Women in the Arts

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Eccentric Essays II

Edited by

Barbara Harbach

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INTRODUCTION – WHO WE ARE!

BARBARA HARBACH

Is there a need for books about women in the arts, exhibitions of women painters, readings of women's poetry, concerts of music by women composers, and conferences highlighting women in the arts? One might believe that today the playing field is level, especially in the music profession, since the best known piece of music in the English language was written by two sisters, Patty and Mildred Hill, in Kentucky in 1893 for their kindergarten class. The original words were "Good Morning to All," and we all know and sing it as "Happy Birthday to You."[1]

However, the above example may produce an inaccurate posit. It is an acknowledged fact that there are more professional male creators in classical music than female, and historical men creators have been chronicled for centuries and their creative products duplicated. On the other hand, historical women creators in literature and the visual arts have been recovered since the late 19th century, but in music the recovery of women composers dates only from about 1980. In addition, it has only been since the 19th century that women could sign their names to their creativity without any societal repercussions.

Let us start this introduction with some provocative and probably little known statistics from 2012- 2014.

- PRS for Music in the United Kingdom states that men hold 67.8% of all music related jobs, while women hold 32.2%, and that out of their membership of about 95,000 composers and songwriters, only 13% are female. Adding to this disparity is the statistics that show women earn less than their male co-workers.[2]
- To continue with the music profession, according to the League of American Orchestras, only 1-2% of pieces played by orchestras in the United States are composed by women.[3]
- The Proms in the United Kingdom, in its 119th year in 2013, is the largest music festival in the world. Held in London at the Royal Albert Hall, Marin Alsop was the first woman to conduct the prestigious Last Night of the Proms. Alsop said that she was

honored to be chosen, but that it was extraordinary that in 2013 there were still events that were "first times" for women. Statistics of the Proms show that women's participation in 2013 was not as high as in 2012, which was the best year for women.[4] In addition, Alsop is the only woman director of a major orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony, appointed in 2007.[5] On the other hand, there are more women conductors in the opera world.

- In October 2013, the Russian conductor Yuri Temirkanov, music director of the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, stated in an interview with the Paris-based pianist and composer Elena Gantchikova in *The New Yorker* that women conductors "[are] counter to nature….The essence of a woman is weakness."[6]
- Judith Weir, a British composer, was appointed Master of the Queen's Music. In 2014 she was the first woman to be appointed to this role, which has been in existence for nearly 400 years. As Jessica Ruchen said in her article, "The title may be archaic, the job's implied responsibilities establishmentarian, but given the struggles for recognition that have faced women composers over the centuries it is still a significant crack in a crystal ceiling."[7]

The visual arts are not immune to gender inequality in the workplace. According to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., 51% of artists are women, and "yet only 5% of the art displayed in museums is made by female artists."[8] In the United States, women earn more than half of the Master of Fine Arts degrees, but only one third of gallery art is by women. "Representation, on and off the canvas, remains a key realm where visibility and influence are actively contested."[9] To highlight even more inequality, *Art Miami* in their 2013 symposium report stated, "In the art market, women's art generally sells for about a tenth of the price of male counterparts' works... Only a fraction of the current art on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York is by women artists."[10]

The actress, Geena Davis, and her Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media is working to change the portrayals and stereotypes in children's media and entertainment. Women in film are under-represented in crowd scenes (17%), and character roles (33%). Davis states, "If the female characters are one-dimensional, sidelined, stereotyped, hypersexualized or simply not there at all, we're saying that women are less important to our society than men, that women and girls don't take up half the space in the world."[11]

Media also has its gender equality issues, although 2013 had some highlights for women in media, such as a record number of female directors nominated for Emmys, the first female anchor team on *NewsHour* was appointed by PBS, and *Nine for IX* film series was aired by ESPN. The Representation Project in media, whose mission is to expose injustices created by gender stereotypes and to shift people's consciousness towards change, states that "some things aren't changing fast enough… Because extreme Photoshop is used to promote the Barbie lifestyle and look, and calling a 9-year-old girl – or anyone, for that matter – the C-word is used for humor, and a GOP leader called Miss America a prostitute for standing up against bullying, and sex appeal is apparently the only way to sell hamburgers."[12]

