is the hairdresser for all the *haut ton*” (King *Monsieur Motte* 188), a term with which the young aristocratic girls are referred to. Marcélite has undoubtedly been working on her reputation because everyone would “recognise a hairdresser of the *élite*, while in New Orleans, in the *Quartier Créole*, there was hardly a man, woman, or child who did not call her by name [...]” (20) Jones aptly explains that King gave Marcélite the profession of a hairdresser on purpose. “[S]he is essential to the school’s students and faculty, showing where the real values of the school lie – appearance.” (Jones 100) It is embarrassing that no woman at the Institute of St. Denis is able to arrange their hair on their own. If Marcélite is not present for a day, pupils and female staff alike are desperate. Among others, Madame Lareveillère’s “hands had grown completely unaccustomed to the exercise of the comb and brush.” (King *Monsieur Motte* 67) The entire Institute has to go to the exhibition without having their hair done properly because the quadron did not appear. Regarding Marcélite’s position, she is not only the hairdresser of St. Denis, but also “the general *chargée d’affaires, confidente*<sup>12</sup>, messenger, and adviser of teachers and scholars.” (19) Nevertheless, Marcélite does not see how dependent the white ladies at the Insitut are on her. She idealises them because they are white (Elfenbein 101).

It is no wonder that the black workers on the Bel Angely plantation do not accept her as one of their own people. “Between her and her people there was no good feeling; instead, the distrust of a class toward a superior member of it, and the disdain of an ascending member toward an inferior class.” (King *Monsieur Motte* 137) Marcélite managed to get a reputable position in a society dominated by white ladies and gentlemen and this is a situation the black workers who formerly may have been slaves cannot understand. Even though her own mother was sold when she was a baby, Marcélite enjoyed staying in the home of the Mottes who took her in open-heartedly, and this may have changed her world view (99). Indeed, there was a chance for her to be more than a worker on a plantation, and by raising Marie Modeste Motte, and finally running from the plantation during the war, she was able to establish her own business. Additionally, the reader knows that Marcélite made a living by earning

---

<sup>12</sup> She is responsible for various affairs and the confidente

a considerable amount because she was able to pay for Marie's education and, furthermore, save a box of gold dollars for her wedding day (296).

Jones definitely has a point when she argues that not Marie, but Marcélite is the heroine of the story (Jones 109). Also Bush agrees that Marcélite is "elevated to the status of heroine." (Bush 61) Yet, she is the one "who, possessing all the qualities and more that are valued elsewhere in the story, whether by implication or assertion, is also irretrievably oppressed." (Jones 104) Additionally, Marcélite is the character who speaks with Grace King's authorial voice. As a consequence, Marcélite embodies many qualities Marie or Madame Lareveillère should show as ladies, but they oftentimes fail to do so. "Marcélite is strong, intelligent, independent, and self-supporting, fully capable of love (particularly maternal love), yet able to show her anger in astonishingly assertive ways." (104) Thus, Marcélite does not represent the type of the black woman, but "she represents in the extreme the condition of the white southern woman." (105) This means, that Marcélite has some traits of a lady that cannot be found in any other character in the novel. Additionally, she is probably the most modern woman in *Monsieur Motte* because she "could always manage her own affairs without the assistance of anyone." (42) Marcélite was able to care for herself and, to top it all, for a young "belle".

What is more, Marcélite is a real woman of action. Elfenbein sees her as a "vulgar, vital contrast to the mannerly, ordered, identical young ladies." (Elfenbein 95) Even though she is socially inferior, Marcélite is not afraid to speak her mind and stand up for herself. She, for example, decides to argue with Madame Montyon when she feels offended, even though it is highly inappropriate to talk to a white aristocratic woman in this way. "Madame is, perhaps, not satisfied; the insults of last night were, perhaps, not enough; Madame apparently does not mind duels; she would have one every day. Madame, perhaps, loves blood [...]" (King *Monsieur Motte* 255) Even though she is stopped by a gentleman, she is able to express her dissatisfaction with Madame Montyon. The reason why the girls at the Institut and also the teachers feel so comfortable around Marcélite is because she is "capable of expressing real emotion in a way that the girls are not." (Elfenbein 96) Marcélite is both a tender care-taker and a passionate woman. Even Madame Lareveillère realises that "Marcélite is more of a woman than Aurore." (King *Monsieur Motte* 166)

This does not necessarily make her more independent, but more womanly. Aurore is not the embodiment of a real lady. On the contrary, she is a perfect plantation mistress and, thus, Marcélite, who was working for the elite of New Orleans for a long time, has a greater feeling of how to behave as a woman than her. It also seems valid to assume that Marcélite is not very religious. "She longed to humiliate that meek Virgin Mother; and if the form on the crucifix had been alive she would have gloated over his blood and agony" (51) inserts the narrator. Marcélite also sincerely fears that Aurore could "persuade [Marie] [...] into a convent, will make a nun of her, - a nun!" (154) This shows that she has very maternal interests in Marie's future. Marie's whole education would be absolutely for nothing if she ended up in a convent.

Above all, one cannot imagine what a dreadful secret she had to keep from Marie. Elfenbein goes so far as to call it "Marcélite's noble suffering" (Elfenbein 97). All the time she knew that there was no Monsieur Motte who would take the young girl home. She could not bear to tell her that there was no one left whom she could call family, only Marcélite, her old nurse. "Were it not for her social inferiority as a quadroon she would of course be proud of her sacrifice to the child she reared with greater care and devotion than most white mothers would have done." (Bush 97) Even though it is possible for Marcélite and Marie to love each other like mother and daughter, the quadroon is always aware of the fact that she is socially inferior to Marie and, thus, not suitable to pay for her. Nevertheless, this lie was a huge risk for Marie and selfish from Marcélite's side as well. I agree with Taylor that Marcélite was nearly responsible for the loss of Marie's fortune (Taylor 55). If it was not for Monsieur Goupilleau who found out about Morris Frank to be the son of the Motte plantation's overseer, Marie would have been married and penniless.

All the events in the novel also make Marcélite seem a "deeply tragic figure" (57), for example, by the way she constantly humiliates herself by calling herself "nigger, nigger, nigger" (King *Monsieur Motte* 42). Her rigorous devotion to her protégé Marie makes her go to extremes. "She would kill herself, for the matter of that" (42), the narrator explains. Keeping her secret almost drives her insane when she realises that the last school year is about to finish and there will be nobody to take Marie home. "You know I would kill myself for you, *mon bébé*." (40) Marcélite, in her desperation, repeatedly declares her maternal love for

Marie. But she is also afraid that Marie would not be able to endure the truth. In a private conversation with Madame Lareveillère Marcélite sobs, “Madame, she will die! It will kill her! I knew it! I knew it that night! It will choke her heart to death.” (153) After Marie finds out that she has no uncle called Monsieur Motte, she is deeply upset and discouraged by the world. Marcélite tries to make it up to her by offering her stories about the old Motte plantation. However, Marie does not seem interested. Marcélite “[a]s if she were a dog, or a lying negro caught stealing, [...] crept away.” (153) The narrator strongly supports Marcélite’s character and makes the reader understand her immense distress. Nevertheless, her passionate nature constantly becomes visible.

The moment Marie finds out that Monsieur Motte does not exist Marcélite shows a different side of her personality. “The quadron, unmasked, stripped of disguise, had indeed lost her nerve and audacity. Her brave personation was over. As Marcélite, there was nothing to accomplish except the part of a faithful servant.” (105-106) The loss of her mask makes her vulnerable, as also Jones assesses (Jones 109). Thus, she is not able to oppose the vile housekeeper Jeanne any more. “Sneaking outside the gate! like an animal! like a thief! like a dog! Ha! I caught you well!” (King *Monsieur Motte* 94) All strength has left her body and she does not even care to defend herself against Jeanne. Her maternal heart, who loves Marie so desperately, seems broken.

Also later, when all matters are finally resolved and Morris Frank will continue to work on the Motte plantation, Marcélite falls to her knees and beseeches him, “Monsieur Morris, [...] let me work for you, let me be your slave – “ (325). Throughout the novel it is clear that Marcélite feels inferior to the white elite and especially this situation shows that she would rather go back to a state of complete dependence and restriction, namely slavery, than be without her Marie. In various situations Marcélite puts herself willingly on the bottom rung of the ladder. She would never allow a young “belle” like Marie to “go live with a nigger like [her]” (100), even though the girl understands that she has no uncle and no place to go. Marie loves Marcélite with all her heart and does not care about social or racial differences. Furthermore, the young “belle” will also, in the end, accept the gold dollars from her nurse, although she hesitates a second. This brief indecision makes Marcélite believe that Marie would not take her money because she is black. “I know, I know, it’s because I am black, it’s

because I am a negro!" (298) Again the quadroon assumes something nobody else would think of. Marie finally takes the gold dollars, deeply touched that the quadroon was saving such an amount of money for her.

At the end of the novel *Marcérite* is forgiven by everybody and it is proven that maternal love succeeds. It is not Madame Lareveillère who gives the bride away but *Marcérite*. Additionally, she will live with the couple on their plantation and, thus, have a home for the rest of her life.

Having this information in mind *Marcérite*, at first glance, seems like the perfect black mammy. In her physical appearance she fits the standard (also that she wears a calico dress), she is intelligent and extremely devoted to Marie. A black mammy usually was a diplomat on a plantation, which *Marcérite* definitely is. On a hierarchical ladder she is above other black women (and even men). Especially on the Bel Angely plantation this becomes evident. However, her profession does not really fit a black mammy's job. This mythic figure would never leave the family's household and work as a hairdresser. Here it is important to say that *Marcérite* used to be the perfect black mammy, but circumstances made her change her life and save her protégé. All in all, *Marcérite* is a highly complex character who incorporates qualities a white lady possesses, but she is also a devoted servant. Nevertheless, Jones argues that in the end "it is not class but race that keeps *Marcérite* an outsider" (Jones 100). Also Elfenbein adds that it is even directly mentioned in the novel that *Marcérite* and Jeanne, the housekeeper, are part of "a quarrel involving complex questions of the privileges of order and the distinctions of race" (17). At the beginning of the novel *Marcérite* wins the quarrel because she forces Jeanne to let her into the school building, but when the quadroon is later found by her and brought to Madame Lareveillère because she did not appear at the exhibition, Jeanne takes the chance to insult her and finally succeeds in degrading the black woman (Elfenbein 96).

### 3.7.2. Marie Modeste Motte

Prima facie, Marie Modeste Motte is the perfectly trained, submissive, amusing, pious and enchanting "belle".

She is being educated in a school for aristocratic girls in order to entertain a future husband. This attitude is burnt into her mind to such an extent that she

repeatedly worries if her studies “had been learned only for herself” (King *Monsieur Motte* 105) or if her uncle will be pleased by her efforts and prizes (35). When she finally meets Charles she understands that “[e]verything [...] [she] did was for Him.” (292) It is evident that what she has acquired at the Institute St. Denis does not aid her in becoming an independent woman who will take up a useful profession. On the contrary, Marie learns by heart “l’Histoire de France” (12) and how to behave properly.

The narrator spends more pages on Marie’s characterisation than on any one else’s. Extensively her “black eyes [that] were oversized for her face”, and her “masses of black hair whose heavy plaits burdened the delicate head and strained the slender neck” (27) are illustrated. Marie is only 17 and slowly grows into “the woman in the body of the child.” (28) A completely foreign world lies before her. “Romances and poetry had been kept from her like wine and spices.” (28) Remarkable about the young “belle” is also her pure innocence. Madame Lareveillère envies Marie, “Marie was young, Marie could have ideals, Marie could yet dream in the moonlight, unhidden by life and experience.” (142) Furthermore,

[s]he envied morbidly the pure spirituality which yet enveloped the young girl, her unspotted cleanliness of simplicity, her virgin ignorance of the quantities in the problem of life, her incapacity for calculation. There were surprises yet in store for her, there was still an unknown before her. Whatever misfortune had done to her, could do to her, her seventeen years had been protected and were flawless in their innocence. (142-143)

Nevertheless, a girl at that age grows curious for everything she was prevented from discovering, and the one thing all naïve, innocent “belles” strive for is love. All of them are looking forward to new experiences after their graduation. Especially Marie, who has been spending her life in this school since she was four, is full of hope that her uncle, Monsieur Motte, will take her home after the exhibition. Being an orphan the only relative she has left is Monsieur Motte whom she has never met.

Already her characterisation shows that Marie is a tender person who is fragile and rather weak. As Chapter 2.4.1 claims a “belle” has delicate nerves and indeed Marie is a highly emotional person who tends to exaggerate a lot. On the

brink of crying Marie sighs, "if my uncle did not come for me to-morrow evening, I would die." (38)

Undoubtedly, the young "belle" is the one character in the book the reader feels the most sympathy for. Thus, she is deserted and disappointed three times. The first time, by her parents, who died when she was just a baby. They were killed during the Civil War and Marcélite had to leave the plantation with her master's daughter in order to save her life. Taylor explains that "*Monsieur Motte* is organized around broken families, surrogate parenthood, adoptive relations, and orphanhood." (Taylor 53) This impressively proves that Grace King is a fictional realist who perfectly illustrates that the last War and Reconstruction period was a time when families were torn apart. Men went to war and left women who had to take care of their children alone. Orphans and widows were the consequence of such traumatising periods.

The second time, it was Monsieur Motte who let her down. This mysterious man who Marcélite only made up to construct the idea of a white relative who supports Marie, finally does not appear at the exhibition to take her home. At the end of the first Chapter, the young girl is the only "belle" who is left behind. Marie's hopes of a home are crushed. "[T]he child on the floor gave herself up to the full grief of a disappointment which was not childish in its bitterness." (King *Monsieur Motte* 78)

The third time, which is presumably the most hurtful experience for her, is when not only Monsieur Motte does not appear, but also Marcélite deserted her in her grief and desperation. Marie feels betrayed by her nurse, "Marcélite! Marcélite! [...] how could you? for you knew, you knew it all!" (79) At this day, her hopes are shattered, her dreams destroyed and she finally seems to be entirely alone in this terrifying world. "But for the future, - looking for it there was no future. Where it had been, the girl saw only a blank space, or a world thick with strangers, aliens." (104)

This is the moment when Marie begins her growth. I agree with Taylor that one of the major themes of the novel is change (Taylor 54). All female characters develop in very different ways and also Marie gradually transforms from simplicity to wisdom through her experience. Repeatedly the reader is reminded that "Marie will never be sound again" (King *Monsieur Motte* 109), she is "a woman now" (288) and that she changes "from girlhood to real young

ladyhood.” (89) All her disappointments, on the one hand, let her grow, but, on the other hand, also embitter her. Marie learns to wear a mask and pretends to be happy even though she is devastated on the inside. When Madame asks her how she feels, Marie only answers, “I, Madame? happy!” (149) She keeps her feelings to herself because “the important thing was not to cry, not to let them suspect. Oh, she had learned at school not to cry” (147). Again this shows that she is the perfect “belle”, who wallows silently in self-pity and tolerates everything with endless patience, as Chapter 2.4.1 informed. However, Elfenbein claims that the moment Marie starts to see herself as a white lady changes her relationship to Marcélite dramatically as “she now sees [her] as an inferior.” (Elfenbein 102) Additionally, Marie is still dependent on Marcélite from an emotional perspective, but “Marie has learned to be contemptuous of Marcélite.” (102) I personally strongly disagree with this argument, as Marie very much behaves as a daughter towards her mother. Of course, she must be disappointed and is well aware of the prejudices the white society has towards a quadroon who takes care of a white lady, but Marie herself would have lived with Marcélite and she loves her like a mother. I do not think the “belle” feels superior to her; on the contrary, she is still emotionally reliant on Marcélite.

Even though she cannot understand why she was chosen by God to end up as an orphan, Marie is highly religious. Already at St. Denis Marie “has never been anywhere except to church” (91), and especially Aurore’s Catholic influence encourages her spiritual development. The plantation mistress “had drawn Marie into the active routine of her religious exercises” (148) and seems to hope that she can guide Marie into a life of divine devotion, which is a source of Marcélite’s sorrow. The quadroon fears that Aurore “will make a nun of her, - a nun!” (154), which, in fact, does not seem likely to happen regarding Marie’s education. Nevertheless, Aurore was herself a young “belle” like Marie was, and she changed into a woman who behaves very much like a nun.

Turning to her racial attitude, no one could argue that she is racist when observing Marie’s interaction with black people. When the young “belle” finds out that her uncle does not exist, she wants to go home with Marcélite, ignoring the fact that she is a white aristocratic girl and Marcélite a black woman. Marcélite is the one who cannot stand the thought of a white girl living with a

black woman, and finally Madame Lareveillère and Monsieur Goupilleau offer to take care of Marie (100). Nevertheless, this shows that Marie has no prejudices against her nurse. Additionally, when the women visit Aurore on her plantation Marie is very interested in the black workers and talks to them a lot. This is not something she does out of duty, but “[f]rom the first day it had been natural for her to talk to the negroes, go into their little cabins, seek and respond to their confidences.” (137)

Her racial sensibility is definitely predicated on her relationship to Marcélite. This woman, regardless of her skin colour, is Marie’s mother figure. Even though Madame Lareveillère serves as a sort of second mother to her who come to her rescue when she was left alone at the school and promised to be a mother to her, she is not the one who finally leads Marie down the aisle when she marries Charles. Taylor argues that “Marie is obsessed with the blood relations she has never known, clinging to Marcélite only as a poor substitute for a real white mother” (54), which I do not agree with. Although Marie could embrace the opportunity to live with Madame Lareveillère and Monsieur Goupilleau, she eventually decides to forgive Marcélite and shows everyone who she thinks is worthy to be her mother arranging with Marcélite that she should give her away to Charles. “Ah, Marcélite, my uncle can never be as kind to me as you are. He gives me the money, but you-“ (33). This hints at the love that is so much more important. Marie’s original relationship to Marcélite, nevertheless, is a fragile one as it is partly built on lies. The fact that Marie has no uncle and Marcélite was the one who lied to her about this important information brings about a huge crisis for Marie.

