

EL DESPERTAR.

Kate Chopin.

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In her introduction to her own translation and edition of Kate Chopin's best-known work, Prof. Eulalia Piñero quotes Emily Toth's affirmation that *The Awakening* is one of the most frequently read texts within the context of academic syllabi in the United States, often replacing Melville's ubiquitous *Moby Dick* (65). Piñero's own experience as a teacher confirms the popularity and "student-friendliness" of Chopin's novel in Spanish universities, which in itself would be an excellent reason for preparing an edition like the present one. In addition, if it is understood that Chopin's popularity in academia in comparison to Melville's work is not only due to the rather non-academic reasons that may come to mind, such as the concision and relative clarity of Chopin's novel in contrast with the overwhelming digressiveness of Melville's, the publication of this edition gains in significance. The recovery of Chopin's, and other nineteenth-century women writers' texts in the teaching of U.S. literature and culture is part of a process which is certainly not new by now, having gained momentum in the early 1970s in the United States and approximately in the late 1980s in Spain, but which is still relevant in its attempt to offer a more accurate image of the themes and preoccupations that dominated U.S. literature and culture in the 19th century, beyond the minority approach of the "American Renaissance." In this sense Chopin's work, elegantly dealing with the much-debated "Woman Question" and reflecting several of the most relevant influences on U.S. literature at the end of the 19th century, is enormously representative.

In the edition itself, Piñero underlines that its basic contribution is the scholarly framework and the extensive support provided by means of editor's notes, and points out the existence of another translation, Olivia de Miguel's 2011 reworking of her 1986 translation, published by Alba Editorial together with a selection of Chopin's short stories. While de Miguel's edition seems more aimed at the general reader, presented in an attractive hard-back format in a collection that specializes in re-editing less familiar 19th century texts, Piñero's is more academic, at a level useful both to undergraduate students and more specialized readers. The greatest strength of her edition is her thorough, almost exhaustive, introduction that successfully situates Chopin within the multiple contexts that frame her writing.

Kate Chopin's biographical background is presented in a fluid, narrative tone that makes it also accessible for a curious general reader, while the solid bibliography which supports the narrative is tidily presented in unobtrusive but well-documented footnotes. This tone may have its own dangers in sometimes becoming too personal, as in some psychological speculations, for instance those relating to the writer's alleged affair with Albert Sampite (24). However, the personal biography is closely interwoven with the literary background, as Piñero traces the publication of Chopin's short stories in relation to several significant influences on the writer. Chopin's work is given density by placing it in relation to her European influences (notably Maupassant) and the national context, including the rise of the New Woman and the mostly female tradition of local-color writing, which Chopin would extend by her bold introduction of transgressive themes, such as the tragedy of "miscenegation" and racial prejudice in "Desirée's Baby."

In a similar way, *The Awakening* is set in a series of frameworks, firstly within the polemical critical reaction it provoked on publication, and then within the novel's "rediscovery," where a brief account of the history of Chopin's critical reception is also provided. The analysis of the novel itself which follows retakes the theme of Chopin's link to a variety of national and European traditions, but also successfully marks her difference from them, as in the contrast established between the characters of Edna Pontellier and Emma Bovary. Chopin's situation as a woman writer in a moment of transition, and her comparative "creative solitude," are also emphasized. It is in this detailed analysis of the novel, however, where I would formulate some minor objections, perhaps related to tone rather than content. Piñero, for instance, makes a perceptive reading of the omission of any explicit mention of childbirth itself in the episode where Edna attends her friend Adèle in her "difficult moments" when this omission might simply be attributed to late Victorian convention, and in this sense her refusal to take things for granted is well justified. However, her phrasing of some other references to "givens" of late Victorian, or even specifically Southern, culture, such as the attribution of sexual awareness and desire to non-white women, in contrast to the sexlessness presupposed in white middle class "ladies" (78), or even the extent of Edna's musical training (94), suggests an unwonted element of surprise. This, and the occasional tendency to slip into the past when describing events in the novel, which contributes to a sometimes too passionate, too personal critical voice, are to me the only drawbacks in an analysis which again may be equally valuable for the three levels of readers mentioned above: general readers, graduate and postgraduate students, and scholars. In this sense, the bibliography provided is useful, and its particular interest in covering Chopin studies in Spain merits praise.

As to the translation, Peter Newmark points out that criticism of a literary translation should not be an attempt to collect mistakes or to suggest alternatives, but an attempt to understand and assess the "theory," whether explicit or implicit, that

has guided the translator's choices (186-87). Piñero has, I believe, opted again for a reader-friendly translation, including a very reasonable number of brief notes that are more complete than in de Miguel's translation, but manage to avoid one of the pitfalls of academic editions: the excessive extension and number of notes that makes the page visually uncomfortable and continuous reading virtually impossible. The notes concisely explain place and name references and contemporary customs, and provide translations of the (originally untranslated) French words and phrases intercalated by Chopin's Creole characters, which seems a sensible choice for contemporary readers. The translation as a whole is fluid and accurate; the translator's strengths are perhaps best reflected in some very Spanish-sounding expressions not often employed in translating, such as "cada dos años *tenía un niño*," "Mme Ratignolle *quería mucho* a la Sra Pontellier," (139-9) or the assertive, colloquial "*Te lo digo yo*" with which Edna's father tries to persuade his son-in-law that women must be ruled with a strong hand (227). Some other options are more debatable; for instance, Piñero uses the familiar form "*tú*" in translating some of the dialogues between Edna and Robert Lebrun, even though the latter addresses her as Mrs Pontellier in the original (189, 263); to me, this leads to the loss of a shade of meaning, the element of courtly –and thus by definition unequal– love which defines Robert's view of the relationship; but it is ultimately the author's choice to take this risk in attempting to reflect their intimacy.

To quote Newmark again, the final question to ask in translation criticism is "Was it in fact worth translating?" (189). The answer is clearly in the affirmative; all the above makes Eulalia Piñero's edition and translation of *The Awakening* a valuable contribution to the growing field of studies on Kate Chopin in Spain, and a work that manages to keep an excellent balance between the various needs of her prospective audiences.

WORKS CITED

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NEWMARK, Peter. *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1988.