Edward Helmore in his 2013 article, "The naked truth: Hollywood still treats its women as second class citizens," states that "research shows female film stars are paid less, have fewer lines and spend more time with their clothes off than men."[13]

In *Oxford Music Online*, women musicians who perform with major symphony orchestras is about 36%.[14] Currently in 2014, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in St. Louis, MO, has a gender breakdown of 45 men and 51 women, which is unusual for a major symphony orchestra.[15] In contrast, the first woman admitted to the Vienna Philharmonic was in 1997, and there are still only a few women in the Philharmonic.

Women in the academy have made some progress in the lower ranks but still lag behind men. In 2009-10, women held more than 36% of the faculty positions in music, with the highest proportion of women (35%) in the most recently hired ranks (assistant professor). The proportion of women decreases further up the rank (33% for associate professor and 25% for full professor).[16]

Is there anyway women can embrace the parity and shorten the time line for equality for women in the arts? What can we do? Ivan Hewett in his article for the Telegraph, "Why are there so few women in contemporary music?" finds some surprising explanations to the inequality between the sexes in classical music."[17] And these explanations transcend music to incorporate all the arts. His first posit after witnessing a spirited and combative discussion at the Shoreditch House in 2014 for Girls Allowed: Women in Contemporary Music[18] was that men of a certain age still resist change of allowing women in middle and upper management positions. As the radio presenter Ruth Barnes said, "We've just got to wait for them all to die off." And hire and promote women to replace them. The canvas change should also include women and people of color in positions of power.

All women creators have similar pressures, and all parts of the fine arts industries have a role in reducing the barriers women face to become artists and secure in their careers. If you showcase 19th century music or art, the canon offers many composers who were published at that time, and they were almost all male. Another problem is the lack of confidence in young women. Culture breeds women not to tout their own horn, not to volunteer when they know the answers, and as always, girls have to be twice as good to get the position or even the possibility of an audition or interview. We must hasten the march toward equity in gender, class and race!

Changing the resistance of institutions and audiences is daunting, but possible to overcome by innovative thinking: communities can start celebrations and collaborations to support contemporary artists. In 2013, 25% of the season's premieres in the United States were prompted by local ties and connections: city celebrations and anniversaries, cultural partnerships or local composers with a relationship to the community. I was fortunate to receive commissions from my local St. Louis community and the University of Missouri–St. Louis to compose the *Gateway Festival Symphony,* for the 50th Anniversary of the Gateway Festival Orchestra; the *Jubilee Symphony* for the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the University of Missouri-St. Louis; and *A State Divided – a Missouri Symphony* for the 150th anniversary of Missouri's entrance into the Civil War. When I lived in Wisconsin, the Central Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra commissioned me to write *One of Ours – a Cather Symphony* – a community based commission.

Another avenue is to start commissioning consortiums and partnerships. 15% of 2013 season's premieres were the result of funding partnerships between orchestras, presenters or cultural organizations. Initiatives such as Women in the Arts Festivals (Hartford, CT; St. Louis, MO, Buffalo, NY plus many more) – are not just for women, but also for people of different ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities. We need to energize radio stations to play music by women composers such as the International Alliance of Women in Music (IAWM) does weekly. Call up your favorite radio station jockeys and ask them to play some women's music. IAWM has many suggestions of women composers for radio stations to highlight.

Higher education and K-12 must include more women's artistic contributions emphasized through suggested readings, books and lesson plans. Also, more women teachers are needed in higher education so that there are more role models available to both young women and men. In music, the ratios of female to male members of composition faculty at

twelve of the top music schools or conservatories in the US is very low – eight women out of seventy composers, and of these twelve schools, four have no female composers on the faculty.