However, having overcome all these dramatic experiences she finally gets her own happy ending. After the secret concerning Morris Frank is disclosed and Marie owns her parents’ plantation she can eventually be happy. Having been put under pressure by a vile marriage contract, “[i]t is she who is too good for him [(Charles)], now” (324). In the very last paragraph of the novel the narrator informs the reader that there was a happy ending for everyone. Even Morris Frank could call “[t]he old house he loved [...] still his home, - the home too of Marie Modeste, her husband, her children, and Marcélite.” (327) Nevertheless, it is important to admit that Marie not once in her life acted as an independent woman. The young lady was initially dependent on Marcélite and her uncle,

then on Eugénie and, finally, she will be dependent on Charles for her entire life. It is difficult to tell whether Marie would turn into a true lady or a devoted plantation mistress, but the information provided that she gave birth to children (the exact number is unknown) and her family had a happy life would make her both a formidable lady and plantation mistress. Her journey was a difficult one, full of disappointments and frustration, but in the end she grew into a lady who had found her true love and joy. I would argue that her tender personality more fits the image of the lady than the tough plantation mistress.

### 3.7.3. Eugénie Lareveillère

Eugénie Lareveillère, or Madame, as she is being called by the staff and the pupils at the Institute St. Denis, is the woman who comes closest to the definition of a lady.

Aurore Angely and Madame went to school together and, thus, both had the same base for the perfect life of a lady. Through Madame's thoughts, portrayed by the narrator, the reader finds out that "[t]he pretty, poor little blonde [(Eugénie)] and the pretty, rich little brunette [(Aurore)]" (King *Monsieur Motte* 132) were inseparable friends. "There was a period when their hearts had been as bare to each other as their faces" (125), but after leaving school they took different paths and did not see each other very frequently. Aurore became a passionate plantation mistress<sup>13</sup> and Eugénie married very early. The former made a step towards autonomy and the latter stayed dependent on a man.

It was not even Madame's decision to marry old Lareveillère. Her mother found the match suitable and did everything to make it work. "Eugénie had not been required to say even a word to her *fiancé* Lareveillère." (133) As it was common at that time, he was simply fascinated by her beauty "at the exhibition of her school." (133) It seems unbelievable that Madame once had been so blind and trusted her mother wholeheartedly without a second thought. This means that love was not the reason for this arrangement, it was a sense of duty. "There was nothing a woman could not do for duty, or religion; that made marriage so much more reasonable, so much less ridiculous, *enfin*<sup>14</sup>; but love!" (132) A marriage contract was arranged. At the end of the novel, Aurore Angely

---

<sup>13</sup> Also see Chapter 3.7.4 Aurore Angely

<sup>14</sup> Finally

comments on Marie's document, "Those marriage contracts, - they are all against the women, the poor women! That is the way with Eugénie there, Old Lareveillère made a marriage contract against her; she had nothing of her own, and all her life there he has held her." (312) Madame honestly tried to be a good wife. "How patiently she had labored with him after the stroke of paralysis confined him night and day to his house" (160). She wanted him to find salvation and to find his way back to God. Old Lareveillère was no religious person but for Eugénie it was important that he would donate money to some charity. "Whatever prospect of heaven the old French merchant now enjoyed, he owed it to Eugénie, and no one else." (161) Eugénie Lareveillère was a good wife, doing everything for her husband whom she did not really love. During this marriage she definitely behaved as the ideal lady.

When he died, she, on the one hand, prospered and found her own joy in the profession of a headmistress, but, on the other hand, she also kept bitterness in her heart. Thus, this rich, independent woman is being characterised by the narrator as having "the sweet, delicate face of Eugénie Lareveillère", and time "she had maintained her own [age] perfectly" (46). Madame is still good-looking, even though her blond curls faded into "old, gray, almost white" (48) hair that were covered by "transplanted exotics" (47) to keep her aging a secret as long as possible. As the headmistress of the Institute St. Denis she is an educated and intelligent woman who can even handle calculations (mathematics was not something men would think women were capable of doing). "No one but a schoolmistress knows the mental effort requisite for the working out of an equation" (45). Elfenbein convincingly states that "Madame Lareveillère [is] the model of feminine propriety and a fashion plate to the girls at St. Denis, [who] sacrifices her life to the appearances" (Elfenbein 98) that are so important. The headmistress' position only hides her insecurity. "Paid to direct the education of two hundred young girls, King's headmistress exemplifies the superficiality and inflexibility of the system. Even Madame Lareveillère can be seen to suffer from that system." (99) Her life seems full of challenges, having lost her husband, craving for the love of a child and longing for the love of a man who might not love her back.

After old Lareveillère's death she managed her life on her own; nevertheless, a cold bitterness remained<sup>15</sup>. During a conversation between Madame and Aurore the former remarks that "[w]hatever marriage is, it is least of all what a school-girl thinks." (King *Monsieur Motte* 135) She was certainly disappointed by her deceased husband and expected to find romantic love, or at least to be happy. For her, marriage was a long stony path to her husband's grave. It is no wonder that Madame thinks that "our lives are surprise-boxes to us women" (158) and they are "sold as bargains, - damaged goods. [...] I wonder if there is a sound woman in the world!" (108-109)

Usually, Madame stands up for her rights and she fights for people she loves. For instance, she does not accept the fact that Monsieur Motte deserts Marie at the exhibition and that Marcélite vanished. As a consequence, she wants to find the lost uncle. She would insist on him taking his niece home, "*Voilà la politique feminine.*"<sup>16</sup> (85) Elfenbein argues that the headmistress is unable "to handle this emergency" (Elfenbein 100) and relies on a man to take charge. I disagree because I think that Madame does not wait for a man to come to her rescue but she tries to manage her affairs alone. It is true that in the end Monsieur Goupilleau helps her to find out that Monsieur Motte does not exist, but Madame Lareveillère was willing to solve the problem on her own.

Even though she repeatedly mentions that men are all "égoïste" (King *Monsieur Motte* 56, 84) she still has a male friend who is precious to her because he often advises her in school-affairs. Monsieur Armand Goupilleau, the notary public, finally is the one who tells her to look at "a directory" (91). Madame does not even know what a directory is which shows that even though she does a good job running St. Denis, she is still a woman who occasionally needs a man's advice.

Additionally, Monsieur Goupilleau is not the only person she is dependent on. Women at that time obviously were not capable of arranging their hair on their own. Therefore, the quadroon Marcélite was responsible for Madame's and the *internes'* toilette (the boarders). When Marcélite does not show up, all the women are desperate. The narrator comments on Madame's situation, "Her hands had grown completely unaccustomed to the exercise of the comb and

---

<sup>15</sup> Also compare Jones *Tomorrow is Another Day*, p. 105

<sup>16</sup> Female politics (the female way of handling such situations)

brush.” (67) No one looks as splendid as they could have looked if Marcélite was there. These “belles” and ladies are completely helpless without the black woman.

One of the major characteristics of a real lady is that she marries and raises children. Madame has spent her entire life without having children of her own. The mostly independent lifestyle of a widow who runs a school does not really match a lady’s attitude.

Nevertheless, it is evident that Madame would like to be a mother. Before the exhibition she did not realise Marie’s presence a lot. However, she enquires about Monsieur Motte and asks Marcélite if he would reliably pick the girl up after the exhibition. During this conversation Madame praises Marcélite for her motherly efforts towards Marie. “A mother could not have been more devoted” and “that’s a thing money can never pay for, - love.” (52) After this splendid evening, Madame finds out that Marie was not collected by her uncle. She feels very sorry for Marie and is disappointed by Marcélite who acted like a mother for Marie but let her down in the most important moment of her early life. If Madame had only known that the young “belle” was still at the Institute she “would have helped her undress, and stayed with her, too; [she] [...] would have slept on the floor” (81). Those were the first tender feelings of Madame towards Marie. When Marcélite finally confesses that there is no Monsieur Motte, Monsieur Goupilleau and Madame decide to be a mother and father for the girl. “I shall protect her; I shall be a father to her - ‘And I’ said Madame [...] ‘I shall be her mother.’” (101) Elfenbein adds at this point that this is only “a superficial maternal gesture [...]” (Elfenbein 92) which I cannot judge as a reasonable statement. The headmistress is a woman who was deprived of her wish to become a mother and she now faces the chance to come close to it. The rest of the novel also shows that she takes serious her role as a foster mother and sees to Marie’s needs. Additionally, it is the quadroon who wanted her orphan girl to have a noble family and this was the moment when the two friends Madame Lareveillère and Monsieur Goupilleau step in and help out. Stereotypically, the father protects the young girl, even though Madame was the one who stood up for Marie’s rights. At this time, it would have been a scandal if an aristocratic girl had lived with a black woman. White upper-class parents were the more suitable choice. What is more, the headmistress takes her new

role as a mother very seriously. The narrator aptly mentions, “For she had a mother’s heart, if by an error of Nature she had never been a mother.” (King *Monsieur Motte* 265) When, at the end of the book, Marie marries Charles, Madame would have wished for Marie to ask her mother and father for their blessing, which she does not do. At first, Madame is disappointed but then she, of course, is happy for her girl.

Because Madame had been disappointed in marriage once, her friends cannot understand that she still believes in love. Madame thinks to herself, “But is a woman’s heart a thermometer to be regulated according to outside appearances?” (133) The heart wants, what it wants, independent of age and looks. However, she is aware of the fact that for a second chance at love she would be more careful. “The first time you go into it blind; the second, ha! with microscopes over the eyes!” (134) As a matter of fact, Madame has found a person who might be a potential husband. Armand Goupilleau, her trusted advisor at the Institute St. Denis, is the man who is always there for her when she needs help. Publicly she claims to feel for him like a child to her father and she even introduces him to Aurore as a father figure (165). This is what Elfenbein claims to be proof of Madame Lareveillère’s insincerity. The author thinks that she “discovered in Marie’s need for a mother a convenient excuse to betroth herself to the déclassé Monsieur Goupilleau.” (Elfenbein 106) In my opinion, Madame Lareveillère only wanted to do the right thing and was not willing to let Marie down. Of course, it was convenient that it brought her closer to her secret love, but, as a reader, I did not once feel that the headmistress felt superior to the notary and that this was the reason why it took them so long to confess their feelings. She might as well have been hesitant because she did not want to lose her independence again.

Indeed, Madame Lareveillère’s feelings cannot be feigned, as a sensitive reader can guess early that there is a potential romance in development. Every touch they exchange, every hasty glance seems very special to them. The narrator informs the reader, “The first recognition; the first expression of a fifteen years’ secret affection!” (King *Monsieur Motte* 93), when Madame holds on to Monsieur Goupilleau’s arm. He even sometimes tries to be bold and flirt with Madame. When she talks about how women are “damaged goods” (108), Goupilleau answers, “God knows best; when he wishes to put the finishing, the

perfecting touch to a woman, he simply sends her in youth some misfortune. It is his way; and I for one [...] have nothing to criticise [sic], seeing the results.” (109) The reader knows through the narrator that the words were meant for Madame because he was looking at her, but Madame does not realise. Only when Goupilleau visits Aurore’s plantation and finds out that his billet-doux never arrived because of Gabi’s inability to deliver the mail, he pours out his heart to Eugénie Lareveillère and proposes. The scene is full of love and affection and, of course, Madame consents (169). It is a huge step for the headmistress to marry for love, not for duty. “*Mon ami*, it is not so; do not believe it: it is not duty, Armand.” (171)

Even though the reader is touched that Madame finally finds love it is clear that this means for her to lose a tremendous amount of independence. Madame Joubert wanted to buy Madame’s interests in the Institute St. Denis (167). In a conversation between Madame and Aurore it becomes evident that Madame will indeed give St. Denis to Madame Joubert and live with her husband (174). At the end of Madame Lareveillère’s story, she thus finds back to her role as a true woman and marries the love of her life. Together they move to Royal Street (near St. Louis) and plan to take care of Marie. This picture would resemble the ideal family life of a lady, having a husband and child and no profession to distract her from her household duties. However, Marie marries and never really lives with her step-father and –mother. After all, there could be no better happy ending for Madame.

#### 3.7.4. Aurore Angely

Madame’s good friend, Aurore Angely serves as an almost completely flawless example of a plantation mistress. What is more, she is the character most comparable to Grace King herself. Both were hardworking women and never married. They chose a rather emancipated path for themselves without being dependent on male guidance. Even though Grace King speaks through Marcélide, it may very well be that the author lent some of her qualities to Aurore Angely. The narrator describes Aurore as a “stern, hardworking Catholic and plantation manager” (Taylor 52) who “runs Bel Angely with her brother Félix.” (Jones 110)

As we learned in Chapter 2.4.2 the ideal plantation mistress shares many characteristics with the lady. Both roles were given the same education which becomes evident when looking at Aurore and, for example, Eugénie Lareveillère, who went to school together. When Aurore was a young “belle” she was very popular and envied for her looks. She could have had everything a “belle” wanted, but she decided differently.

Now, economical Nature seemed stealthily recalling one by one charms which had proved a useless, unprofitable investment; flattening her chest, straightening her curves, prosaicising her eyes, diluting her voice; in short, despoiling the handmaiden of Saint Catherine almost beyond the recognition of her dearest friend. The little heart that once bounded so frankly forward toward orange blossoms was being led by religion now away from mirrors, adornments, fripperies, and follies of the flesh, away from Madame Lareveillère, away from herself, down an austere path rugged with artificial vicissitudes, where a crucifix and Golgotha replaced the rose-winged vision of youth, and hope offered the extinction in place of the gratification of desire. (King *Monsieur Motte* 126-127)

This description conveys a very negative image of Aurore’s chosen life. It seems that the narrator cannot understand why a woman with such a potential would choose to merely become a plantation mistress and, additionally, devote her life to God, not to a husband. What is more, Aurore has lost her social contacts, especially Madame Lareveillère. For Aurore it would have been easy to have a prosperous life with a wealthy man, but somehow she did not want to embrace her options and stayed with her brother on the family’s plantation. The reader is not informed whether Aurore’s parents had chosen for her, or whether she had decided independently, to live a life in relative solitude. However, she seems content the way things turned out for her and she realised that her beauty was useless for plantation life<sup>17</sup>. During a long conversation between the two women Madame Lareveillère argues that “our lives are surprise-boxes to us women; we never know what is going to come out of them: [...] Men are the serious occupation, women are the playthings, of fate.” (King *Monsieur Motte* 158-159) Aurore agrees with her and adds, “Ah, yes, men are more fortunate. [...] There is something sure, something stable in a man’s life.” (159) Nobody could have ever guessed that Aurore would never become a mother or wife, but

---

<sup>17</sup> Also compare Taylor’s *Gender, Race and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin* (1989), p. 58

a spinster and plantation mistress. A man can simply choose his way; a woman never knows exactly what her life will turn out to be. Nevertheless, I would argue that Aurore is not a woman who waits until her fate takes its course but she insisted to stay unmarried and is happy with her decision.

She has chosen religion over children and autonomy over domestic confinement. Indeed, Aurore is well aware that the field of marriage is rather alien to her. "It is hard for me to understand, - one like me, who never has been married at all; the maiden lady raised her hands" (174). With a rather ironic tone the narrator informs the reader that Aurore decided to be a virgin for life. It seems that religion is Aurore's major support.

I get very much discouraged with life, I assure you; it takes a great deal of religion to enable us women to support it. It is so full of contradictions, - useless contradictions. I sometimes wish that there were no more hopes given us. They are no better than toy balloons; they dance before us very beautifully for a time, then *crac!* they burst and we are left *plantées* there until we get another one. I do not complain, it is against my religion; but if you knew how many hopes I have seen go to pieces that way! (156)

Aurore begins to open herself to Eugénie again, tells her about her hopes and worries. The plantation mistress definitely has a good heart. As a good Catholic and a benevolent woman by nature, she raised Gabi and put so much effort in his religious education. What is more, she also tried to teach the Catechism to the other children on the plantation (157). Another indication that Aurore is certainly happy with the life of a spinster (and may like to win others for her way) is that she tries to "draw[...] Marie into the active routine of her religious exercises. Masses, confessions, communions, retreats, penances, novenas, fastings [...]" (148) because she realises that Marie is very unhappy with her situation. This seems to be the way Aurore plans to aid the girl. In fact, Aurore is happy with her independent lifestyle, so why should religious devotion not enrich Marie's existence as well? She is convinced that

those women, who, renouncing with fortitude the pleasure of sex and youth, forsake the world and consecrate themselves to the perfect vocation of perpetual virginity and prayer, thus preparing their souls for those beatitudes in a future life reserved solely for the pure and undefined. (149)

Aurore's obsession with religion and her ardent devotion to the Lord may be the only characteristics that seem exceptional in a plantation mistress. Even though this role may have a religious dimension, the plantation mistress would normally be a married woman (or very often the widow of a plantation owner). A woman with a fulfilled life without being a mother is very uncommon in this society and often critically looked upon by other ladies. The same way as Grace King, Aurore Angely stays with her family, her brother Félix, and never looks out for a good *parti*.

Aurore is completely occupied with her vast domestic duties involving herself as the contact person for complaints. For instance, when Gabi is sent for the mail and brings back a bundle of destroyed letters, Aurore has to worry about it. Indeed, this accident is sure to cause a problem, as one letter of importance is lost, namely Monsieur Goupilleau's in which he confesses his feelings for Madame Lareveillère. The narrator, thus, ironically demonstrates Aurore's state of feelings, "Mademoiselle Aurore and her never-ceasing theme of plantation crises." (141) It is not surprising that Aurore takes over the entire plantation when her brother cannot move because of sciatica.

During the war it was common even for a woman to handle an entire plantation (even though Félix gives a lot of instructions). When their husbands went to war they often sent home information how to deal with certain matters. Félix' inability to work leads to Aurore's being in charge.

All of her duties demonstrate that she has a strong connection to her staff and the workers. The fact that she feels the urge to teach her worker's children the Catechism shows that she has a tender heart and religious conviction. Hence, a plantation mistress leads an industrious life but has no chance to ever leave her property. This means that her only option to see company is to invite friends. Indeed, it is a very welcome distraction for Aurore when Madame Lareveillère, Marie and Marcélite visit the plantation. Additionally, the strong family ties of a plantation mistress can be found in *Monsieur Motte*. Even though Aurore is extremely annoyed by Félix' reliance on Rousseau and Voltaire (160), she loves him dearly. Nevertheless, he is the only living relation we know about. Here the unequal education of men and women becomes evident. Félix knows a lot about Voltaire and Rousseau whereas Aurore has found her love for God.

