

Chopin's Awakening Study: Supplemental Literature

Tone

Slipping

Joan Aleshire (1947-)

Age comes to my father as a slow
slipping: the leg that weakens will
barely support him, the current mist
that falls over one eye. Years, like
pickpockets, lift his concentration,
memory, fine sense of direction. The car
as he drives, drifts from lane to lane
like a raft on a river, speeds and slows
for no reason, keeps missing turns.

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As my mother says, "He's never liked
to talk about feelings," but tonight
out walking, as I slow to match his pace—
his left leg trailing a little like
a child who keeps pulling on your hand—he says,
"I love you so much." Darkness, and the sense
we always have that each visit may be
the last, have pushed away years of restraint.

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A photograph taken of him teaching—
white coat, stethoscope like a pet snake
around his neck, chair tipped back
against the lecture room wall—shows
a man talking, love of his work lighting
his face—in a way we seldom saw at
home.

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I answer that I love him, too, but
hardly knowing him, what I love
is the way reserve has slipped from
his feeling, like a screen suddenly
falling, exposing someone dressing or
washing: how wrinkles ring a bent neck,
how soft and mutable is the usually
hidden flesh.

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(1987)

Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

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Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

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Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

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And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Starry, Starry Night
Anne Sexton (1928-1974)

That does not keep me from having a terrible need of -- shall I say the word -- religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars.

--Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother

The town does not exist
except where one black-haired tree slips
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how 5
I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons
to push children, like a god, from its eye.
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars. 10
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die:

into that rushing beast of the night,
sucked up by that great dragon, to split 15
from my life with no flag,
no belly,
no cry.

Final Pages in *The Awakening* – use book.

Comparative Works

Désirées' Baby: <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/k Chopin/bl-k Chop-desir.htm>

Désirées' Baby Study Questions

Why does Désirées' mother, Madame Valmondé, believe the baby is not Désirées' when she first sees him?

In what ways does the story coincide with the societal values of the time in which it was written?

In what ways do social forces and class differences affect the plot of the story?

Who can be considered racist in the story? Why?

How does Désirée's gender play into the assignment of fault in the fact that the child was of mixed race?

Explain the irony in the story.

What does Madame Valmonde's continued love for her daughter reveal about her personality?

Do you the reader feel that the text portrays a positive or negative light on society?

What does Armand's reaction to having a mixed baby say about his sentiments towards different races?

What is contradictory about his sentiments?

What archetype does Desiree represent in the text? Why?

The Storm: <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/k Chopin/bl-k Chop-the storm.htm>

The Storm Study Questions

How does the storm outside affect Calixta? Alcée? What does she think of when she sees the lightning bolt? How does Alcée react? Explain.

What does the fact that Chopin herself decided not to publish "The Storm" tell you about her feelings about the piece? About social expectations of literature and women writers? Explain.

"The Storm" is comprised of five scenes told in sequence. Why do you think she chose this format?

In what ways does the storm outside mirror Calixta's internal sexual turmoil? How does a storm begin, grow, strike, and abate?

One of the controversial issues of this story is its "lack of moral closure." What moral issues are raised in this story? Does Chopin's closing sentence, that "everyone was happy" seem immoral? What is your viewpoint?

Why don't Calixta and Alcée do not act on sexual impulses in "At the 'Cadian Ball" when both are still single, but do so without guilt in "The Storm." What do you think?

What social and ethnic issues are raised by "'The Storm"?

The Story of an Hour: <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/webtexts/hour/>

The Story of an Hour Study Questions

What is the nature of Mrs. Mallard's "heart trouble," and why would the author mention it in the first paragraph? Is there any way in which this might be considered symbolic or ironic?

The setting of the story is very limited; it is confined largely to a room, a staircase, and a front door. How does this limitation help to express the themes of the story?

In what ways is this passage significant? "She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves." What kinds of sensory images does this passage contain, and what senses does it address? What does the vision through the open window mean to her? Where else does she taste, smell, or touch something intangible in the story?

What kind of relationships do the Mallards have? Is Brently Mallard unkind to Louise Mallard, or is there some other reason for her saying "free, free, free!" when she hears of his death? How does she feel about him?

Mrs. Mallard closes the door to her room so that her sister Josephine cannot get in, yet she leaves the window open. Why does Chopin make a point of telling the reader this? How might this relate to the idea of being "free" and to the implicit idea that she is somehow imprisoned? Do other words in the story relate to this idea?

What does Josephine represent in the story? What does Richards represent?

Mrs. Mallard is described as descending the stairs "like a goddess of Victory." In what ways does she feel herself victorious?

The last line of the story is this: "When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease-of joy that kills." In what ways is this an ironic statement? What is gained by having the doctors make such a statement rather than putting it in the mouths of Josephine or Richards?

What view of marriage does the story present? The story was published in 1894; does it only represent attitudes toward marriage in the nineteenth century, or could it equally apply to attitudes about marriage today?

If this is, in some sense, a story about a symbolic journey, where does Mrs. Mallard "travel"?