The ultimate goal is to change the debate away from gender categories which reinforce the notion that men's creativity is not only the norm but better. There are many women challenging the *status quo*, and we are succeeding, albeit glacially. "Old habits die hard. One of the reasons we haven't seen much change is that it's not seen as a problem by people in positions of power – even by some women. Unless you perceive something as a problem, you're not going to fix it."[19]

It's been nearly a millennium since Hildegard von Bingen composed music and illuminated manuscripts. Shouldn't we be past the time when it was unusual to be a "woman composer?" Or as the great 20th century pedagogue and composer Nadia Boulanger said, "I've been a woman for a little over 50 years and have gotten over my initial astonishment. As for conducting an orchestra, that's a job where I don't think sex plays much part."

And yes, books like *Eccentric Essays II*, and enlightened publishers like Cambridge Scholars Press, who champion women creators, will move us just a little closer to equality by keeping the accomplishments of women at the forefront of our consciousness. Technology today is a great asset in documenting the productivity of women, and all the artistic creations can be codified and archived, in contrast to earlier times when creative women's birth and death dates are unknown, not even taking into account all their lost creations.

Kathleen Nigro in her provocative essay "Pictures at an Exposition, Kate Chopin and the Palace of Fine Arts" brings new insights into what it meant to be an artistic woman at the turn of the 20th century in St. Louis, Missouri. "I am becoming an artist," Edna tells Mlle Reixz in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. There is no indecision in that statement, and every woman creator should use it as their mantra. This essay also addresses the class system of middle-America as well as the elite versus the black, underprivileged women. At a time when women's sexuality and social class were barely acknowledged, Kate Chopin focused new light on gender in Victorian America. Nigro states, "No matter how condescending male artists might be towards female artists, the truth is that the women [artists] were a group of subversives." That statement holds true even today. Women creators must, by necessity, be their own muse, entrepreneur, agent and promoter. Nigro further states, "*The Awakening* is the product of an 'emancipated' female artist very much of her time…she moves from [being an] object to subject."

Another fascinating essay by Kathleen Nigro is her "Gone with the Wind? Rethinking Gender in Missouri's Slave Narratives." *Gone with the Wind*, the 1939 epic film of romance with African Americans struggling for their freedom during the Civil War in the United States, does not accurately portray the lives of women slaves. Nigro points out that men and women slaves were treated differently. As mothers, "the female slaves suffered the loss of their children, and many begged not to be separated from them." It is heartrending to read of children torn from their mothers' arms. "The story of Celia, a Missouri slave in Callaway County, illustrates the complex relationship that existed on an individual level and in the national consciousness." In addition, "Clearly, gender roles and boundaries added greatly to the already existing confusion about race that defined the American Civil War South." Women slaves were often pushed into unwanted marriages, or kept as sex slaves, or valued only for the number of children they produced, and were used as wet nurses for the white children. "The slave woman's life was also circumscribed by violence through countless examples." Compelling to all of us today is Nigro's profound statement, "Hopefully, as we look back on these documents and realize their inestimable value, we will be mindful of the stories that have been lost and of the vigilance we must pay to the issues we see reflected in the stories that have survived."

"Dos and Don'ts for Growing Up in Macholand" by María Balogh could be thought of as tongue-in-cheek, a clever way to see how the genders interact. Or is it? Macholand is where men live and reign. Growing up in a patriarchal culture, Balogh defines the different roles girls and boys must learn and obey. "There are many areas of the modern world where at least ninety percent of all men are nurtured machos." Little girls are taught to stay clean, "and that there will be someone to help around the house a few years later." Balogh takes us from birth to teen years, and then marriage. "Finally, you'd better be married and with children, or at least pregnant, by the time you're 25, or your family will worry that you will never be a real woman."

What if you are a little boy? "If you are born a boy, your parents are ecstatic, because there will be someone to carry on the family name and be the head of the household after your father passes on." Balogh takes us from being a baby boy, "You will know that the most important part of your body is your penis," to being a boastful teen, whistle at girls and make innuendoes to them, and practice your sexuality. Balogh ends her essay, "Your children in turn will model for your grandchildren, until someone like me comes along to break the pattern." Yes!