In Chapter 2.4.2 great feasts on grand plantations were mentioned that can also be found in the plot of this novel. Aurore insists on celebrating Eugénie's and Armand's wedding on the Bel Angely plantation. "*Chérie*, you must remain here too, you must be married from Bel Angely, - from the home of your oldest, best friends, with your old sister Aurore to wait on you, to love you to the last-" (176). This is the moment when Aurore and Eugénie's friendship is revived. After all this time of separation they call each other by their former nick names "Ninie" and "Titite" (176) and the narrator concludes, "It was worth so much difference, so many differences, - the reconciliation; the crossing over from such a separation in their natures to meet again as they had started in life, heart open to heart, tongue garrulous to tongue, all revealed, understood, nothing concealed, - absolutely nothing." (177) Holding Eugénie's wedding on the plantation can strengthen their friendship and drives them into each other's arms again. It cannot be ignored that Aurore has missed her friend terribly and she even says rather early in the story, "If I only had a friend, an adviser; ah! a woman ought never to be without one, - two in fact." (132) Aurore easily warms towards other women and enjoys their company on the usually rarely visited plantation.

Finally, during their honeymoon somebody has to look after Marie and who would be more fitting than Aurore who has already started to educate Marie religiously? "Eugénie! How can you doubt it? How can you ask?", Aurore asks with feigned shock. Of course her dearest friend will take care of Eugénie's charge and, thus, finally experiences what it would be like to have a daughter. In conclusion, Aurore is an independent woman but still under the protection of her brother. She is highly religious and has a big heart which shows itself in her contacts with people. Her tender heart aids everyone who needs help although she never experienced the love of a husband or a child.

#### **4. At Fault**

The next chapters are concerned with Kate Chopin's first novel *At Fault*. A major focus again will lie on the female roles of four selected characters. In order to make the analysis graspable for every reader a plot summary offers some guidance. Also, the contrast between rural and urban life, as well as the

differences between an upper class society and the black workers (on the plantation) shall be given.

#### 4.1. Plot Summary

“*At Fault* opens in 1885, three years after the railroad had come to Natchitoches” (Ewell 31). When her husband deceases, the Creole Thérèse Lafirme becomes the sole owner of the cotton plantation Place-du-Bois, which is located on the borders of Lac du Bois and the Cane River near Natchitoches. One day, a gentleman, David Hosmer, comes “with a moneyed offer for the privilege of cutting timber from her land for a given number of years.” (Chopin 10) After obtaining Mrs. Lafirme’s consent, David, who also brings his sister Melicent, moves to Place-du-Bois.

One year later, as the narrator informs the reader, the business is running splendidly and Melicent is in love with Grégoire, Mrs. Lafirme’s nephew. However, for Melicent it is clear that their love is only a game and nothing stable because they come from different worlds (she is from St. Louis). Thérèse observes a picture of a young boy in Mr. Hosmer’s possession, whereupon Hosmer only tells her that the boy was very dear to him and is now dead. Later Melicent divulges that Hosmer had been married once but left his wife Fanny, who was an alcoholic. Mrs. Lafirme who is secretly in love with Hosmer and vice versa, cannot resist discussing this matter with him and she finds out that the young boy from the picture was his and Fanny’s son, who died at the age of three. Being a strict Catholic Thérèse advises him to take his wife back because this would be the morally adequate thing to do. After proclaiming his love for Thérèse, he consents to do as he is told heavy-heartedly.

In September, Hosmer visits St. Louis and decides to marry his former wife Fanny again. Belle Worthington and Lou Dawson, Fanny’s friends, are appalled that David takes Fanny away from the city and back to Place-du-Bois. Fanny is very unhappy at the plantation and meets old Morico, an old black worker, whom she visits repeatedly to get hold of some liquor. Furthermore, Mrs. Lafirme is very polite towards Fanny and wants to support her in any way possible but it is inevitable that Hosmer’s wife starts getting jealous towards her. One night, a terrible succession of events leads to the death of two people. Joçint, old Morico’s son, who also works on the plantation, sets fire to the

sawmill and the boy dies. Everyone suspects Grégoire of having killed Joçint but this is never fully confirmed. To top it all, old Morico is shocked to such an extent that he dies holding his son in his arms. No one is sincerely sorry about Joçint's death as he was a lazy fellow who did not respect his co-workers or even Mrs. Lafirme. Only Melicent cannot accept that Grégoire was a murderer. When she leaves the plantation to go back to St. Louis, she refuses to talk to Grégoire and does not even say goodbye. Melicent is devastated when later Hosmer's letter reaches her in St. Louis to announce that Grégoire is also dead. Meanwhile, Thérèse invites Fanny's friends Belle Worthington and Lou Dawson to bring her some joy. Belle Worthington offers to take Fanny back to St. Louis with her for some time, which Hosmer admits to be a good idea. His wife starts a terrible quarrel because she thinks that he only wants to be alone with Thérèse. Hosmer, completely out of his mind, threatens to kill her and leaves the house. When he returns his wife is absent and he searches the plantation for her. A huge storm is raging while Thérèse and Hosmer are looking for Fanny. Finally, they find her at Marie Louise's (Thérèse's old nurse) house. The little cabin is located on the banks of the river and all of a sudden, it breaks down into the flood of water. Hosmer jumps into the river and tries to rescue Fanny.

In the next chapter, Thérèse is thinking back to this terrible day in March, one year before when Fanny died and Hosmer was rescued. After this terrible accident Thérèse and Hosmer do not see each other for one year. Thérèse travels a lot and finally meets him again on the train back home. One month later they are married.

#### 4.2. Language and Narration

Kate Chopin's first novel *At Fault* was first published in 1890 and is written in two parts<sup>18</sup>, "reading more like a series of the sketches in which Chopin specialized than a full-length novel." (Taylor 167). The storyline is more concerned with moral questions than with matters of race or the female representation. It is set in post-bellum Louisiana on a cotton plantation located on the banks of the Cane River. This novel shows

---

<sup>18</sup> The first part comprises 12 chapters, and the second part 17 chapters [on 166 pages]

Chopin's early capacity to experiment with regional material and conventional Local Color techniques. [...] *At Fault* is a romance with gothic motifs, a conspiracy subplot, and a melodramatic resolution. Its black and French Acadian characters are superstitious and simpleminded, speakers of a largely quaint and comic dialect. (Taylor 166)

Indeed, Chopin proves that she knew the people of this area well. Thus, she introduces French names, like Thérèse Lafirme, Jérôme or Grégoire and also extensively makes use of their regional dialect, "Mistuss, [...] I 'lowed 'twar best to come to de house an' tell you; fur Massa he alluz did say 'Hi'urm, I counts on you to keep a eye open endurin' my appersunce;' you ricollic, marm?" (Chopin 7) The language truly is remarkable as not only dialect is used frequently, but also French expressions add to Chopin's reliance as a Local Color writer. Marie Louise and old Morico, for example, use French, "Tenez madame; goutez un peu: ça va vous faire du bien<sup>19</sup> [...]" (94). In many cases, it is only mentioned that the characters talk in French or the reader is offered a direct translation. "Non – non, Tite maîtresse, Marie Louise 'prè créver icite avé tous son butin, si faut' (no, no, Tite maîtresse, Marie Louise will die here with all her belongings if it must be)." (90)

A third person omniscient narrator frequently comments on the events, "Need the misery of that one day be told?" (68) Remarkable is also the closure of the novel, when the narrator ends the story with the words, "Can that be Hosmer? Is this Thérèse? Fie, fie. It is time we were leaving them." (166) It is not hard to identify that the narrator rather ironically comments on the events and also looks upon some characters with a sarcastic tone, for example the ladies from St. Louis who only live for their amusements or Melicent because of her extraordinary dress-code.

Additionally, intertextual elements can be found as well, for example "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (18) or "Ruskin's Miscellanies" (18) and texts by "Schopenhauer" (55) are referred to.

Finally, a word about the title has to be said. *At Fault* already shows the focus of the story, namely moral issues and not the racial or social situation. The title is concerned with Thérèse's and Hosmer's love story. Thus, Fanny makes clear that "He's got no faults to give up. David never did have any faults. He's a true,

---

<sup>19</sup> "Take this, Madame, try a sip: this will be good for you."

honest man” (84). As a contrast to this, Thérèse, the devote Catholic, who wants to set things straight again by recommending that David Hosmer should take his wife back, only makes things worse. At the end of the story she even admits, “I have seen myself at fault in following what seemed the only right. I feel as if there were no way to turn for the truth.” (162)

Chopin’s choice of language, especially the conversations in French and Louisiana dialect, and her picturesque depiction of the land lead to the conclusion that Kate Chopin, even though she did not live in this area for long, is a remarkable example of a Louisiana fictional realist.

### 4.3. The Plantation – Place du Bois

In a very similar way as Grace King shows the contrast between rural and urban life, Kate Chopin also presents two entirely different worlds in *At Fault*. The novel “is [...] characteristic of her general regional style” and is more concerned with “daily life and the people of the peninsula.” (Taylor 174)

Already the position of the characters shows that there are clear tendencies in each of them towards the city or the countryside. Madame Thérèse Lafirme is the owner of the plantation Place-du-Bois and lives there with her nephew Grégoire Santien, “whose duty on the plantation was comprehended in doing as he was bid, qualified by a propensity for doing as he liked” (Chopin 8). David Hosmer, who originally lived in St. Louis with his wife Fanny, takes a particular liking towards the countryside, which stands in stark contrast to Fanny’s feeling. The diverse attitudes of the characters “emphasize the differences between the modern, city couple<sup>20</sup> and the old, rural order<sup>21</sup>. Chopin’s sympathies are clear: the vulgarity of the St. Louisans may be the future, but the grace of the Louisianians is a casualty to be regretted.” (Ewell 36) Mrs. Lafirme’s friends, the planter family Duplan, are contrasted with Mrs. Hosmer’s friends, Belle Worthington and Lou Dawson who live in St. Louis and would never set foot on a plantation if it was not only for a visit. Finally, Melicent Hosmer quite enjoys the farm life as long as she is not bored.

The “Louisiana plantation [Place-du-Bois] stretched along Cane River, meeting the water when that stream was at its highest, with a thick growth of cotton-

---

<sup>20</sup> The Worthingtons and Dawsons

<sup>21</sup> The Duplans

wood trees [...] – rich in its exhaustless powers of reproduction.” (Chopin 8) Mrs. Lafirme’s plantation where “cotton and corn” (8) is produced successfully, is home to many black workers (and servants). After Thérèse’s husband Jérôme died, the plantation mistress took over “four thousand acres” (7) and had to win the respect of a vast number of black workers. She also faced many changes, for example the new railroad that crosses her land, forced her to “seek another domicile.” (8). For this lady it was clear that “modern architectural innovations” (8) had no place at Place-du-Bois because she “clung to the simplicity of large rooms and broad verandas: a style whose merits had stood the test of easy-going and comfort-loving generations.” (8) From the main house she was able to see the “negro quarters” and

to view her surrounding possessions with comfortable satisfaction. Then her gaze swept from cabin to cabin; from patch to patch; up to the pine-capped hills, and down to the station which squatted a brown and ugly intruder within her fair domain. (8)

This description already shows that Thérèse Lafirme was not amused by the building of the railway; it only stained the perfect view from her house. “She pictured a visionary troop of evils coming in the wake of the railroad” (8).

The author vividly describes the surroundings of the plantation mistress’ house. “Looking through the wide open back doors, the picture which she saw was a section of the perfect lawn that encircled the house for an acre around” (Chopin 9). Generally, the atmosphere on the plantation can be regarded as very peaceful. Also Helen Taylor remarks that “Northerners are seen as crass and grasping, while the plantation is on the whole harmonious, fiercely community-spirited, and unmaterialistic.” (Taylor 166) Hosmer, for instance, enjoys “the soothing quiet” (Chopin 102). Frequent descriptions of nature support this feeling of harmony.

Outside, the moisture was dripping from the glistening magnolia leaves and from the pointed polished leaves of the live-oaks, and the sun that had come out with intense suddenness was drawing it steaming from the shingled roof-tops. (137)

Even Belle Worthington thinks that the countryside will be good for Fanny as “the climate down there’ll be the very thing to bring her<sup>22</sup> round.” (65)

Furthermore, the workers seem friendly and content. In the evenings one could “hear[...] the scraping of Nathan’s violin, the noise of shuffling feet and unconstrained laughter.” (91)

However, Hosmer is aware that people who live in St. Louis would not be content on a plantation because sometimes it can be very lonesome. “I live in the country where there are no distractions such as you ladies call amusements – and I work pretty hard.” (65) There is always the possibility to visit Natchitoches to go for a drink, but this is not adequate amusement for a lady. Very enjoyable distractions from the hard life of a plantation worker (or even a plantation mistress) are visits from friends, like Belle Worthington or the family Duplan. This also offers convenient opportunities to discuss the harvest. “Conversation had never once flagged with these good friends; for, aside from much neighbourhood gossip to be told and listened to, there was the always fertile topic of ‘crops’ to be discussed” (129).

To sum it up, Place-du-Bois seems to be the home of many people, black and white, who work hard and live in harmony. Everyone knows his/her place and enjoys the luxury of an affectionate community.

#### 4.4. Life in St. Louis

Whereas in *Monsieur Motte* Grace King deals with the situation after the Civil War and addresses the Reconstruction and the changed situation of people in the South, Kate Chopin does not touch upon this topic directly. The reader can only guess that the characters are confronted with the aftermath of the Civil War because it is mentioned that many people lost their relatives. For example Melicent explains to Mrs. Lafirme that “[she] was only ten when both [her] [...] parents died.” (Chopin 32) Also Grégoire’s “father died, fo’ years ago” (18) and Thérèse herself is a “widow of five years’ standing” (31). At first glance, no one would think that the Civil War has already taken place but some innovations (the railroad etc.) are addressed, which makes it possible to define when the story is set. Kate Chopin, thus, shows that this was a time of change. By writing

---

<sup>22</sup> Fanny

about the railroad, the sawmill and many other innovations<sup>23</sup> she gives some insight into the atmosphere of this era. “This turbulent clash of two cultures – the agricultural South of the past and the industrialized, urban North of the future – is accented throughout the novel. [...] Place-du-Bois and its environs move slowly, still more a part of nature than of civilization.” (Ewell 34-35)

It seems that people in St. Louis lead a luxurious life. When David Hosmer goes back to the city to propose to Fanny again a few descriptions of the surroundings are given.

Women and children from the near and rich country towns, in for the Exposition and their fall shopping; wearing gowns of ultra fashionable tendencies; leaving in their toilets nothing to expediency; taking no chances of so much as a ribbon or a look set in disaccordance with the book. (47)

Everyone presumably knows how to dress according to the event. A “newly married couple [...] with their new attire and newer jewelry” (48) are enjoying their time, and David Hosmer also comes across “some noticeable changes since he had last been there. Formerly, it had been rather a quiet street, with a leisurely horse car” (48) passing by. “But now the cable had come to disturb its long repose, adding in the office, nothing to its attractiveness.” (48) Furthermore, it seems to be fashionable now to live in “brand new pressed-brick ‘flats’” (48) and not in a house.

It is remarkable about this man that he used to live in St. Louis his entire life but now enjoys staying on Mrs. Lafirme’s plantation. Thus, Thérèse inquires, “I don’t understand that. It’s natural enough that I should be fond of the country; but you – I don’t believe you’ve been away for three months, have you? and city life certainly has its attractions.” (26) However, these attractions are not to Hosmer’s liking. He was always thinking that Fanny did not seek proper company in St. Louis.

It wasn’t long before she attempted to draw me into what she called society[.] [...] I am little versed in defining shades of distinction between classes, but I had seen from the beginning that Fanny’s associates were

---

<sup>23</sup> Also in the city there are the St. Louis Exposition (most likely 1886) or the new trend of buying flats

not of the best social rank by any means. I had vaguely expected her to turn from them, I suppose, when she married. (Chopin 38)

Unfortunately, Fanny did not turn her back on these people and became an alcoholic. It is remarkable that after the Civil War the WCTU<sup>24</sup> wanted to reduce alcoholism among men, but in this novel alcoholism among women is important. One could argue that the city was responsible for Fanny's addiction, which Jones confirms<sup>25</sup>. "Fanny is carefully developed as the passive product of a pernicious environment, suggesting that Thérèse could be right and that a change of place could help." (Jones 138) However, the reader learns that the country life does not improve her situation. It only encourages her habits by giving her the opportunity to drink at Morico's. Nevertheless, Fanny is a city-character who only sticks to her routine, but nobody else is mentioned to drink excessively. Only Hosmer smokes a cigar occasionally (and more often when he brings Fanny to the plantation).

What is more, the characters who live in the city seek and need their amusements, as especially the ladies have already "develop[ed] into finished and professional time-killers." (Chopin 55) They spend a lot of time on finding the perfect attire and adjusting hairpieces or dyeing their hair in order to look their best when they are going out. "If a theatre party were not on hand, it was a spin out to Forest park behind a fast team, closing with a wine supper at a roadside restaurant. Or a card party would be hastily gathered" (56).

No real townsfolk would ever like to live in the countryside. Nevertheless, for Thérèse it was no problem to adjust to her new surroundings after she had married Jérôme Lafirme. The plantation mistress was living in New Orleans before her marriage but quickly got used to farm life with her husband. As a contrast to this, Fanny was not able to find any joy in the countryside. She even complains before seeing Place-du-Bois the first time, "Oh, I don't like the South." (50) On her first day she cannot stand her new home at all, "Oh it's so lonesome, and dreadful, I don't believe I can stand it" (74).

