

In her time, the general public viewed Kate Chopin as an almost taboo writer, and her works, such as *The Awakening*, were branded as “gilded dirt.” (ix) Yet, in today’s context, she is viewed as a woman who broke conventional barriers through her writing. Her early short stories served as a precedent to *The Awakening*, slightly pushing traditional boundaries years before she wrote her most famous story. (360, 377) In her short story “The Maid of Saint Phillippe,” Chopin used intense characterization and imagery to connect Marianna to the overarching themes of women’s independence and freedom, in a time when such writings could be considered inflammatory.

As a character, Marianne embodied a strong-willed and strong-minded woman in charge of her own destiny. In the opening lines, Marianne is initially described as “tall, supple, and strong” and a huntress who “looked more like a handsome boy than like the French girl.” (156) It is later revealed to the reader that she is the acting head of her household charged with her sickly father’s care and household work. (160) Upon his death, a rather drastic shift in Marianne’s temperament is seen, as she shook her only earthly bond of dependence in him, and her nerves became “like iron.” (160) Even after repeated insistence from the cure and Jacques, she remained resolute in her decision to stay in Saint Phillippe alone. (161) Her independence is most thoroughly portrayed in the last scene during her conversation with Captain Vaudry when she asserted that she was her own master and the pleasantries of France could not persuade her. (162-163) Marianne’s independence is built through calculated dialogue and characterization to present her as the “new woman” apparent in Chopin’s time.

The more analytical aspect of Chopin’s portrayal of popular themes can be seen through the imagery presented in the text. As Marianne is returning from her hunt, she is described as “stag-like” who travels “his native hill-side unmolested,” suggesting a connection between

Marianne and a stag which roams free in its own domain and is a slave to none. (156) Chopin continually referenced Native Americans throughout the story in such lines as “the subtle perfume of the Indian summer,” which suggests that Marianne’s locale is rural and thus untainted by civilization. (156) The strongest example of imagery Chopin used in this story was the ending line, which suggested Marianna turned to look at a bright future seen in the rising sun. (163) Chopin used this imagery to augment the theme of freedom seen through Marianne’s decision to cut ties with the life of civilization and embark on a journey to the unknown.

Throughout the story, Marianne underwent a metamorphosis of sorts and, in the end, blossomed into a shining example of the independent woman. The reader must contextually analyze the text to find the core values of Chopin and the thematic elements present in the body of the story. Chopin attributed traditionally male characteristics to a female protagonist while writing in an era where women were still without enfranchisement and possessed little freedom. In doing this, Chopin subtly attacked the conventionalism present in her time through the thematic elements presented in just the eight short pages of “The Maid of Saint Phillippe.”