Truth in art – that is what every artist strives for, no matter what discipline she practices. Mary Troy in her essay "Truth in Fiction: Writing out of Bewilderment" states, "In some real sense, all creative endeavors are a search for truth, versions of truth." Through authors such as Alice Munro and Joyce Carol Oates, among others, Troy reminds us, "Evolutionary scientists, psychologists, and literary critics agree that truth is found in stories, and some even say our brains [are] formed for and by stories; we learn who and what we are, what we can and cannot do, through stories." As a writer, Troy says, "So we write out of our bewilderment and curiosity, and we aim for truth, we stumble toward it, discovering it as we go." Stories for Troy resonate: "And if done well, they are uplifting, insightful, startling, surprising, and yes, even comforting. And always, the opposite of boring." The quest for truth enables us, "[to] see humanity, and it changes us, takes us out of our own lives, makes us look at ourselves from another angle." Amen!

Maria Balogh is an outstanding word painter, and in a few words she can give a gritty portrait. In her poem, "First Lessons," she continues woman's emancipation from Macholand,

"Soup and pieces of broken porcelain
Slowly in chunky cascades onto the floor."

In "Jumping the Fence," a mother looks at her 17-year-old boy and hopes, "the promise of a better future starting college soon the 1st in the family," but knows he is already entrenched in Macholand. Painting an articulate portrait in "On the Sidewalk," Balogh poignantly describes a homeless and broken prostitute. Another salute to women occurs in *Caribeña*, "I salute you, Sister *Caribeña* & your blended mosaic nature," and yet another portrait of an overworked mother in "Once upon a Woman,"

"Realization of worth
Tardiness of value."

The poetry of Jennifer Tappenden is thought provoking, creating images with few words. "Football at Roosevelt High" explores the image of members of a football team fallen on the football field, where underneath are buried the bodies of immigrants and victims of cholera. The football field was built on the site of a cemetery, Holy Ghost (Old Picker's) Cemetery in St. Louis. "Invitation to Ms. Brigit Pegeen Kelly" purports an imaginary invitation to a garden with bushes and even a stair

case leading to nowhere. “All of this is only true if you are here. Please come.”

Tappenden’s “The Tooth Collector” tells of a man who goes around collecting teeth from dead Rebels and Yanks for profit, “The teeth speak for themselves.” “Thin Place” is the fond memory of going fishing with her father, “Somewhere there is a lake thin like a finger, glassy and full of fish.”

“I Shall Hold to Life” by Kathleen Shimeta tells the uplifting story of Gena Branscombe, a woman ahead of her time. “She was a strong leader, willing to take chances, and was a self-promoter with heart.” Branscombe was born in Victorian times in 1881 and went on to become a pianist, composer, conductor, wife, mother and champion of American music. Shimeta says, “Her life’s story of hard work, determination and financial struggle struck a familiar chord in me…All this adds up to my fascination with her and my decision: my job was to bring her life and music alive in the twenty-first century.”

Carole Harris has brought new insights into the lives of “Boulanger and Talma, Women Who Changed the Twentieth-Century American Musical Landscape.” Without a doubt, Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) was the greatest musical pedagogue in the twentieth-century. “Although her students came from many countries, her main influence was upon young American musicians who studied at the École Américain at Fontainebleau outside Paris during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.” Her roster of students reads like a who’s-who of American composers in the mid-20th century: Aaron Copland, Ned Rorem, Roy Harris, Karel Husa, Burt Bacharach, Philip Glass, Louise Talma, Walter Piston and Peggy Glanville-Hicks, to name only a very few. Roy Harris states, “Copland’s spirit of adventure and his instincts about Nadia Boulanger later precipitated a new path for American music and for many American musicians in the decades following the 1920s.” Boulanger’s legacy of teaching composition and helping each of her students develop their own style of composing is still flourishing through her students and the generation of students that have followed her teachings.