When Belle Worthington hears that Fanny will live in the countryside, she adds to the dilemma knowing that only a city would satisfy her, "It's to be hoped in New Orleans, [...] that's the only decent place in Louisiana where a person

---

<sup>24</sup> "Woman's Christian Temperance Union", also see Chapter 2.3.4

<sup>25</sup> Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936. (1981)

could live.” (64) Mrs. Worthington herself “ain’t going to mix with Creoles. She can’t talk French if she wanted to.” (149). Nevertheless, she ventures a visit to Place-du-Bois and manages to make herself understood, even though she only speaks English (which is no problem for Thérèse, as she speaks both French and English). Afterwards Belle Worthington states in a letter “[t]hat Mrs. Lafirme’s a trump” (165). Even though she sees herself as part of the upper-class society, her language does not fit her probably self-appointed status, “Oh, they weren’t my company, or I’d a give ‘em a piece of my mind pretty quick. You know they’re married, and they know you’re married, and they hadn’t a bit o’ business there.” (57) This shows that her moral judgement stands in clear contrast to Lou Dawson’s, who enjoys flirting with Bert Rodney. This is referred to again on the last page of the novel when the reader finds out that Lou Dawson cheated on her husband with Bert Rodney, whom she earlier claimed to be a “perfect gentlem[a]n” (57).

Toth sums it up perfectly, “She [(Chopin)] presents St. Louis as cold and gray, and Louisiana as light and warm [...]. Louisiana was a bright memory, and in *At Fault*, it appears as a place of happiness, hospitality, romance and humor.” (Toth 113) All the disgraceful and possibly even revolting behaviour of the inhabitants of St. Louis, like alcoholism, smoking in public, cheating and the like, stands in clear contrast to the life on the plantation Place-du-Bois where a focus lies on harmony and benevolence among the workers and those in charge.

#### 4.5. Class Differences

Both Grace King’s *Monsieur Motte* and Kate Chopin’s *At Fault* portray a hierarchical society. After the Civil War the aristocracy was decimated significantly, slavery was abolished and, as a consequence, former slaves had to find work<sup>26</sup>. *At Fault* shows the dichotomy between a black working class and white, rich people but also demonstrates that those two worlds may merge with each other and that plantation life particularly leads (potentially) to harmony between black and white human beings.

---

<sup>26</sup> Also see Chapter 2.3.2

#### 4.5.1. Aristocracy

*At Fault's* focus lies not on the class situation and does not address the dichotomy between rich and poor directly. Instead, it “was the first American novel to present a nonmoralizing view of divorce, an issue of growing concern [...]. Although the American divorce rate surged after the Civil War, almost quadrupling by 1900, genteel authors passed over this topic [...].” (Elfenbein 122) Chopin spotted the gap and decided to attend to this issue. “Chopin’s attack on the ‘moral conventionalities’ about marriage, motherhood, and sex made her an exception in American literature of the turn of the century.” (123) Only secondarily and if one digs deeper a few remarks by the narrator or certain characters slightly touch upon the chasm between those who were born into an upper-class family and those who own next to nothing. The author does not present the situation in the South as straightforwardly as *Grace King* does. Only occasionally does a character speak about the past. Grégoire, for example, tells Melicent how he came to his aunt’s plantation,

You see w'en father died, fo' years ago, mother she went back to France, t'her folks there; she never could stan' this country – an' lef' us boys to manage the place. Hec, he took charge the firs' year an' run it in debt. Placide an' me did'n' have no betta luck the naxt year. Then the creditors come up from New Orleans an' took holt. That's the time I packed my duds an' lef'. (Chopin 18)

One can only assume that Grégoire’s father may have died fighting in the war. Most likely their plantation was affected by the Civil War’s aftermath, and his family was not able to run the place successfully any more. It is no wonder that “Grégoire’s departure [was] keenly felt among certain belles of upper Red River.” (16) The way he behaves around Melicent shows that he is a true gentleman. “He carried her shawl and parasol; she herself bearing a veritable armful of flowers, leaves, red berried sprigs, a tangle of richest color.” (85) The narrator explains that Grégoire “[f]eel[s] himself her equal in the aristocracy of blood, and her master in the knowledge and strength of loving” (80). Nevertheless, Melicent, even though she is in love with him, does not see him as a *parti*. He is still not good enough for her. The major reason for this was not that his family name was not worth adopting; Melicent simply could not feel comfortable with the fact “that she should marry a man whose eccentricity of

speech would certainly not adapt itself to the requirements of polite society.” (44) This means that she was annoyed by his way of speaking.

Melicent herself is a young “American lady” (24) who is “free from the weight of responsibilities” (15). The reader is informed by Fanny that the young “belle” loves to flirt, and Grégoire confirms that “she knows they ain’t anybody born, good enough for her” (110).

Fitting their status, the ladies in this novel all know how to dress and they always seem to look stunning. Many descriptions are reserved for the illustration of marvellous beauty. Belle Worthington, for example, is a lady who seems to attract attention a lot, with her loud and blunt way of speech, and her exaggerated way of dressing.

Her husband, “a gentleman employed for many years past in the custom house” (55) lived with her in a flat and he was absorbed in “his precious books: a small hoard of which he had collected at some cost and more self-denial.” (55) It seems likely that he had enjoyed the kind of education that brings a man closer to philosophy, as he was interested, for example, in Schopenhauer. He also took a particular liking to religion and especially the “Christian religion.” (67) Not only Mr. Worthington, but also their daughter Lucilla is pious and is “going to be a religious.” (127) Having time for books, philosophy and religion is rather characteristic for the upper class.

When looking at Thérèse Lafirme, who definitely is a rich “childless Creole widow of thirty” (7), she has strong Catholic beliefs. She is a beautiful woman from a well-respected family who married a wealthy plantation owner, Jérôme Lafirme. Therefore, after his death, she had to take care of the plantation and, thus, is a woman of authority. Underlining her status, Melicent remarks, “she’s positively a queen.” (30)

Every upper-class citizen in this book knows how to speak adequately (apart from Belle Worthington). Their language differs tremendously from the dialect of the black workers. Everyone on the plantation speaks French (and some also English).

In order to make their life easier, servants take care of their needs. There is a cook on the plantation and many black servants who light the fire or clean the house. Thérèse even apologises for not being able to spare more than one servant for Fanny, even though she managed quite splendidly with one at her

house in St. Louis. What is more, Thérèse brought her own nanny from New Orleans to the plantation, the only person who accompanied her. Marie Louise only shows that Thérèse's parents were rich enough to afford a nanny.

Oftentimes, upper-class people in this novel do not know what to do with their free time and are frequently bored. "Melicent was plainly dejected; not troubled, nor sad, only dejected, and very much bored" (142). In order to make herself busy she decided to buy a new flat and "install[ed] that delightful old poverty-stricken English woman as keeper of Proprieties" (143) when she moved back to St. Louis. At the plantation, the possibilities for distraction are rather limited. Sometimes friends visit and they play cards. When the incompatible families Duplan and Worthington meet, "Thérèse with her pretty Creole tact was not long in bringing these seemingly incongruent elements into some degree of harmony." (130) The women were richly dressed and also Mr. Duplan is mentioned to be "courteous and rather lordly" (130).

When living on a plantation occasional visits to the city are obligatory in order to get some distraction. Especially Melicent loves to travel. Her usually rather boring life in St. Louis is thankfully interrupted by Hosmer's invitation to Place-du-Bois. She has lived with friends after leaving school and, at the end of the novel, decides to travel around with Mrs. Griesmann who wants to educate Melicent in Natural History. "[W]e're going to take that magnificent trip through the West – the Yosemite and so forth. It appears the flora of California is especially interesting" (165). Also Thérèse needs a change of scenery after Fanny's death. She goes to New Orleans and Paris.

What is remarkable about the character of the upper class people in this novel is that they feel not too good to keep company with black people. They often party or spend the evening with the workers and dance to their music. Grégoire even wants them to drink with him in a pub, which is strongly forbidden.

Even though the white characters sometimes like to surround themselves with their servants, many do not really care a lot about the deaths of their workers (at least one does not read about it). Joçint's, Marie Louise's and Morico's deaths do not seem to concern the rest of the plantation. When Joçint sets fire to the mill and, as a consequence, is killed by Grégoire, Taylor states that "Grégoire's murder of an unarmed arsonist is accepted by the community without further question." (Taylor 170)

Having said all this, it is clear that Kate Chopin did not want to put an emphasis on the difference between the life of the upper class and the black workers, but she describes her protagonists in such a way that they are plausible to the reader. The rich (male) characters in the novel all have a job and somehow have to work to afford their luxurious lifestyle; their inheritance does not provide enough money for them. The ladies enjoy various amusements, from dinner parties to travelling, depending on whether they live in the city or in the countryside. Nevertheless, what all of them seek no matter how rich they are, is love. As a matter of fact you do not have to be rich to find something that is called “a royal love; a generous love and a rich one in its revelation” (163), as Mr. Hosmer and Mrs. Lafirme do.

#### 4.5.2. Black Workers

On a plantation like Place-du-Bois, where cotton and corn are the main products, the help of black workers is needed in order to cultivate the fields, to pick cotton and perform similar duties.

There were patches of the field before them, white with bursting cotton which scores of negroes, men, women and children were dexterously picking and thrusting into great bags that hung from their shoulders and dragged beside them on the ground; no machine having yet been found to surpass the sufficiency of five human fingers for wrenching the cotton from its tenacious hold. Elsewhere, there were squads ‘pulling fodder’ from the dry corn stalks; hot and distasteful work enough. (Chopin 42)

No matter how many innovations the human mind might bring forth, the hand of a black worker will always be needed; at least this is what this passage says. The novel shows that Kate Chopin was a woman who “accepted the colored people as persons worthy of serious study, and that she in her writing treats them as people and with little condescension.” (Seyersted 79) Taylor talks about the same point,

Throughout the novel, black servants and white creoles and Acadians are conceived as part of the Cane River community which, especially within the Place-du-Bois plantation, is one happy extended family. The blacks are simple, loyal, superstitious, and supportive to their white employer/mistress (Taylor 168).

Indeed, the reader gets the feeling that Thérèse and her workers get along splendidly and everyone feels very comfortable and at home. Occasionally, the back veranda of the plantation mistress' house is the scene of grand parties. Everyone is laughing, "two young negroes from the lower quarters – famous dancers – were keeping time in marvellous shuffling and pigeon-wings; twisting their supple joints into astonishing contortions and the sweat rolling from their black visages." (Chopin 91) Nathan is playing the violin and "[a] crowd of darkies" (91) is having a good time. Even Melicent and Grégoire are part of this wonderful event, which shows that not only blacks are welcome in their middle but also white Creoles.

Indeed, Thérèse respects the customs and rites of her black workers, for example "Tous-saint' eve – w'en the dead git out o' their graves an' walk about? You wouldn't ketch a nigga out o' his cabin tonight afta dark to save his soul." (95) What also speaks for itself is the fact that Chopin reserved one entire chapter<sup>27</sup> for a conversation between Uncle Hiram, Aunt Belindy and Betsy (all three are black). They are talking about Grégoire who "forces a store-owner to serve drinks to black and white at the same counter" (Seyersted 80), which already hints at his reception of equality between the races. Nevertheless, Pierson is well aware that "dey knows Grégor gwine fo'ce 'em drink; dey knows Chartrand gwine make It hot fu' 'em art'ards ef dey does." (Chopin 116) This means, that it would not be good for the black pub visitors to accept Grégoire's offer because the owner would not accept this privilege.

Apart from Kate Chopin's good intention of writing a novel with a positive attitude towards blacks, Seyersted further argues that she had a very limited and idealised view of this community (Seyersted 79). When Joçint burns down the sawmill, this deed is justified as "an act of vengeance against the modern machines rather than their owners." (79) The half Indian boy is very upset about the new sawmill on the plantation and holds Thérèse responsible for it. His father forces him to work there, even though he would love to spend his time in the woods. Joçint does not see any other option than to burn the mill down.

This black boy is the only coloured person in the novel who attracts negative attention. When Thérèse visits old Morico, Joçint is also present. The plantation mistress usually sends chickens and eggs through the youth to his father to

---

<sup>27</sup> Chapter VIII. "With Loose Rein"

allow him some nutritious food. Morico complains, “Joçint is a bad son, madame, when even you have been able to do nothing with him.” (Chopin 24) When Thérèse tries to talk to the boy he only answers, “Well, I got no chance me, fu’ go fine nuttin in de ‘oods’ (woods)<sup>28</sup>, he answered purposely in English, to annoy his father who did not understand the language.” (25) The boy does not only disrespect his father, but also Thérèse, which is even worse.

It is very interesting that fitting this conversation, Marie Louise, Thérèse’s old, black nurse, urges her to “make those lazy niggers work more. You spoil them.” (90) Sometimes the reader gets the impression that this might be true. The black workers are taking many liberties, for example Sampson, who is taking a day off, and Major helps out for one day.

What is also worth a remark are Fanny’s frequent visits to old Morico to get hold of some alcohol. It seems that most of the white characters in this novel have a good relationship to at least one black person. For Fanny this is definitely old Morico, even though they are not able to talk to each other. Every time Fanny is having a “glass of ‘toddy’” (94) she is in a good mood and even laughs, which is rather uncommon for her.

Finally, a very peculiar attitude towards their master is natural to all the black servants and workers. “Thérèse soon enlightened her<sup>29</sup> with the information that the negroes were very averse to working for Northern people whose speech, manners, and attitude towards themselves were unfamiliar.” (Chopin 20) Even though Thérèse is a woman, her roots lie in New Orleans, which makes her acceptable as a boss. What is more, she also pays them very well. However, at the end of the novel, when Thérèse marries David Hosmer, things change, as Taylor remarks. “Marrying a northerner means that when David imitates the dialect Mandy normally uses to announce supper, Thérèse laughs with him at the girl’s speech [...]” (Taylor 169) Taylor is right in her observation that on the last pages of the novel the black characters take up a minor part and are hardly mentioned. This is intended to “restore[...] social order and a racial harmony that depends on the speechlessness of the black community.” (169)

Additionally, even though Chopin overly seems to care about the black community on the plantation, it is interesting that she does not even talk about

---

<sup>28</sup> Translation by the author

<sup>29</sup> Melicent

Marie Louise's condition after her house slid down into the river. Fanny's death is mentioned, but the reader is never informed about Marie Louise's state of health. One can only assume that she is dead, which is astonishing as this stereotypical black mammy<sup>30</sup> was Thérèse's nanny.

Furthermore, when Joçint perishes, only old Morico is devastated and he dies from the shock holding the dead boy in his arms. Especially the black workers share the same view and think that "Joçint [...] [was] only properly served in getting 'w'at he done ben lookin' fu' dis long time.'" (Chopin 108) Also Joçint's murderer "Grégoire was rather looked upon as a clever instrument in the Lord's service" (108). This assessment means that I do not agree with Seyersted's comment above who thinks that Chopin idealised the black community and did not see negative traits in them. I would argue that especially the deaths of these people show that she is aware of the fact that at this time the decease of a black person was not discussed or seen as an irreplaceable loss. "[...] Joçint's death is pronounced to be a moral lesson for blacks; Tante Louise's drowning goes unremarked." (Taylor 171) While the black community loses three members (Joçint, Marie Louise and Morico) without any drama, the white aristocracy deeply mourns for Grégoire. In the end, "[t]he white lovers marry, restore order, and ensure symbolic national peace and mutual understanding" (Taylor 171).

#### 4.6. Female Roles

Ewell clarifies that "a major motif of *At Fault* was marriage and the challenges it faced in the late nineteenth century." (Ewell 29-30) Thus, it is no wonder that Kate Chopin, very much like Grace King, developed diverse female characters, who mirror the change of the role of women in the Reconstruction period. "The female characters, for example, display most of the different possible roles into which Chopin envisions women moving as they become less secure in the traditional view that 'the woman's place is in the home.'" (P. Skaggs 73) *At Fault* shows that a woman is not restricted entirely to the domestic sphere any more, but has the chance to fulfil herself and to gradually extend her limits. Hence, the author presents "the incurable coquette, the virtuous widow, the rejected suitor who quickly degenerates, the deserted wife, the repentant husband; alcoholism,

---

<sup>30</sup> Compare Chapter 2.4.3

moral and religious dilemmas, self-sacrifice, even, at least tentatively, divorce.” (Ewell 30) Having this in mind, I will match the female roles presented in Chapter 2.4<sup>31</sup> with four selected female characters and explain my choices.

#### 4.6.1. Thérèse Lafirme

Against the notion of some critics<sup>32</sup> the heroine of the story is not Fanny Larimore but Thérèse Lafirme. Also, it is not the former who is at fault, but the latter who accomplishes a transformation of her attitude and finally manages to be with her true love (Toth 118-119).

Thérèse Lafirme is “a handsome, inconsolable, childless Creole widow of thirty” (Chopin 7) who resembles Kate Chopin a lot. When Thérèse’s husband, dies he leaves her with “a plantation of four thousand acres” (7). Indeed, not only Thérèse Lafirme loses her husband and now is a “widow of five years’ standing” (31) (which means she is 35 years old at the time the story is set), but also the author’s husband, Oscar Chopin, died and left her with a huge plantation (Jones 137).

Thérèse is the epitome of a plantation mistress. Being a hard-working business woman, she “successfully followed the methods of her departed husband.” (Chopin 7) Thus, she accomplishes to earn the respect of the workers on the plantation even though she is *only* a woman. Her position as the mistress of the plantation can certainly not be questioned. Even other characters, like Melicent, notice, “Mrs. Lafirme is exceptional. Really, when she stands at the end of the veranda, giving orders to those darkies, her face a little flushed, she is positively a queen.” (30) Melicent even goes further in saying, “[T]hat woman is an angel. She’s simply the most perfect creature I ever knew.” (30) Also the narrator adds to Thérèse’s attitude as a business woman, “To shirk any serious duties of life would have been entirely foreign to Thérèse’s methods or even instincts.” (87) Hence, the plantation mistress is used to be respected and is rather confused when a person behaves as Mr. Rufe Jimson does when he brings the news of Grégoire’s death, “He spoke to Thérèse as he might have spoken to one of her black servants” (138). Also, Belle Worthington with her extroverted,

---

31 The lady, belle, plantation mistress and black mammy, ...

32 For further information, see the extract with reference to “the Natchitoches *Enterprise*, edited by Phanor Breazeale’s brother Hopkins Payne (‘Hop’). The review, signed ‘Flora,’ was full of misspellings and typographical errors” (Toth 118)

unconcerned nature makes her nervous to such an extent that she even “pricked her finger with her needle till the blood came” (126). Additionally, “Joçint’s surreptitious defiance of authority” (23) is not comprehensible for Thérèse. All these examples show that “Mrs. Lafirme [is] a clever enough business woman” (10) who expects to be treated as befits her position. Indeed, when she is absent for a year after Fanny’s death “[t]hings had not gone well at Place-du-Bois” (160). Her talent of organisation and keeping an eye on everything definitely influences the success of the plantation.