Louise Talma (1906-1996) studied with Boulanger and was greatly influenced by her. She was a prolific composer who wrote more than forty major pieces. She progressed from a neo-Classical style to the more austere serial style. She received three honorary doctorates and many grants. She is credited with a significant number of “firsts” as a woman composer: the first woman to receive two Guggenheim awards; the first woman elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1974); the first American to teach at Fontainebleau; and the first woman to receive the

Sibelius Medal for composition from the Harriet Cohen International Awards in London (1963). Harris concludes, "Talma's contributions to American music are continuing to be investigated and evaluated; as a woman composer, she did not receive the recognition that some of her male contemporaries did. However, the quality and quantity of her output rank her as one of America's leading twentieth-century composers."

"In the midst of heart-breaking poverty and a lack of resources for an appropriate musical education environment, Ms. Nalden has provided the children with a first-rate school. She offers them not just musical instruction but lessons in how to succeed in their lives as well." So opens Gail Fleming's inspiring essay, "Rosemary Nalden: Buskaid Soweto String Project – South Africa." Fleming visited the Buskaid Soweto String Project in 2010 and saw firsthand the squalor of the squatter village where the students lived, but saw and heard students' music that transcended their environment. The String Project was started by Rosemary Nalden in 1997. Nalden is a professional viola player originally from England. Under Nalden's tutelage, "the BSSP has performed for global ambassadors such as [the late] Nelson Mandella, recorded five CDs (including one which features South African folk songs arranged for strings), and toured internationally 16 times." Fleming sums up what teaching is all about: "I was inspired by the fact that even in the bleakest of physical surroundings, children can be nurtured to grow, blossom, and thrive with caring instruction and the inspiration of music. It left me with a heightened awareness of the miracles that music, and those who teach music, can perform."

Diane Touliatos-Miles' groundbreaking research on Byzantine women composers has led to her "Representation of Ancient Greek and Byzantine Women through the Eyes of Contemporary Male Creators." Touliatos-Miles has recovered many women composers from the Byzantine era, especially her recovery of Kassia. "Kassia stands out in importance because of her brilliance, beauty and education – the latter being an unusual attribute for women. She was characterized later in her life as the woman who was too smart to become empress of the empire – a disparaging compliment for any woman of that time." It is riveting to discover how scholars find information about Byzantine composers through iconography representations that are preserved on vases and statues and from male writers in Ancient Hellenistic times. Touliatos-Miles states, "Ancient Greek women musicians in the eyes of men were usually divided into two categories: the unrespectable Hetairai or the more respectable composers/performers that were organ and kithara performers, the lyric poetesses, and the parthenia choruses that were endured but never

given the same prominence as men musicians." It is revealing that Touliatos-Miles' journey into the recovery of ancient Greek women helped add to the knowledge of Iaia of Kyzikos, Diotima of Mantineia, Phantasia of Memphis, and Sappho from Lesbos. Touliatos-Miles is creating a history of women composers from Ancient times when everyone believed that there were no women creators. And for that, we thank her!

Jennifer Moder in her essay "Instrument Selection and Gender Bias" suggests the reasons why each gender chooses which musical instrument to learn. "The ability to produce a sound out of the instrument and liking the sound of the instrument were the two primary reasons both male and female students selected their instrument." Since the Renaissance period (15^{th}-16^{th} centuries), there has been gender stereotyping for various instruments, and "this bias not only occurs in music programs throughout the United States but also around the world." Moder suggests ways to break this trend by having women demonstrate the traditional male instruments (trombone, trumpet and percussion), and men demonstrating the so-called feminine instruments (clarinet and flute). Another factor in selecting an instrument is the parent's encouragement to choose an instrument regardless of gender stereotyping. "It is also imperative to involve parents in the recruitment process and guide them to the realization that it is acceptable for students to choose any instrument they want to learn."

The art of Vanessa Woods is thought-provoking, complex and intriguing. Careful study of the pieces can reveal insights into our own personas in her Celestial Shadows, Out of the Ash, Tilted Orbit, Ephemeris, Nascent Stars, Photogram, The Astronomers Dream, the Omen, Celestial Cartography and The Alchemists.

"Posing Nude, Producing an Object, Performing a Subject: Cléo de Mérode, Alexandre Falguière, and *La Danseuse"* is an in-depth probe into the psychology of posing for an artist that was supposedly based on the "likeness of a rising star at the Opéra de Paris, Cléo de Mérode (1875-1966)." Many young female dancers would often pose nude for financial gain. However, models often felt that they were more than a passive object: "The assumption is that the artist contracts with and pays the model to stand or sit in a manner that suits him, and the economic transaction becomes the template for their inter-subjective exchange. A closer look at the process of posing unsettles that paradigm, however." In 1896, it was assumed that most "models consider posing to be collaborative or at least reciprocal." But if the sculpture is judged through the lens of dance and theater as opposed to the gallery, *La Danseuse* "[it] may be seen as

presenting a tentative challenge to the conventions that governed feminine stage performances." Waller sums up the controversy: "It challenged the conventions that governed women's stage performances and gave material form to her agency, troubling and destabilizing conventional gender oppositions by presenting her as simultaneously object and subject."

Creating art and teaching art is a common duality each artist must figure out for herself. Karen Cummings in her essay "Artist Identity and Teaching Practice: The Influence of Artmaking on Teaching Art" suggests, "Being an artist means searching for an understanding, searching for the truth" – a posit that Mary Troy champions in "Truth in Fiction: Writing out of Bewilderment." Cummings' passion for teaching art is evident: "It is incredibly important for an art educator to continue to make art so that they remember the passion and excitement that comes with creating artwork." She purports that whether artist/teacher or teacher/artist, "The role of teacher and that of artist are always present in the lives of art educators, although they never seem to be equal due to the amount of energy both require; it is the balance of the two roles that change throughout life."

"Fostering Older Adults' Engagement in the Community through Lifelong Music Making Experiences" by Melita Belgrave believes "Music-based lifelong learning programs are a successful way to engage older adults with their community." Especially with the baby boomers turning 65 years old, this can be done through private lessons and music ensembles, such as choirs, orchestras and bands. She also suggests, "Another music-based program that fosters engagement of older adults with their community is intergenerational programming. Intergenerational programs bring together younger and older generations to improve cross-age attitudes, cross-age interactions of younger and older generations, as well as psychosocial well-being of older adults." Belgrave has instituted her successful Forever Young vocal ensemble "to engage older adults in lifelong learning through music." Another interesting project is her Piano Wizard Project. "Piano lessons were taught using the Piano Wizard methodology, a technology-based instructional method that utilizes sensory learning." As we all age, we need innovative programs like these to help keep us connected to society through music.

The essays contained in *Eccentric Essays II: Women in the Arts – Music, Visual Arts and Literature* reflect the lives of creative artists, whether they are teachers, scholars and researchers recovering the past generations of women artists or practicing artists creating new masterpieces. All of us must follow our passion and promote the roles of women in the arts, so that our legacy will live on and be a resource for

future generations of students, scholars and researchers, and that our collective creativity will enhance generations to come, enriching our culture through the arts.

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WOMEN IN LITERATURE

PICTURES AT AN EXPOSITION: KATE CHOPIN AND THE PALACE OF FINE ARTS

KATHLEEN BUTTERLY NIGRO

Biographies of Kate Chopin end on August 22, 1904, when the author died in her home. On August 20 of the year, Pennsylvania Day, Chopin had visited the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (known popularly as the St. Louis World's Fair) and suffered a cerebral hemorrhage that night. Chopin did not write about her visit to the fair, although she was a frequent visitor, and so it is impossible to know whether she viewed the international collection at the Palace of Fine Arts (the only remaining structure, this building is still used today as the St. Louis Art Museum). As the centerpiece of the Fair and intended to be a lasting memorial, contributions from twenty-seven nations filled its halls; according to Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company President David R. Francis, "At no previous exposition did art receive so much recognition and recognition and attention." It is certainly intriguing to consider whether Chopin might have visited the Palace of Fine Arts and what she might have thought of what she saw there, and her writings give us a certain insight into her attitudes towards art and artistic movements. As John Berger writes in his analysis about perception, *Ways of Seeing*, "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe."[1] What do we as readers think we know about Chopin's beliefs or ways of seeing, and how is that opinion reflected in her writings?