What is more, she is a very traditional woman with high moral standards who is used to get what she wants. When the railroad and the saw mill are established on the plantation Thérèse is not amused at all because it forces her to change the location of the main house. However,

[s]he had made pouting resistance to this change at first, opposing it step by step with a conservatism that yielded only to the resistless. She pictured a visionary troop of evils coming in the wake of the railroad, which, in her eyes no conceivable benefits could mitigate. The occasional tramp, she foresaw as an army; and the travellers whom chance deposited at the store that adjoined the station, she dreaded as an endless procession of intruders forcing themselves upon her privacy. (Chopin 8)

She loves her home and she wants to keep the South as she knows it. When Thérèse travels, she is always “eager to be home again. She loved Place-du-Bois with a love that was real” (160). Ewell agrees, “Certainly Thérèse, in her orderly domain and old-fashioned house, views change as unwelcome but inevitable.” (Ewell 33) Even though Thérèse would love to keep things as they used to be, she knows that time changes and also a woman like her has to accept certain innovations that make life easier.

Regarding her high moral standards, she certainly is “no individualist” (Chopin12) but knows that sometimes you have to sacrifice yourself for a higher good.

Thérèse required certain conduct from others, but she was willing to further its accomplishment by personal efforts, even sacrifices – that could leave no doubt of the pure unselfishness of her motive. There was hardly a soul at Place-du-Bois who had not felt the force of her will and yielded to its gentle influence. (Chopin 23)

Peggy Skaggs mentions that “[a]ny person who thinks she knows all the answers to life’s complexities may cause others to suffer, no matter how grand her intentions, and Thérèse certainly feels confident of her own answers.” (P. Skaggs 77) Even her nephew Grégoire states that “they ain’t no betta woman in the worl’ than Aunt Thérèse, w’en you do like she wants.” (Chopin 18) Thus, it is, on the one hand, kind of her to take so much interest in protecting the people she loves, but, on the other hand, she interferes in other people’s affairs when they neither ask for it nor want it. “The whole of Part One illustrates her admirably successful attempts to secure this moral order by fulfilling her responsibilities as chatelaine.” (Ewell 37)

There are various people mentioned in the story who enjoyed or suffered from her caring but intrusive nature. Marie Louise, for instance, seems to like her little cabin located far from the main house, but Thérèse is worried for her old, black nurse and suggests moving her to the main residence. The plantation mistress argues that if someday something happens to Marie Louise, she would not be able to help her. “– and what am I going to do then? – no one to nurse me when I am sick – no one to scold me – nobody to love me.” (Chopin 90) Even though Thérèse leads this conversation with emotional emphasis, Marie Louise insists on keeping things as they used to be. She only reminds Thérèse that she should “[m]ake those lazy niggers work more. You spoil them.” (90) As a matter of fact the Creole lady cares for her workers and looks after many things herself; maybe she sometimes puts too much on her own shoulders. Being very watchful she always wants to make sure that everyone knows what to do and how to do it. “Thérèse looks as she acts – the complete woman who knows who she is, what she wants, and where she belongs.” (Skaggs 75)

Also old Morico enjoys special treatment from Thérèse. Regularly she pays him a visit and sends him supplies. As a reaction to her tender care he is usually “trembling with excitement at her visit” (Chopin 24). Sometimes “Thérèse remained a while longer with the old man, hearing sympathetically the long drawn story of his troubles, and cheering him as no one else in the world was able to do” (25). He seems to be very grateful for her attention.

Furthermore, even Fanny benefits from Thérèse’s generosity. Hosmer’s wife, who is addicted to alcohol and, as a consequence, not able to take care of her household duties, is supported by the plantation mistress when Belle

Worthington's visit is nearing. Thérèse, showing a presence of mind, sends David Hosmer away and starts cleaning up the mess. Under the influence of alcohol Fanny could not help but "sit and gaze stupidly at Thérèse, who busied herself in bringing the confusion of the sitting-room into some order." (Chopin 121-122) Later, when David comes home, "[t]he room was as he had pictured it; order restored and the fire blazing brightly. On the table was a pot of hot tea and a tempting little supper laid." (122) Indeed, Thérèse is not only a capable business woman, but also a splendid housewife.

Her nephew Grégoire is also a person whom she feels responsible for. This is the reason why she is sceptical about his relationship to Melicent, "I hope that your heart is not too deep in this folly." (81) Of course, it is far too late for admonitions like this as Grégoire is already deeply in love with Melicent. When she finally decides to leave Place-du-Bois for St. Louis and refuses to talk to Grégoire, the Creole man asks his aunt to help him. Thérèse responds, "Oh, Grégoire, I see so much trouble around me; so many sad mistakes, and I feel so powerless to right them; as if my hands were tied." (110) Nevertheless, she tries to persuade Melicent to talk to him, which she refuses. Her words show that not everything she touches falls into place. Even Thérèse cannot help everyone, and she is painfully aware of it.

This leads to the last person she wants to help in this novel, David Hosmer. When Melicent reveals that David is divorced and not a widower, Thérèse urges him to take back his former wife. Even though she promises that she "shall not misjudge [him]" (38) she, after hearing his story, admits that she had "nothing to say except what would give [him] [...] pain." (39) She goes on,

I have learned one thing through your story, which appears very plain to me [...]. You married a woman of weak character. You furnished her with every means to increase that weakness, and shut her out absolutely from your life and yourself from hers. You left her then as practically without moral support as you have certainly done now, in deserting her. It was the act of a coward. (Chopin 39)

Her cruel words and lack of understanding force him to do as he is told, but not because he wants it. "What ever I do, must be because you want it; because I love you." (40) Peggy Skaggs also finds, "This assessment of the Hosmer's marital problems, essentially accurate though it is, reveals Thérèse's own

egotism as well as her self-righteousness. And her egotism leads her to believe that she can, by applying a moralistic formula, prescribe solutions to everyone's problems." (P. Skaggs 77) What is more, a typical plantation mistress would be submissive and would only give advice if she was asked for it. Even then, no proper lady would ever talk to a man like this. Thérèse certainly is a self-confident woman who does not have to bow to a man's wishes. She reprimands him as if he was a child, and his reaction is accordingly, "So I've been a good boy; have done as my mistress bade me and now I'm to receive a condescending little pat on the head – and of course must say thank you." (Chopin 98)

Thérèse's decision has terrible consequences. Probably for the first time in her life she is not sure if she did the right thing. "[R]eligion doesn't influence my reason in this. [...] [E]ven at the price of happiness." (37) Thus, the problem lies not with her religion, but with her high moral principles. These moral principles are so important to her that she would even make personal sacrifices in order to live up to her own expectations. Ewell adds that "community and right order are the highest good, sometimes requiring the sacrifice of the self." (Ewell 40) Her own pride and stubbornness lie in the way of her happiness. Indeed, Thérèse possesses a "native pride" (Chopin 33) and she usually wants to be consistent in her actions. Being too stubborn and unable to depart from her high moral standards endangers not only her own joy but also leads to Fanny's death and nearly to Hosmer's destruction.

However, Thérèse later starts to question the quality of her advice.

She first took exception with herself for that constant interference in the concerns of other people. Might not this propensity be carried too far at times? Did the good accruing counterbalance the personal discomfort into which she was often driven by her own agency? What reason had she to know that a policy of non-interference in the affairs of others might not after all be the judicious one? (89)

The plantation mistress sees the pain in his face and is aware of the torment he must endure. When she comes to David's and Fanny's house to show Fanny the branch from a rose-tree she is shocked at the picture before her. The disorder in the room, David's new habit of "smoking one cigar after another" (120) and the general atmosphere make her speechless.

[...] Thérèse at once relapsed into the gloomy train of reflections that had occupied her since the day she had seen with her bodily eyes something of the wretched life that she had brought upon the man she loved. [...] She tried to convince herself that a very insistent sting of remorse which she felt, came from selfishness – from the pain that her own heart suffered in the knowledge of Hosmer's unhappiness. She was not callous enough to quiet her soul with the balm of having intended the best. She continued to ask herself only 'was I right?' (126-127)

"Thérèse too learns the limitations of her desire to do what is right." (Ewell 42) Not everything is always black and white; some situations in life force you to choose a grey path. Thérèse should have never prompted David to go back to his wife again. This led to incredible misery for all three people involved. Only at the very end, when Fanny dies and David almost loses his life, and after a year of traveling to New Orleans and Paris is she sure that what she did was wrong. When she meets David on the train back to Place-du-Bois she confesses,

I have seen myself at fault in following what seemed the only right. I feel as if there were no way to turn for the truth. Old supports appear to be giving way beneath me. They were so secure before. It commenced, you remember – oh, you know when it must have begun. But do you think, David, that it's right we should find our happiness out of that past of pain and sin and trouble? (Chopin 162)

It is clear that "Thérèse effects a change within herself. She acknowledges at last that she cannot solve everyone's problems and that only her own egotism has led her to believe she can." (P. Skaggs 77) David only assures her, "Together, dear one, we will work it out" (Chopin 162); and they certainly do so. The narrator concludes, "Through love they had sought each other, and now the fulfilment of that love had brought more than tenfold its promise to both. It was a royal love; a generous love and a rich one in its revelation." (163) Thérèse and David decide to keep their familiar duties, her being the plantation mistress and him being the manager of the saw mill. When the plantation mistress suggests that David could bring himself more in concerning the plantation, he wisely answers,

'No, no, Madame Thérèse,' he laughed, 'I'll not rob you of your occupation. I'll put no bungling hand into your concerns. I know a sound

piece of timber when I see it; but I should hardly be able to tell a sample of Sea Island cotton from the veriest low middling.’ (164)

David is aware of the fact that his wife will always be the boss on the plantation and that she has earned her position. Thus, he will, in return, stay in his business also, where he knows he belongs.

Additionally, life changes tremendously for David. Before, he was tied to a wife who made him terribly unhappy and did not even fulfil her household duties. With Thérèse he has found a woman who awaits him with “delightful Creole dishes” (164), and he even leaves work earlier because he cannot wait to see his wife. “This woman so wholesome, so fair and strong; so un-American as to be not ashamed to show tenderness and sympathy with eye and lip” (83) finally makes David feel at home. Every aspect of this woman conveys understanding and empathy, even her bodily appearance.

Without a doubt, she is the most lady-like person in this novel who also deeply cares for her fellow human beings. She is always watchful and makes sure that everyone is content. Whenever there are visitors on the plantation “Thérèse with her pretty Creole tact was not long in bringing these seemingly incongruent elements into some degree of harmony” (130), as it was with the families Duplan and Worthington. Belle Worthington once mentions towards Fanny that “it’d of took an angel to stand him<sup>33</sup>” (84) and an angel Thérèse truly is. Her “manners and actions, like her appearance, enhance her feminine appeal. Kind, warm, gracious, sincerely interested in other peoples’ problems, this woman exercises an almost irresistible charm.” (P. Skaggs 76) Even though she does not know when she should rather leave people to manage their affairs alone, she always has good intentions.

Indeed, Thérèse is the woman who “satisfies her need for love, place, and autonomy [more] than any other woman in the novel.” (P. Skaggs 77) She is not only a person who, in the end, finds out more about herself and figures that her shortcomings were the reason for some very negative developments in other people’s lives, but she is also able to keep her independence and position on the plantation. Being simultaneously a business woman and also the perfect housewife who does not only take care of her husband’s but also of her whole plantation’s needs, she possesses some essential traits of the ideal plantation

---

<sup>33</sup> David Hosmer

mistress. Yet, she is a headstrong woman who dares to oppose men (but they accept it). What is more, Thérèse is more concerned with the management of her plantation than with being a mother. Indeed, she has no children and does not seem to miss something. All the same, she remarkably takes care of the people around her, especially her husband and does so with infinite patience.

#### 4.6.2. Melicent Hosmer

Melicent Hosmer, sister of David Hosmer, is the one character that comes closest to what a “belle” resembles. She was born into a well-respected house, is an adventure-seeking young woman and constantly looking for the perfect match. However, Melicent is too old for being a “belle” (“I am twenty-four, so he<sup>34</sup> of course is thirty-nine.” (Chopin 32)), and not at all humble, quiet and submissive enough.

Living in St. Louis, the early death of her parents makes her dependent on her older brother David. “[...] I was only ten when both my parents died. We had no kindred living in the West, and I positively rebelled against being separated from David; so you see he’s had the care of me for a good many years.” (32) Thus, David has always been responsible for the girl. As a consequence, Melicent has a very close relationship to her brother, and she genuinely “loved him blindly” (15), also because he makes sure that she is “perfectly independent.” (32-33) Regarding financial affairs she is more than willing to keep her nose out of them. It only occurs to her once that David might have financial problems. But “Melicent would not burden herself with the suspicion. It was far more agreeable to believe that affairs were shaping themselves according to her wishes [...]” (41)

Melicent is a person who is light-hearted and good-humoured and when she “looks at the world laughing, she wants it to laugh back at her” (85).

Her resemblance to Hosmer ended with height and slenderness of figure, olive tinted skin, and eyes and hair which were of that dark brown often miscalled black; but unlike his, her face was awake with an eagerness to know and test the novelty and depth of unaccustomed sensation. She had thus far lived an unstable existence, free from the weight of responsibilities, with a notion lying somewhere deep in her consciousness that the world must one day be taken seriously; but that

---

<sup>34</sup> David Hosmer

contingency was yet too far away to disturb the harmony of her days.  
(15)

Melicent absolutely enjoys her casual lifestyle and tries to keep it as long as it is possible. Skaggs accurately states, “A capricious sort of recurring boredom, accompanied by a constant, restless search for excitement, forms the nucleus of Melicent’s personality.” (P. Skaggs 80) Melicent indeed is a person very easily bored. How lucky she is that she has got a brother who keeps her occupied. This means that the young woman loves to travel, and “[s]he had eagerly responded to her brother’s suggestion of spending a summer with him in Louisiana” (Chopin 15) after she has already travelled “North, West, or East” (15). Thus, she impatiently embraces every opportunity of an adventure and enjoys motivating other people as well, for example, when she wants to go horse-back riding with Fanny, David and some other people. What is more, she does not seem to care about the skin colour of her company as she even celebrates a loud party with music and black dancers (91), or wants to go and see old Morico. “[...] I shall take along a comb, and comb out that exquisite white hair of his and then I shall focus him, seated in his low chair and making one of those cute turkey fans.” (86)

It is true that Melicent is a “high-spirited girl full of conceits as she is now, and in her exaggerated way” (Chopin 38) she always makes a mountain out of a molehill. When David tells her that he remarried Fanny and that he expects her to respect his decision and to take care of his wife, she reacts with astonishment, “I can’t meet her, you surely don’t expect it.” (76) This is not how she envisioned David’s future. “But David, I had hoped for something so different. [...] I think [...] [Mrs. Lafirme] would have given up religion – anything for you.” (76) The “belle” is used to get her will and cannot understand her brother’s decision. Yet eventually, Melicent “did the unexpected [...] and embraced her<sup>35</sup> effusively” (79). In the new surroundings Melicent decided that “she found Fanny less objectionable” (80).

In the same erratic way as she loves to move to different places, or as she decides whether she likes somebody or not, she behaves towards Grégoire. When she first came to Place-du-Bois, Melicent found the young Creole quite appealing, however, his voice was not to her liking.

---

<sup>35</sup> Fanny

His features were handsome, of sharp and refined cut; and his eyes black and brilliant as eyes of an alert and intelligent animal sometimes are. Melicent could not reconcile his voice to her liking; it was too softly low and feminine, and carried a note of pleading or pathos, unless he argued with his horse, his dog, or a 'nigger' (Chopin 16).

This description gives the impression that she at first analyses him like an animal that you consider to buy. She also realises that "[h]is hands were not so refinedly white as those of certain office-bred young men of her acquaintance" (16), all of which shows that he is not good enough for her.

When Melicent first met Grégoire, his peculiarities of speech, so unfamiliar to her, seemed to remove him at once from the possibility of her consideration. She was not then awake to certain fine psychological differences distinguishing man from man; precluding the possibility of naming and classifying him in the moral as one might in the animal kingdom. But short-comings of language, which finally seemed not to detract from a definite inheritance of good breeding, touched his personality as a physical deformation might, adding to it certainly no charm, yet from its pathological aspect not without a species of fascination [...]. (Chopin 43)

Again a reference to the "animal kingdom" (43) is made. Nevertheless, Melicent seems to be aware of his "good breeding" (43) which fascinated her. At the beginning she somehow feels drawn to him because she has never had such an exotic admirer. She even imagines to be "an Indian maiden of the far past, fleeing and seeking with her dusky lover some wild and solitary retreat on the borders of this lake" (17). Always wanting to know "why [she] [...] should do things" (17) only supports her assertive nature. "[F]or it was not her fashion to obey at word of command" (16). When Grégoire asks her to put down her veil she insists on a reasonable explanation why she should do such a thing. Only then does she react to his proposition. Even though it is clear that "she was in love with Grégoire" (44) and "[h]e loved her to desperation" (45), she knew that "nothing could come of it." (44) The only kiss they shared in one intimate moment was never to be repeated, even though he had been the only man whom she ever allowed to kiss her. "But Melicent really loves only a romantic image of love." (P. Skaggs 79) Skaggs makes clear that Melicent cannot really distinguish between wanting to be in love and really loving another person. She

might only enjoy the attention and excitement of a new adventure. Still, Melicent never lies about her intentions, “our love must be something like a sacred memory – a sweet recollection to help us through life when we are apart.” (Chopin 80) Grégoire is the one who suffers extremely under the knowledge that his beloved will be gone some day. In contrast to this, Melicent does not seem to feel so strongly, “There is nothing in this world that one cannot grow accustomed to, dear” (80). As a matter of fact she is “[e]xtremely romantic[.] Melicent likes to envision herself as being in love; but whenever a man tries to get close to her, she rejects him.” (P. Skaggs 79) Thus, it is clear for Grégoire that his feelings are true, whereas no one really knows if Melicent is in love with him or if she simply enjoys to be in love. “Feeling himself her equal in the aristocracy of blood, and her master in the knowledge and strength of love, he resented those half understood reasons which removed him from the possibility of being anything to her.” (Chopin 80) As a reader one gets the impression that Grégoire is more of a toy for her than a boyfriend. “Melicent, who did what she wanted with him, had chosen this afternoon, for some inscrutable reason, to make him happy.” (85) She spends some time with him and makes him feel important. Without any resistance from his part Melicent orders Grégoire about how it pleases her, “[G]o sit by Fanny and do something to make her laugh, only don’t tickle her; David mightn’t like it.” (85)

Their little affair comes to a sudden end when she finds out that Grégoire killed Joçint. “Melicent had shunned Grégoire since the shooting” (108), and she plans to leave without saying goodbye to him. She simply cannot understand how he was able to “murder [...] a defenceless man!” (110) Without a second thought Melicent leaves Place-du-Bois. Probably it is simply time for a change in order to bring some new excitement into her life. Ewell agrees, “Melicent’s affection is only superficial, however, and she proves a mockery not only of the ‘new woman’ of the North but as a model of substantive social change as well. (Ewell 34) Putting a focus on short affairs and appearance is a step back for the emancipation women at that time experienced. Melicent seems to function as an element of ridicule, of how women should not behave any more.

When Melicent is back in St. Louis she is very quickly bored again. Being from St. Louis, no black person wants to work for her when she is at Place-du-Bois. In St. Louis she is pleased with her new “delightful little old poverty-stricken

English woman" (Chopin 143) and her new flat. However, even "these people whom she frequented were all very tiresome." (144) It is hard to believe but true that Melicent actually found no real pleasure in social obligations.

Indeed, it seems like a welcome disturbance that Mrs. Lafirme's letter with the news of Grégoire's death arrives at a time she feels very bored. After reading the piece of paper three times she decides to "wear mourning for a long, long time." (144) She would give herself over to her grief, "answer[ing] to the curious who questioned her" (145) and revel in memories for a certain period of time. "Was she in love with Grégoire now that he was dead? Perhaps. At all events, for the next month, Melicent would not be bored." (145) Skaggs summarises, "To Grégoire's love, she responds first with disdain; then she responds in turn with tender sympathy, with playful flirtation, with bored abandon, with loathing, and finally with romantic nostalgia after learning of his death." (P. Skaggs 80)

Grégoire is not the only victim of her boredom. This beautiful "belle" is "always conscious of the impression she makes upon others, [and] knows well how to attract men" (P. Skaggs 78) During a conversation between Grégoire and Fanny the reader is informed about Melicent's behaviour that "[i]f she likes a person she goes on like a lunatic over them as long as it lasts; then goodbye John! she'll throw them aside as she would an old dress. [...] And the people she's been engaged to! There ain't a worse flirt in the city of St. Louis; and always some excuse or other to break it off at the last minute." (Chopin 109) Fanny's opinion of Melicent obviously is not the highest. Grégoire adds, "Well, I reckon she knows they ain't anybody born, good enough fur her?" he said, thinking of those engagements that she had shattered." (110) Obviously, Grégoire is aware of his limited significance for Melicent. When Thérèse asks him whether Melicent loves him, he answers, "No, she does not. No matter what she says – she does not. I can feel it here" (81). In the same way that she loves variety of the places she calls home, she also likes to have diversity among her admirers.

Toth adds, "Melicent, for instance, relives some of Kate Chopin's most embarrassing Cloutierville moments, but defuses them. A St. Louis flirt with haughty urban ways, Melicent has no idea that everyone in the Cane River country is watching her, especially when she has trouble hiring servants" (Toth 113). Always dressing extravagantly her "appearance resembles Kate Chopin's.

A decade earlier, Kate Chopin might have thought she was the most fashionable creature ever to promenade Cloutierville's one street – but she makes Melicent the most ridiculous.” (113)

Without a doubt Melicent's appearance could have been more modest and less prominent than wearing a big “ostrich plume” (42) and the “great bunch of geraniums” (42). Skaggs agrees that the “belle” is “[a]lways conscious of the picture she presents” (P. Skaggs 78) However, it is a pity that even though she is a headstrong woman who always gets what she wants, she is not content. “So Melicent remains incapable of satisfying any of the basic drives for love, place, or autonomy.” (P. Skaggs 81) I would not entirely agree with this statement because I think that even though she is dependent on her brother's money she is the one who decides what she does with it. Melicent is a free spirit and a tomboy who even on the last pages reveals that she is still planning a new adventure. A certain Mrs. Griesmann is interested in the young woman and wants to take her on a “trip through the West – the Yosemite and so forth.” (Chopin 165) Melicent will learn about Natural History and how to “label [...] specimens in Latin.” (165) Also, Mrs. Griesmann finds that Melicent has been led in the wrong direction, and Melicent agrees, “I never did care really for society.” (165)

This passionate woman who possesses all prerequisites to be the perfect “belle”, however, can never be taken seriously. Her life seems a constant search for excitement without ever finding peace in a cosy home. The goal of the typical Southern “belle” is to find the perfect match as soon as possible. Some flirtations are permitted but it is always important to keep an eye on how society perceives her actions. In Melicent's case everyone observes her adventures and no one seems pleased. Nevertheless, somewhat similar to Belle Worthington, Melicent is a woman who is able to “look after herself.” (13) She knows what she wants and how to get it, and she does not care what others think of her.

Maybe this was the attitude that enabled women to break free from the old stereotypes. Women like Melicent show that a female life does not necessarily have to consist of finding a husband and childbirth, but that they can choose what they want to be and what to do regardless of a man's wishes.

#### 4.6.3. Fanny Larimore/Hosmer

“Almost everything the readers know about Fanny they learn through David’s account, because by the time the story begins Fanny has long since surrendered control of herself to alcohol.” (P. Skaggs 81) It is true that Fanny Larimore is not introduced by the narrator with a long characterisation but by David Hosmer, her former husband, who confesses his past to Thérèse Lafirme. Unfortunately, Melicent Hosmer has disclosed the unpleasant fact that David is no widower but divorced, which is a huge shock for the Catholic Mrs. Lafirme. David explains that he was about to turn thirty when he was introduced to Fanny in St. Louis. “She was a pretty little thing, not more than twenty, all pink and white and merry blue eyes and stylish clothes. [...] I went to see her again and again – my first impression deepened, and in two weeks I had asked her to marry me.” (Chopin 37) It is sad to say that they did not know each other well enough when they married and, as a consequence, they found out that their characters were not compatible. Fanny wanted David to spend time with her and to engage in social events but her husband was more concerned with his business. “A year after our marriage our boy was born.” (38) This event kept Fanny occupied enough to make her ignore their problems. “Finally there was nothing that united us except the child.” (38) When their boy died at the age of three, “Fanny’s road plunged downhill.” (P. Skaggs 81) This triggered a terrible crisis which led to her addiction to alcohol. After their divorce David did not stay in touch with his ex-wife. He only knows that she receives “the alimony which [he] doubled.” (39)

The reader is later informed that Fanny has a different opinion on their failed marriage. Thus, she wants Mrs. Lafirme to know her perspective too, “I guess David’s told you just what suited him about me. You got to remember there’s always two sides to a story.” (Chopin 83) Of course, Fanny had to endure David’s unwillingness to go out and spend time with her. Being a young lady who wants to be entertained she must have been very bored with a man whose only concern was his business. Thus, she tried very hard to find something they had in common. For example, when he read the newspaper, she “used to read the paper too sometimes, and when [she’d] go to talk to him about what [she] read, he’d never even looked at the same things. Goodness knows what he read in the paper, [she] could never find out.” (84)

When Fanny gets her second chance for reanimating their marriage she is willing to do everything it takes to make David happy. However, she is aware that this job is harder for her than for him. "There isn't anything so very hard for David to do [...] He's got no faults to give up. David never did have any faults. He's a true, honest man; and I was a coward to say those things about him." (84) This statement proves that Fanny knows that she made mistakes and she speaks as if she was the only one to blame.

After Mrs. Lafirme persuades David to remarry his former wife, he obediently goes to St. Louis. At first, David is shocked at Fanny's appearance.

[H]e with astonishment at sight of the 'merry blue eyes' faded and sunken into deep, dark sockets; at the net-work of little lines all traced about the mouth and eyes, and spreading over the once rounded cheeks that were now hollow and evidently pale or sallow, beneath a layer of rouge that had been laid on with an unsparing hand. Yet was she still pretty, or pleasing, especially to a strong nature that would find an appeal in the pathetic weakness of her face. (Chopin 50)

It is evident that Fanny's deterioration was caused by her consumption of alcohol. The reader also learns that she "had pneumonia so bad. They thought [she] was going to die." (50) Belle Worthington, who cared for her during this illness, confirms this in a conversation with David, "But I tell you what, you came pretty near not having any Fanny to take away with you. She was the sickest woman" (65). After a brief conversation in which David tries to persuade Fanny to remarry she seems resigned, "It would be the same thing over again." (50) Also, the fact that she would have to live in the South, and that Mrs. Lafirme knows all about their situation does not improve her opinion of David's idea. Nevertheless, she finally gives in and agrees to try again. The brief comment of the narrator shows that Fanny was never deeply in love with David. "[H]er weak love for him" (51) was soon gone after their divorce but now that she knew she would be part of his life again "she felt great comfort in her knowledge of his honesty." (51) After their wedding "in the small library of their Unitarian minister" (59), her friends cannot understand her decision and think she is a fool. Furthermore, Lou remarks, "But I thought he<sup>36</sup> had more sense than to tie himself to that little gump again" (66). Lou and Belle are not able to comprehend

---

<sup>36</sup> David Hosmer

how Fanny could ever leave St. Louis, her house and servant for the Deep South.

Indeed, when she finally arrives at Place-du-Bois, she is bewildered at the tranquillity of this place. “Fanny sat with her head pillowed on the sofa, sobbing bitterly. [...] ‘Oh it’s so lonesome, and dreadful, I don’t believe I can stand it” (74). David tries to calm her down, “It’s all strange and new to you, Fanny; try to bear up for a day or two. Come now, don’t be a baby – take courage.” (74) This quotation perfectly explains David’s regard for his wife. She behaves like a baby, surrendering to her emotions and making herself dependent on the consolation of her husband. “Besides being a clumsy Yankee, out of place in the Cane River country, Fanny is uneducated and crude, speaking an old slang that makes her seem addled.” (Toth 114)

However, “[d]ay by day, Fanny threw off somewhat of the homesickness which had weighted her at coming. [...] Thérèse affected her forcibly.” (Chopin 83) In general, everybody tries to help Fanny in getting used to the Deep South, especially Thérèse who often visits her for example to show her a beautiful “branch from a rose-tree” (120) to raise her spirits. “Everybody seemed to be making much of her, which was a new experience in her life [...]. The negroes were overawed at the splendour of her toilettes and showed respect for her in proportion to the money value which these toilettes reflected.” (79) This might also be the reason why Fanny likes the company of the black inhabitants of Place-du-Bois. Also, even though she cannot talk French, she enjoys Morico’s company who offered her “a glass half filled with strong ‘toddy’ [...] which she drained at a draught. All uneasiness and fatigue seemed to leave her on the instant as though by magic.” (94-95) However, this is not enough for Fanny, as she steals the whole bottle of liquor from Morico’s house, who in turn blames his son for the theft. “Of course, she bribes, begs, and steals to get the alcohol her body demands; and matters move from bad to worse for all concerned until the day when her addiction causes her to drown.” (P. Skaggs 73) I agree with Skaggs that Fanny obviously is still not content in her second marriage. She feels lonesome to such an extent that she, firstly, tries to find amusement by talking to Grégoire about dancing possibilities, who offers to take her to Natchitoches the next time. Secondly, Fanny wants to drown her misery in alcohol and, finally, she even confronts David with her knowledge about his love

for Thérèse. This woman clearly has good reasons to be upset. Fanny certainly “resented that knowledge which Thérèse possessed of her past intimate married life” (Chopin 79-80). Above all, she is aware of David’s feelings for Thérèse. Furthermore, Fanny’s premonition is confirmed by her overhearing David’s words during his sleep. “Thérèse, Thérèse – so good – let me love you.” (123)

After this incident she is blind with jealousy. When the Duplans’ and Worthingtons’ visit Place-du-Bois she “was the ghost of the feast.” (132) Fanny is neither interested in polite conversation, nor in playing cards. “She had come prepared to watch her husband and Mrs. Lafirme, her heart was swelling with jealous suspicion. Failing to discover such, and loth to be robbed of her morbid feast of misery, she set her failure down to their predetermined subtlety.” (131) In a conversation between Thérèse and Belle Worthington, Belle remarks that she has “never seen her like that before. Why, she does nothing in the God’s world but whine and sniffle, and wish she was dead; it’s enough to give a person the horrors.” (126) Indeed, Fanny who is regularly drunk, is not able any more to manage her own household. Thérèse even “found her depressed, as was often the case.” (120) Because Fanny is so worried about Belle’s assessment of her house’s condition when the visit approaches, Thérèse helps her. However, the alcoholic offers no assistance but is “utterly incapable to do more than sit and gaze stupidly at Thérèse” (121).

When Belle’s departure nears, David asks his wife if she plans to accompany her friend back to St. Louis for a visit. Fanny, instantly alarmed, starts a quarrel. “Tain’t because I want to stay here, Lord knows. A God-forsaken place like this. I guess you’d be glad enough” (149). This is only the trigger of her outburst,

It’s time for somebody to talk about a woman passing herself off for a saint, and trying to take other women’s husbands [...]. And what’s more I won’t stay here and have you making love under my very eyes to a woman that’s no better than she ought to be. (Chopin 149-150)

As a result of her passionate outburst David gets furious and, without any self-control left, he threatens to kill her. Afterwards, Fanny is filled with a feeling of self-satisfaction because she was able to stand up for herself and oppose David. Thereupon, she decides to hide at Marie Louise’s cabin. Why she visits the black woman the reader can only guess; there has never been any point of

contact between the two women before. When Hosmer comes to take Fanny home she only says, “You must be crazy” (154). She has no intention to go home. “She felt ‘good,’ as she would have termed it herself; her visit to Sampson’s hut having not been without results tending to that condition.” (154) This again hints at her being drunk as without alcohol she most likely would not have been able to prevail over David. In the end, this leads to her own doom because Fanny drowns in the river when Marie Louise’s cabin is dragged into the water by a flood and consumed by the floods.

On the last pages of the novel Fanny is only mentioned once in Thérèse’s memories. One year later, “[t]he picture of that one terrible day of Fanny’s death, stood out in sharp prominent lines” (160).

In conclusion, one may say that Fanny Larimore is the weakest female character in the novel, who does not manage her life on her own. Being completely dependent on a man, she returns to an unhappy marriage. Skaggs sums this up aptly, “Further, his<sup>37</sup> generosity insures that neither<sup>38</sup> will find a place in life where she feels needed, even by herself.” (P. Skaggs 82) In St. Louis she only lives for parties and alcohol. On the plantation she is bored and obsessed with the knowledge of David’s love for Thérèse. There is no place for Fanny to be happy. Without doubt, she is a desperate character who has nothing in common with a lady, apart from her dress code and budget. Her vulgar speech, lack of submissiveness to her husband and inability to keep away from alcohol to drown her sorrow only make her a pathetic and poor woman who ends according to her conduct.

#### 4.6.4. Isabella Worthington

Even though she does not play a major role in the novel, Isabella Worthington receives a place in this analysis as she stands in stark contrast to Mrs. Lafirme. At first glance Mrs. Worthington, who is “known to her friends as Belle Worthington” (Chopin 53), has all the attributes for being the perfect lady. “Her husband [...] is an absent-minded and very pedantic professor whose bookshelf is weighed down with the books Kate O’Flaherty read as a schoolgirl” (Toth 115). Lorenzo Worthington is a man who lives more in his books than in real life

---

<sup>37</sup> Hosmer’s

<sup>38</sup> Melicent and Fanny

and enjoys studying various subjects, among them the mystery of women. He acknowledges their “usefulness as propagators of the species” (Chopin 56), who are equipped with “a weak and inadequate mentality.” (56) Working in the custom house he brings home enough money to enable Belle to spend her time as she pleases.

Weighing “a hundred and eighty pounds” (63) she still enjoys dressing herself extravagantly and eye-catchingly.

In full garb, she presented the figure of a splendid woman; trim and tight in a black silk gown of expensive quality, heavy with jets which hung and shone, and jangled from every available point of her person. Not a thread of her yellow hair was misplaced. She shone with cleanliness, and her broad expressionless face and meaningless blue eyes were set to a good-humored readiness for laughter, which would be wholesome if not musical. She exhaled a fragrance of patchouli or jockey-club, or something odorous and ‘strong’ that clung to every article of her apparel, even to the yellow kid gloves which she would now be forced to put on during her ride in the car. (Chopin 54)

This description shows that she knows how to present herself. However, her “expressionless face” (54) hints at an ignorant character, which makes her appear charmless and disagreeable and, as a consequence, not ladylike.

Furthermore, Belle pretends to be “a good Catholic to the necessary extent of hearing a mass on Sundays, abstaining from meat on Fridays and Ember days, and making her ‘Easters.’” (59) Thus, she tries to do what is expected by society to “keep[...] on the safe side.” (59)

“The magnificent Belle Worthington”, as Skaggs calls her, “spends her time adorning herself, playing cards, attending martinees, and gossiping.” (P. Skaggs 82) She is a lady living in a modern flat because it is fashionable to do so. Also, it is a necessity for her that her friends live nearby. As a matter of fact, Lou Dawson and Belle Worthington

develop[ed] into finished and professional time-killers. Their intimacy with each other, as also their close acquaintance with Fanny Larimore, dated from a couple of years after that lady’s marriage, when they had met as occupants of the same big up-town boarding house.” (Chopin 55)

Thus, it is no wonder that Belle Worthington is shocked when David Hosmer and Fanny leave for the Deep South. “So you’re going to take Fanny away from

us, Mr. Hosmer" (64). Without a doubt Belle Worthington is a good person deep within, who looks after her friends' needs. Fanny's departure would not only reduce her social contacts but it might also hurt her deeply. "I would 'a died if Belle Worthington hadn't 'a took such good care of me", (50) Fanny remarks. However, Belle admits that "the climate down there'll be the very thing to bring her round." (65) Also, she has every opportunity to come and visit her friend in Louisiana, which might be another amusement.