"I am becoming an artist," Edna tells Mlle Reisz in *The Awakening*. What an interesting choice of verb tense: not "I am an artist" or "I want to be an artist," but the active, developing sense of *becoming.* Certainly Kate Chopin held artists in high esteem if one of Edna's final thoughts is about the artist's "courageous soul." What might have been some of the final images in Kate Chopin's life, and what might she have thought of them as she strolled through the Palace of Fine Arts on Pennsylvania Day at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition on August 20, 1904?

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[1] Eleanor Heartney revisits the notion in "A Different Way of Seeing," a feminist art historian's analysis of Manet's *Olympia* (see below).

Of course, even the most experienced writer cannot write backwards in time, as Kate Chopin would have had to do, as most of her writing predates the publication of her novel *The Awakening* on April 22, 1899. However, Chopin's membership in elite St. Louis society would have made her a member of the intelligentsia: in the February 6, 1898, edition of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Kate Chopin was deemed the "leader of the literary set in St. Louis" (Toth 267). She was indeed promoted as one of the "intellectual" women of the city by William [Billy] Marion Reedy, the influential editor of the *Mirror*.[2]

By the time the Fair opened on April 30, 1904, St. Louis was feeling its primacy in the world of scientific advancement, "thrust into the global spotlight" by the Fair. The official bulletin reflected this feeling and America's position as an upstart, toppling the old giants of Europe: "The heroes of Homer's Iliad were engaged in petty achievements when compared with the work of the men who wrestled a vast wilderness from savages and wild beasts and made it the seat of twenty great commonwealths in a single century." Technology, popular culture, contributions from fifty countries and forty-three of the then forty-five states had impressed twenty million visitors by the close of the Fair on December 1, 1904. All of these splendors could be viewed from the Observation Wheel, 265 feet above the Fair.[3] At the center of the Palace of Fine Arts was the United States of America, whose "blossoming culture" was vying with the "authoritative pull" of European influence (Novak 226). [4]

So perhaps sight is the natural place to start, for we know that Kate Chopin attended the Fair regularly from her home on McPherson Avenue, six blocks away, often alone (Toth 391). [See Toth n., 502, for drawings of fairgoers by her son Oscar from the P-D]. Above this heady mixture of social and cultural upheaval, perhaps Kate Chopin viewed and considered a new America, contradicting our modern, monolithic view of the

[2] Perhaps equally interesting about this article, appearing eleven months before final acceptance of *The Awakening* for publication, is its focus of the suicides of four young "society" women in St. Louis. She seems indignant that, though suicides occur "every day" in the business world, we take no note of that phenomenon. The desire for "self-destruction," she says in an intriguing verbal image, "seems to come in waves, without warning, and soon passes away" (Toth, *Private Papers*, 219-222).

[3] http://www.mohistory.org/Fair/WF/HTML/Overview/

[4] For a thorough discussion of American provincialism versus European civilization, see Novak, "America and Europe: Influence and Affinity," in *Nature and Culture*, 226-274.

Victorian era. As John Berger puts it, "The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled" (Berger 1). Given the ambiguous, Impressionistic nature of much of Chopin's writing, she would agree and probably embrace that comment.