Apart from these positive character traits Belle Worthington has many attributes that do not fit a lady at all. "Loud and brash, Belle speaks always frankly and usually tritely." (P. Skaggs 82) Even though she is an honest person, her way of speaking is at times repulsive and not the least elegant. Her exclamations like, "My God, she's a fool!" (Chopin 64), "Well I'll be switched!" (54) or "I declare, you might knock me down with a feather" (54) are not what a lady would ever imagine to say.

Her whole behaviour and personality is impulsive and stubborn. If somebody does not act as it pleases her, she would "a give 'em a piece of [her] [...] mind" (57). When she is agitated, "a loud and aggressive laugh" (65) escapes her lips. Even Melicent comments on "that impertinent Mrs. Belle Worthington! Positively took me by the coat and commenced to gush about dear sister Thérèse. [...] That Mrs. Lafirme's a trump" (165). It is no wonder that Belle feels so strongly about Thérèse as these women are two dramatic opposites.

This becomes particularly evident when Belle visits Place-du-Bois and meets the family Duplan who also own a plantation. Thérèse tried to prepare Mrs. Duplan for this extravagant lady but obviously failed. "But her confidences had plainly been insufficient to prepare Mrs. Duplan for the startling effect produced by Mrs. Worthington on that little woman in her black silk of a by-gone fashion; so splendid was Mrs. Worthington's erect and imposing figure [...]" (130). This well-behaved lady is shocked by Belle's behaviour but at the same time admires her appearance. I agree with Ewell who observes, "Besides them, the expansive, affected Belle and her reclusive husband, Lorenzo, seem vulgar and disconnected." (Ewell 35) Interestingly enough, Mr. Duplan "had a singular effect upon Mrs. Worthington, who became dignified, subdued, and altogether unnatural in her endeavour to adjust herself to it." (Chopin 130) "Mr. Duplan in his courteous and rather lordly way" (130) seems to calm this woman down.

Nevertheless, Belle “demand[ed] a pack of cards” (131) and insists on teaching Mr. Duplan “six-handed euchre.” (131) Again she finds herself in the focus of attention and indulges in her superior knowledge of this game. Belle has somehow managed to motivate Mr. Duplan, as he is “in high spirits” and Belle “in this familiar employment was herself again – con fuoco<sup>39</sup>.” (132) At the end of this evening, Mr. Duplan refers in a conversation with David Hosmer to that “fine woman [...] Mrs. Worthington [...]” (134) It seems as if everyone enjoys the evening and the narrator confirms this, “Mrs. Duplan, under the influence of a charming evening passed in such agreeable and distinguished company, was full of amiable bustle in leaving and had many pleasant parting words to say to each, in her pretty broken English.” (134)

There is a possibility that Mrs. Worthington will someday change her view on the Southerners. Before this visit to Place-du-Bois she was appalled that Fanny would move to Louisiana. “It’s to be hoped in New Orleans [...] that’s the only decent place in Louisiana where a person could live.” (Chopin 64) Additionally, Fanny says that “Belle Worthington ain’t going to mix with Creoles. She can’t talk French if she wanted to.” (149) Thus, Belle neither likes the Louisiana, nor respects its inhabitants.

One reason why Belle Worthington behaves so exceptionally in Mr. Duplan’s company may be because he takes her seriously and pays attention to what she says and does.

Mr. Worthington’s low expectations of his wife’s mentality, his tendency to view her as an interesting but almost useless curiosity, his monetary generosity that frees her from household responsibilities, and his own personal desire to escape human contacts by withdrawing into his world of books – all these attitudes on her husband’s part influence Belle’s own concept of herself. As she attempts to satisfy her own needs for love, place, and individuality, she must do so within the framework of her husband’s ideas about a woman’s place in the world. (P. Skaggs 83)

It is true that Belle does not behave like a good housewife. The reader is not informed if Belle has servants or if she has to clean their flat herself, but it is to be assumed that she hires somebody for this job. Regarding Mr. Worthington, she repeatedly complains about his “everlasting books” (Chopin 67) and that

---

<sup>39</sup> With fire

“he ought to turn Christian Brother” (68) because he is absorbed in his books and religion to such an extent that his wife feels ignored. Belle is constantly searching for entertainment and finds it in the company of her friends. This might be the reason why Fanny mentions, “I don’t believe she’d let poor Mr. Worthington talk in the house if he wanted to.” (84) Fanny is used to being the wife who is not treated well enough and who is ignored by her husband (at least in their first marriage), but even she finds that Mr. Worthington behaves worse than Mr. Hosmer does. Taking a closer look, Belle’s marriage is more unsatisfactory than Fanny’s, but she decides to endure it and does not drown her problems in alcohol.

Also P. Seyersted states, “Little love is lost between the professional time-killer Belle Worthington and her bookish husband.” (Seyersted 92) Because she does not seem to have domestic duties, she desperately tries to find an occupation. Thus, Belle takes the liberty to put her husband’s beloved books “on the top shelf of the bedroom closet” (Chopin 55) in order for them to be out of her way. They are a constant reminder that she has no real place in her husband’s life. Chopin sees this new development of roles “as a potential tragedy for many modern women who no longer are needed, full-time and lifelong, in the home.” (P. Skaggs 87)

The last aspect of Belle Worthington’s life that shall be dealt with in this paper is her daughter Lucilla. The narrator tells the reader about Belle Worthington that she “had done less than her fair share, having but one child, a daughter of twelve, whose training and education had been assumed by an aunt of her father’s, a nun of some standing in the Sacred Heart Convent.” (Chopin 56) This means that Belle, who has nothing to do in the household, is not even responsible for the girl’s education. However, she does everything in her power to make her an obedient child. “She knows by the tone of my voice what she’s got to do.” (125) What is a thorn in Belle’s side is that “Lucilla takes after Mr. Worthington as far as religion goes” (134) The girl desperately wants to be a religious and looks forward to entering the convent as soon as she is allowed to. As a consequence, Belle will never be a grandmother, only having one child who does not want to marry at all. Skaggs remarks that “Lucilla [...] does reflect her mother’s influence. She makes a rather pathetic figure when her family

visits Place-du-Bois” (P. Skaggs 84) as she always perfectly obeys her mother’s orders.

The Duplans’ daughter Ninette seems so much more lively and content with life. She is curious and wants to know everything about a convent and even plans to run away if she does not like it there. As a contrast to this, Lucilla is a boring, well-disciplined girl who has no greater plans in life than to go away from home and live as a nun. “Thus even Aunt Belindy observes that the grandiose Belle’s warped adjustment to life is wreaking havoc with her daughter’s developing womanhood.” (P. Skaggs 84)

It has been demonstrated that Belle Worthington was inspired by

Mrs. Harriet Worthington, co-founder of Forest Park University for Women, the first United States university chartered solely for women. [...] Chopin could not resist skewering her through Mrs. Belle Worthington in *At Fault* – a character who not only favors drinking, but is also loud and crude and a deliberate religious hypocrite (Toth 115).

Nevertheless, I would also argue that she is a desperate woman who is bored with life and disregarded by her husband. Even though she appears to be very rude I think she has a soft core and, what is more, she indirectly paves the way for modern women who are able to oppose their husbands. Her loud, unwomanly and aggressive behaviour does not corresponds to a lady’s manner. She is neither a loving wife, nor a passionate mother and, to top it all, has not the character (and education) to come close to what a lady represents.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper aimed at finding differences and similarities between the novels *At Fault* by Kate Chopin and *Monsieur Motte* by Grace King putting a particular focus on the representation of women. In order to enable the readers of this paper to fully understand the textual analysis it was essential to provide a general overview of the historical background of the novels. Both authors lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and experienced a tremendous historical alteration in the

South. It is no wonder that this time of dramatic change is the ideal inspiration for many writers, like Grace King and Kate Chopin.

The novels *At Fault* and *Monsieur Motte* thoroughly present a picture of a slightly romanticised New Orleans, St. Louis and of two beautiful, successful plantations, Bel Angely and Place-du-Bois. In both works a clear difference between countryside and city is noticeable, as well as a gap between a lower and an upper class society. *At Fault* puts a notable focus on the countryside, whereas *Monsieur Motte*'s story is set for the greater part in the city of New Orleans. Grace King and Kate Chopin show a content and happy plantation life that, on the one hand, is a place for relaxation (especially for visitors), but, on the other hand, can be dull and boring too. In opposition to this stands the city, which offers amusements, exciting people to meet and the opportunity to discover innovations. The industrial development is more addressed by Kate Chopin than by Grace King. Thus, *At Fault* talks about the new stylish flats, and the railway, which *Monsieur Motte* does not mention at all. Some essential references are made to how southern society developed after the war. There still was a huge social gap between black and white people, not only in the city, but also in the countryside. Both authors were convinced that the usual relationship between slave and master was a deferential one. The depiction of upper and lower class citizens and, thus, black and white people turns out accordingly. However, I believe that Grace King gives more credit to the black society than Kate Chopin does. The fact that Marcélite was able to rise in the social hierarchy so far as to become a reputable hairdresser in New Orleans, suggests that Grace King really had a beginning awareness of equality between the races. Kate Chopin, as a contrast, disposes of three black people in *At Fault*, namely Joçint, Marie Louise and old Morico. No one even knows if Marie Louise is really dead because the author simply does not mention her any more. However, all people, no matter which skin colour, are definitely closer to each other in Chopin's novel than in King's. In *Monsieur Motte* there is a definite aristocracy that stands way above the poor blacks in New Orleans. In *Monsieur Motte* the upper-class citizens are not described as being aristocrats or extremely rich but all of them have to work in order to afford their living standards. Thus, the question whether social differences are discernible in both novels can be answered with yes. Each story features an upper and a lower

class. However, *At Fault* accomplishes to unite the characters more than *Monsieur Motte* does.

Turning to the central part of this project, namely the representation of women, and to the question whether they are portrayed in a traditional or emancipated way it is clear that both authors managed to introduce diverse female roles. Not only “[...] [Grace King] imagine[s] a woman who is strong, independent, expressive, honest, intelligent, the mistress of her fate – and pose[s] her against foils who are puppets to fashion, to conventions, to men, even to religion” (Jones 108), but also Kate Chopin manages to invent complex and strong female characters.

In *Monsieur Motte* the most extraordinary figure is, without doubt, the black mammy Marcéline Gaulois. The fact that Grace King makes Marcéline the heroine of the story and ends it by enabling the quadroon to give away the bride Marie proves that she is more of a mother for the girl than the white lady Madame Lareveillère, which shows the author’s positive attitude towards black women. Nevertheless, Grace King is aware of the fact that the passionate, almost animalistic nature of the quadroon is a deficiency in her character. References to her “untamed African blood” (King *Monsieur Motte* 51) and her own attitude towards her race keep her in a subordinate position despite her reputable profession as a hairdresser. However, in the end it is Marcéline whom Grace King supports with her authorial voice. The black woman indeed “represents in the extreme the condition of the white southern woman.” (Jones 105)

Madame Lareveillère is a remarkable lady, who already experienced an unhappy marriage and now is anxious to try again for an entirely different reason, namely love. Being, on the one hand, independent, strong and emancipated in her profession as the headmistress of St. Denis, but, on the other hand, a traditional woman who knows and values marriage, it is regarded as a shame (by the modern reader) that she, in the end, quits her job and goes back to a state of dependence again. Never having had the chance to be the mother of a child, she feels obliged to stand in for Marie when she is in need of a white “caretaker”. Nevertheless, in the end she is not valued as a mother and Marcéline is favoured over Madame Lareveillère. Choosing a black woman over

a white lady certainly implied a significant step for Grace King and women fiction in general.

Interestingly enough, none of the main characters in the novels is a mother. It is no surprise that the plantation mistress Aurore Angely chooses a childless life, as she is a religious person who never felt the urge to marry, but Mrs. Lafirme was married long enough to give birth to a child. The fact that both authors choose to let their main characters remain childless, but show that they are happy nonetheless suggests modern thinking of the authors.

Both plantation mistresses in *At Fault* and *Monsieur Motte* are very strong women, respected by their workers, loved by their family, and role models in terms of character. In Aurore Angely many similarities to Grace King can be found. She is a hard working woman who manages the plantation entirely on her own when her brother Félix is indisposed. Having enjoyed the same education as Madame Lareveillère Aurore chooses a different path. She is occupied with her extensive duties on the plantation. Only when Marie visits the farm does she seem to get a glimpse of what a mother's life looks like.

Also Mrs. Lafirme is a devoted Catholic who has high moral principles. This woman can be easily compared to Aurore Angely as she also resembles a hard-working, intelligent, sympathetic and well-respected plantation mistress. However, she is the one "at fault" in the novel as she urges her true love David Hosmer to go back to his divorced wife, and brings great despair over all of them. In the end, she is able to undergo a transformation. Thérèse realises that she was the one at fault and that she made a terrible mistake in forcing David to remarry Fanny. At this point it is necessary to record that a woman was able to force a man to do something against his will, which means that Thérèse was stronger than David.

These extraordinary women are clearly posed against "puppets of fashion" (Jones 108) that were addressed earlier. Melicent, Fanny and Belle Worthington in *At Fault* and Marie in *Monsieur Motte* are women from the city and, thus, highly concerned with their appearance. All of them share an interest in fashion and in the amusements of the city. Marie is the most innocent of these four women. She is a young "belle" who only wants to have a family and will, one day, be the perfect lady as she has been trained for it. Additionally, she is curious, thankful and humble. Through her losses and disappointments, Marie

manages to grow through her experiences and in the end, finds love and a home.

Fanny Larimore is the most pathetic example of a woman among all the characters mentioned. Kate Chopin portrays her as a victim who loses all essential features of a lady because of her addiction to alcohol. Fanny obviously is an example of what happens to a woman who behaves in an unwomanly fashion towards her acquaintances and especially towards men.

Finally, Melicent Hosmer and Belle Worthington are both women who enjoy company and especially the city. In the same way as Melicent is easily bored and always looking for new excitement, Belle Worthington passes her time with visits to her friend Lou Dawson or Fanny Larimore. Belle is stuck in a marriage that does not enrich her life and Melicent breaks one engagement after the other.

Yet, all three women are highly dependent on men. Melicent and Fanny are supported by David, and Belle has a husband who pays for her lifestyle. Even though Melicent does not earn money herself, she is the one who decides what she does. Furthermore, she is like a tomboy and even though she has not found her way yet, she will judge what is good for herself without interference from anybody else. Belle is bound to lead a life tied to her husband through marriage but separated from him in any other way. Nevertheless, she does not seem to suffer from this situation. In sum, Melicent and Belle are both strong women who do as it pleases them. The former loves to travel and the latter enjoys parties and controlling her husband.

In sum, Grace King and Kate Chopin portray highly diverse female characters that can be described as either independent and emancipated, or submissive and dependent. Especially the role of the plantation mistress shows that a woman does not necessarily need a man in order to be successful, earn money or lead a happy life, as Aurore Angely demonstrates. Thérèse Lafirme was perfectly able to manage the plantation without her deceased husband and even keeps her position when she marries again. However, it needs to be said that these women are fictional characters, idealised types of women that represent both the *angel in the house* and a strong individual who decides for herself. As a contrast to this, women like Marie Motte and Fanny Larimore have

always been dependent on a man<sup>40</sup>. This means that authors like Grace King and Kate Chopin made essential steps towards “killing the angel in the house” (Woolf *Professions for Women*) but did not fully accomplish the task.

Furthermore, both city and countryside can be attractive places to live. However, it is important to differentiate that the countryside is appreciated for its quiet and healthy climate, and the city for its various options to spend one’s spare time. These surroundings shape female characters who represent more the ideal woman<sup>41</sup>, or extravagant and even occasionally vulgar women<sup>42</sup>.

Regarding class differences I came to the conclusion that even though black people are valued in general, there are, on the one hand, coloured citizens who disappear uncommented and unmourned, but, on the other hand, a woman like Marcélite manages to hold a relatively elevated position that would also suit a white working woman.

Despite their somewhat variant tones, [...] writers [like Kate Chopin and Grace King] analyse women, men, and community in the South using values and terms that are essentially similar. Moreover, they share some ambivalence about the nature of art itself, an ambivalence deepened by their perception that the woman in the South – like a work of art – served as symbol and object of beauty, in particular of a beauty that is pure, fragile, and finally irrelevant. (Jones 352)

---

<sup>40</sup> Or on a black woman (Marcélite).

<sup>41</sup> The plantation mistresses Aurore Angely and Thérèse Lafirme in the countryside

<sup>42</sup> Belle Worthington and Fanny Larimore, who live in St. Louis

## 6. Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Chopin, Kate. *At Fault*. 1890. Create Space, 2015.

King, Grace. *Monsieur Motte*. 1888. New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 2008.

### Secondary Sources

Bush, Robert. *Grace King: A Southern Destiny*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983.

Censer, Jane T. *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood 1865-1895*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2003.

Clark, Thomas. "Rural Life." *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Volume 11: Agriculture & Industry. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 106-116.

Clinton, Catherine. *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

Coulter, Merton. *The South During Reconstruction 1865-1877*. A History of the South VIII. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP and The Littlefield Fund for Southern History of the University of Texas, 1962.

Dabney, Charles W. *Universal Education in the South*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936.

Elfenbein, Anna S. *Women on the Color Line. Evolving Stereotypes and the Writings of George Washington Cable, Grace King, Kate Chopin*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1989.

Ewell, Barbara C. *Kate Chopin*. New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1986.

Flexner, Eleanor. *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*. 1959. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1975.

Gehman, Mary. "Toward an Understanding of the Quadroon Society of New Orleans, 1780-1860." *Southern Women*. Ed. Caroline M. Dillman. New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1988. 47-55.

Jewell, K.S. "Mammy." *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Volume 24:

- Race. 1989. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013. 170-173.
- Jones, Anne G. *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1981.
- King, Grace. *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters*. 1932. New York: Macmillan, 1971.
- Kirby, Jack. "Plantations." *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Volume 11: Agriculture & Industry. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 102-105.
- Leslie, Virginia K.A. "A Myth of the Southern Lady: Antebellum Proslavery Rhetoric and the Proper Place of Women." *Southern Women*. Ed. Caroline M. Dillman. New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1988. 19-34.
- Lewis, Leary. "Kate Chopin." *Southern Writers: A Biographical Dictionary*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1979. 80-82.
- Morton, Patricia. "'My Ol' Black Mammy' in American Historiography." *Southern Women*. Ed. Caroline M. Dillman. New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1988. 35-45.
- Nagel, James. *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories: Kate Chopin, Grace King, Alice Dunbar-Nelson & George Washington Cable*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014.
- Picone, Michael, and Amanda Lafleur. "French." *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Volume 24: Race. 1989. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013. 215-219.
- Rankin, Daniel S. *Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932.
- Richardson, Thomas. "Local Color in Louisiana." *The History of Southern Literature*. Ed. Louis D. Rubin. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985. 199-208.
- Scott, Anne F. Preface. *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930*. By Scott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970. x.  
----- *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- Seidel, Kathryn L. *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*. Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1985.
- Seyersted, Per. *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1980.

- Skaggs, Merrill M. "Varieties of Local Color." *The History of Southern Literature*. Ed. Louis D. Rubin. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985. 219-227.
- Skaggs, Peggy. *Kate Chopin*. Boston: Angelo State University, 1985.
- Stempp, Kenneth. *The Era of Reconstruction, America after the Civil War, 1865-1877*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965.
- Taylor, Helen. Preface. *Gender, Race, and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin*. By Taylor. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989. xii-xiv.
- *Gender, Race, and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989.
- Thompson, Edgar. "Louisiana." *The Encyclopedia of Southern History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1979. 733-740.
- Toth, Emily. *Unveiling Kate Chopin*. Jackson, Miss.: UP of Mississippi, 1999.
- Trelease, Allen. "Reconstruction." *The Encyclopedia of Southern History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1979. 1032-1034.
- Turner, Arlin. *George W. Cable: A Biography*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1966.
- Warner, Charles D. "Editor's Study." *Harper's Magazine* LXXXV (1892): 155-156.

### Electronic Sources

- Chesnut, Mary B. *A Diary From Dixie*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905. Documenting the American South. 1 Dec. 2015 <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chesnut/maryches.html>>.
- King, Grace. *New Orleans: The Place and the People*. New York: Macmillan, 1895. Internet Archive. 1 Dec. 2015 <[https://archive.org/stream/neworleansplace02kinggoog/neworleansplace02kinggoog\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/neworleansplace02kinggoog/neworleansplace02kinggoog_djvu.txt)>.
- Parkhurst, Jessie W. "The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household." *The Journal of Negro History* 23.3 (1938): 349-369. *Jstor*. Vienna University Library. 28 Nov. 2015 <[https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+00756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E77666762652E626574++/stable/2714687?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+00756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E77666762652E626574++/stable/2714687?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)>.
- Patmore, Coventry. *The Angel in the House*. London: Cassell & Company, 1891. The Project Gutenberg. 27 Nov. 2015 <<https://univpn.univie.ac.at/+CSCO+02756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E74686772616F7265742E626574++/files/4099/4099-h/4099-h.htm>>.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *L'Emile or A Treatise on Education*. Trans. William Payne. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918. Internet Archive. 1 Dec. 2015  
<[https://archive.org/stream/rousseauemileor00rousiala/rousseauemileor00rousiala\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/rousseauemileor00rousiala/rousseauemileor00rousiala_djvu.txt)>.

Woolf, Virginia. "Professions for Women." *The Death of the Moth, and other essays*. South Australia: The University of Adelaide Library, 1981. eBooks@Adelaide. 4 Jan. 2016  
<<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91d/chapter27.html>>.

## 7. Index

---

### A

abolition.....14, 23, 25, 26, 27, 41  
 Acadians..... 11, 86  
 alcohol..... 25, 88, 92, 103, 104, 105, 107, 111, 116  
 Angely, Aurore.....36, 37, 40, 41, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50,  
 52, 53, 56, 57, 62, 63, 64, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72,  
 73, 115, 116, 117  
 Angely, Félix.....40, 45, 46, 48, 52, 69, 72, 115  
 aristocracy 2, 6, 10, 17, 28, 43, 48, 82, 83, 89, 100,  
 113  
*At Fault*... 2, 3, 7, 8, 27, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 82, 83, 89,  
 112, 113, 115  
 Aunt Belindy..... 87, 112

---

### B

Bel Angely plantation 39, 51, 53, 55, 59, 69, 73, 113  
 belle.... 2, 7, 20, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 43, 45, 47,  
 48, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 67, 70, 83, 84, 90, 97,  
 98, 101, 102, 115  
 Betsy ..... 87  
 black codes ..... 14, 17  
 black mammy... 2, 27, 33, 34, 35, 54, 59, 89, 90, 114  
 black police..... 17, 44  
 black worker 2, 27, 40, 41, 44, 51, 55, 63, 74, 78, 84,  
 86, 87, 88, 89

---

### C

Cable, George Washington..... 5, 6, 8, 10, 44  
 Cajun..... 8, 11  
 Cather, Willa..... 9  
 Catholic..... 4, 7, 62, 69, 71, 74, 77, 84, 103, 108, 115  
 Chaffin, Victoria..... 7  
 Charleville, Victoria Verdon..... 7  
 Chopin, Kate .... 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17,  
 19, 24, 27, 33, 35, 70, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79,  
 81, 82, 83, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95,  
 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107,  
 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 116, 117  
 Chopin, Oscar ..... 7, 90  
 Civil Rights Act..... 14  
 Civil War .. 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20,  
 21, 22, 26, 27, 36, 41, 42, 45, 50, 61, 79, 81, 82, 83  
 class differences..... 2, 35, 117  
 Code Noir ..... 10, 12  
 Confederacy..... 13, 14  
 Conservatives ..... 15  
 Constitution ..... 14

cotton ..... 7, 13, 14, 18, 74, 75, 77, 86, 96  
 countryside 3, 11, 15, 16, 19, 24, 77, 79, 81, 86, 113,  
 117  
 Creole.....3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 19, 38, 39,  
 42, 43, 45, 48, 74, 82, 84, 85, 87, 90, 92, 93, 96,  
 98, 110

---

### D

Dawson, Lou .....74, 75, 77, 82, 108, 116  
 de La Salle, Robert Cavelier..... 11  
 Declaration of Principles..... 22  
 Democrats ..... 15  
 discrimination ..... 14, 35  
 divorce .....8, 25, 83, 90, 103, 104  
 Dunbar-Nelson, Alice ..... 9, 119  
 Duplan.....77, 79, 85, 96, 109, 110

---

### E

education.....2, 3, 4, 7, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26,  
 27, 28, 30, 33, 35, 44, 45, 46, 49, 50, 52, 56, 57,  
 62, 65, 70, 71, 72, 84, 111, 112, 115  
 Elfenbein, Anna .... 35, 55, 56, 57, 59, 62, 65, 66, 67,  
 68, 83

---

### F

Fanny ... 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 81, 84, 85, 88, 89, 90,  
 91, 92, 94, 95, 96, 98, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105,  
 106, 107, 108, 110, 111, 115, 116, 117  
 farm ..... 4, 12, 18, 21, 27, 39, 77, 81, 115  
 female characters. 2, 3, 27, 35, 54, 61, 89, 114, 116,  
 117  
 female rights.....2, 7, 20, 21, 27  
 female roles.....2, 27, 48, 73, 90, 114  
 Fourteenth Amendment..... 15  
 Frank, Morris ..... 37, 57, 58, 63

---

### G

Gabi.....52, 53, 69, 71, 72  
 Glasgow, Ellen..... 9  
 Goupilleau, Armand ... 36, 37, 48, 49, 53, 57, 63, 66,  
 67, 68, 69, 72  
 Grégoire74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 83, 84, 85, 87, 89, 90, 92,  
 93, 98, 99, 100, 101, 105  
 Griesmann..... 85, 102  
 Grimké, Sarah..... 21

---

**H**

- Hentz, Caroline Lee ..... 26  
 Hosmer, David ..74, 77, 80, 88, 93, 96, 97, 103, 104,  
 108, 110, 115  
 Hosmer, Melicent..74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 83, 84, 85, 87,  
 88, 90, 93, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 107,  
 109, 115, 116

---

**I**

- Industrial Revolution ..... 28

---

**J**

- Jeanne ..... 58, 59  
 Jefferson, Thomas..... 12, 28  
 Jimson, Rufe ..... 90  
 Joçint.....74, 85, 87, 89, 91, 100, 113  
 Johnson, Andrew..... 14  
 Jones, Anne Goodwyn ....3, 6, 8, 10, 30, 35, 36, 38,  
 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 66, 69,  
 81, 90, 114, 115, 117

---

**K**

- King, Grace ... 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17,  
 19, 23, 24, 27, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43,  
 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 60,  
 61, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 72, 77, 79, 82, 83, 89,  
 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117  
 King, William Woodson..... 3, 4, 5  
 Ku Klux Klan..... 15

---

**L**

- lady ....2, 3, 4, 8, 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33,  
 35, 37, 45, 48, 51, 54, 56, 57, 59, 62, 63, 64, 65,  
 67, 69, 70, 71, 78, 79, 84, 90, 92, 94, 96, 103, 107,  
 108, 109, 112, 114, 115, 116  
 Lafirme, Jérôme..... 76, 78, 81, 84  
 Lafirme, Thérèse .... 8, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81,  
 82, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95,  
 96, 97, 98, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 115,  
 116, 117  
 Lareveillère, Eugénie.....36, 37, 38, 39, 48, 49, 50,  
 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70,  
 72, 114, 115  
 Lincoln, Abraham..... 14, 23  
 Local Colour fictional movement ..... 9, 10, 39

- Louisiana ....2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,  
 17, 18, 23, 26, 38, 39, 42, 75, 77, 81, 82, 98, 109,  
 110  
 Lucilla ..... 84, 111, 112

---

**M**

- Madame Fleurissant ..... 43, 49, 53, 54  
 Madame Joubert ..... 69  
 Madame Montyon.....37, 42, 44, 49, 50, 53, 56  
 Madison, James ..... 13  
 Marcélite .. 3, 5, 36, 37, 38, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 51,  
 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 63, 66, 67, 69,  
 72, 113, 114, 117  
 Marie Louise..... 75, 85, 113  
 Miller, Sarah Ann ..... 3  
*Monsieur Motte*..2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 27, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39,  
 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 54, 55, 56, 57,  
 58, 60, 61, 64, 66, 67, 68, 70, 72, 79, 82, 112, 113,  
 114, 115  
 Morico ..... 74, 76, 81, 85, 87, 88, 89, 92, 98, 105, 113  
 Motte, Marie Modeste .....36, 37, 38, 39, 45, 47, 49,  
 50, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64,  
 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 114, 115, 117  
 mulatto ..... 16

---

**N**

- Natchitoches .....7, 11, 74, 79, 90, 105  
 Nathan ..... 79, 87  
 Negro ..... 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 25, 26, 33, 35, 120  
 New Orleans ... 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,  
 16, 17, 19, 24, 36, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 46, 49, 50,  
 51, 54, 57, 81, 83, 85, 88, 95, 110, 113  
 Nineteenth Amendment..... 26  
 Ninette..... 112  
 Nourrice ..... 37, 43, 53

---

**O**

- O'Flaherty, Eliza Faris ..... 7  
 O'Flaherty, Katherine ..... 6  
 O'Flaherty, Thomas..... 7  
 Old South..... 33  
 omniscient narrator ..... 38, 76

---

**P**

- Patmore, Coventry ..... 1, 29  
*plaçage* ..... 13

Place-du-Bois plantation..74, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82,  
85, 86, 91, 93, 95, 98, 100, 105, 106, 109, 110,  
112, 113  
plantation mistress ... 2, 3, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35,  
40, 49, 57, 62, 64, 69, 70, 71, 72, 78, 79, 81, 87,  
90, 92, 94, 95, 97, 115, 116  
Presbyterian ..... 4, 5  
Protestant ..... 4

---

## Q

quadroon..... 10, 12, 13, 36, 37, 43, 44, 45, 46, 50, 54,  
57, 58, 59, 62, 66, 67, 114

---

## R

racial segregation ..... 12, 15  
railway ..... 78, 113  
realism ..... 9  
realist..... 2, 9  
Reconstruction.. 3, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 23, 27, 61, 79,  
89  
Republican ..... 15, 17  
rice ..... 12, 14  
roulaison ..... 39, 40, 41, 52  
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques ..... 20, 45, 46, 72

---

## S

sawmill ..... 22, 75, 80, 87  
Scott, Anne Firor..... 29, 30  
Seneca Falls Convention ..... 22  
sharecropping ..... 14, 18  
slave ..1, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27,  
30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 50, 55, 82  
slave trade ..... 12  
slavery..... 6, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 27, 33, 41, 58, 82  
Slaves ..... 12  
South.....1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25,  
28, 30, 33, 38, 43, 79, 81, 83, 91, 104, 105, 108,  
113, 117  
Southern Association of College Women ..... 24  
St. Denis .....2, 36, 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 55, 60,  
62, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 114  
St. Louis..... 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 45, 69, 74, 75, 76, 77, 79,  
80, 82, 85, 93, 97, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106,  
107, 113, 117

Stasie ..... 53  
Stuart, Ruth McEney ..... 9, 35, 70, 120  
suffrage.....15, 17, 21, 25, 26  
sugar cane..... 12, 39

---

## T

Taylor, Helen..3, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 27, 28, 35,  
38, 44, 54, 57, 61, 63, 69, 70, 75, 76, 77, 78, 85,  
86, 88, 89  
tenant farmers..... 18  
*The Awakening*..... 8, 125, 126  
Thirteenth Amendment..... 14  
tobacco ..... 12, 14  
Twain, Mark..... 6

---

## U

Uncle Hiram ..... 87  
Uncle Tom's Cabin..... 76  
Union..... 13, 16, 25, 81

---

## V

Voltaire..... 45, 72  
voodoo ..... 11

---

## W

Warner, Charles Dudley ..... 5, 10  
WCTU ..... 25, 81  
White Leagues..... 17  
woman suffrage ..... 26  
Woman's Board of Foreign Missions..... 25  
women's clubs ..... 25  
Woolf, Virginia..... 1, 117  
Worthington, Belle .....74, 75, 77, 79, 81, 82, 84, 90,  
93, 96, 102, 104, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111,  
112, 115, 116, 117

---

## Y

Yankees..... 13  
yeoman farmers..... 19

## 8. Appendix

### 8.1. English Abstract

Grace King and Kate Chopin are only two representatives of female novel writers from the American South. Both lived in Louisiana after the Civil War and were confronted with tremendous economic and social changes. These women imposingly cast a politically critical eye over race and gender relations in a time when women started to gain important rights in society (Taylor 28).

While Kate Chopin is often discussed by several critics due to her short stories and her landmark novel *The Awakening* (1899), Grace King seems to be undeservedly ignored. As a consequence, this diploma thesis aims at giving an insight into the representation of female characters in Grace King's early novel *Monsieur Motte* (1888), and Kate Chopin's first novel *At Fault* (1890). Both works feature strong female characters who serve as a contrast to the typical white lady and bring to life women who are "strong, independent, expressive, honest, intelligent, the mistress of her fate – and pose her against foils who are puppets to fashion, to conventions, to men, even to religion." (Jones 108) Men are ironically weakly presented in these two novels and many women take up a very strong and emancipated role.

*At Fault* and *Monsieur Motte* show that these post-Civil War authors made a major step towards Virginia Woolf's goal, who thinks that "[k]illing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer." (Woolf *Professions for Women*) Grace King and Kate Chopin portray a new image of women who, on the one hand, are strong and independent and able to provide for themselves, but, on the other hand, crave for male support and a soulmate who complements them.

## 8.2. German Abstract

Grace King und Kate Chopin sind nur zwei Autorinnen, die Romane über den amerikanischen Süden schrieben. Beide lebten nach dem Bürgerkrieg in Louisiana und waren mit massiven ökonomischen und sozialen Veränderungen konfrontiert. Diese Frauen werfen einen beeindruckenden, politisch kritischen Blick auf Rasse- und Geschlechterverhältnisse zu einer Zeit, wo Frauen erstmals Rechte zugesprochen wurden (Taylor 28).

Während Kritiker häufig Kate Chopins Kurzgeschichten und ihren bedeutendsten Roman *The Awakening* (1899) diskutieren, wurde Grace King unverdienterweise ignoriert. Deshalb möchte diese Diplomarbeit einen Einblick in die Darstellung von weiblichen Charakteren in Grace Kings frühem Roman *Monsieur Motte* (1888) und Kate Chopins ersten Roman *At Fault* (1890) geben. Beide Werke weisen starke, weibliche Charaktere als Kontrast zu der typischen weißen Lady auf und erwecken Frauen, die „stark, unabhängig, ausdrucksstark, ehrlich, intelligent, die Herrin des eigenen Schicksals sind – und positionieren sie als Kontrastfiguren zu Marionetten von Mode, Gepflogenheiten, Männern und sogar Religion.“ (Taylor 108) Männer sind ironischerweise in beiden Romanen schwach dargestellt, wohingegen viele Frauen eine starke und emanzipierte Rolle einnehmen.

*At Fault* und *Monsieur Motte* zeigen, dass diese Nachkriegs-Autorinnen einen bedeutenden Schritt in Richtung Virginia Woolfs Ziel machten, die meinte, „den Engel im Haushalt zu töten gehöre zum Geschäft der Autorin.“ (Woolf *Professions for Women*) Grace King und Kate Chopin stellen ein neues Bild der Frau dar, die einerseits stark und unabhängig ist und sich selbst versorgen kann, aber sich andererseits auch sehnlichst männliche Unterstützung und einen Seelenverwandten, der sie vervollständigt, wünscht.