Perhaps what Chopin saw on her visit to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 influenced her style. Mary Cassatt's mural, *Modern Woman*, ushered in the era of the New Woman's achievements and the inequities of women of color (Toth 221).[5] She might have seen the portrait, *Egyptian Girl*, the only nude painted by American artist John Singer Sargent, which ironically caused much less of a stir than his famous portrait, *Madame X*, and which is "no pale, Victorian lady with a high-button collar; this is an exotic beauty of dark hair and olive skin, almost siren-like in her calm."[6] John Singer Sargent won the grand prize at the St. Louis Fair, and he exhibited three portraits there: *The Portrait of the Misses Hunter*; *The Portrait of William Merritt Chase* [Slide 9]; *The Portrait of James Whitcomb Riley*.[7]

Although I cannot focus fully on the aspect of what we call race in this article, I would suggest that this young woman, completely comfortable in her nudity and sensuality, may have emerged in Chopin's famous novel as Mariequita, the shrimp girl, whose feet were "broad and coarse," with "sand and slime between her brown toes" (Culley 34). Edna notices this, but she also notices Mariequita's "pretty black eyes" and, perhaps more significant to this discussion, that the girl does not try to hide her ugly feet. From her position of privilege, Edna might feel entitled to look the girl up and down, but she cannot decipher the unspoken conversation between Robert and Mariequita, who, walking away, "glances" back at Robert (36). Not too long afterward, when Mlle Reisz calls Mariequita, "sly" and

[5] Murals, although not "adequately displayed at the St. Louis Fair because of their size, were represented in various forms as a sign of "civic improvement" (Official Catalogue, Department of Art 17).

[6] http://writing.jmpressley.net/essays/sargent.html

[7] Burns discusses that Sargent "matched the new image of the scientist" at a time when science's authority rivaled religion; Cecelia Beaux maintained the feminine and "communed" with her sitters where Sargent "controlled" them. It was a time when medical men at Johns Hopkins were urged to embrace science, and female nurses were told that scientific knowledge, however "tantalizing" to their ignorant state, could only end in pseudoscience, "that most fatal and common of mental states" (Burns, *Inventing* 176-180).

"bad," Edna is depressed by her "venom," and turns to the sea (49).[8] In her study of the Gothic in nineteenth-century America, Sarah Burns articulates the very "whiteness" of the prevailing art world, which excluded women, people of color, and other marginalized groups such as immigrants. Underlying their apparent power was the fear of "social cataclysm" (xx-xxi): I suggest that a figure such as Mariequita (as well as the quadroon nurse, the "lady in black," and even the unnamed lovers) imply a threat to privilege, of which Edna is only, at this point, tangentially aware: "She could only realize that she herself—her present self—was in some way different from the other self. That she was seeing with different eyes...that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect" (41). She admires Mlle Reisz for her "divine art" yet finds her "offensive": perhaps when Edna paints the unnamed quadroon nurse and discovers that the housemaid (also unnamed) had "classic lines" (58) do we see her moving as an artist towards what Burns called in Eakins "provocations to the status quo" (xxi). [9] Chopin admired George Washington Cable, as she wrote in her 1894 diary "Impressions," for his skillful handlings of the tragic mulatto or tragic octoroon figure of antebellum literature (*Private Papers* 180). [10] The previously unnamed and invisible characters become visible in the seemingly insignificant encounter with Mariequita because they become *seen*. They become part of a new world of which Chopin is aware, full of dangerous changes.[11]

Certainly, the birth scene in *The Awakening*, a scene—for Edna—of agony, "deadened sensation," and "torture" that precedes her return to Grand Isle for one final time, coincides with the paradoxical beauty and realism of Eakins' painting.[12]

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[8] The significance of this is reified when we consider the growth of American landscape painting, represented in the exhibit at the Fair "in full force" (Official Catalogue, Department of Art 17). See n. 3, above.

[9] Kathryn Lee Seidel calls Edna's choice of an African American as subject rather than possession "bold" and *avant garde* (231). See Pegues, "Fear and Desire" about the "fetishization of the black body which is rooted in the (strongly sexually charged) feelings of power over the racially Other" (esp. 2).

[10] For a full discussion of this figure in Cable, Chopin, and Grace King, see *Women on the Color Line*, 1-24.

[11] For example, the sight of a Union flag appearing unexpectedly on young Kate's porch was considered an insult to the family's honor, and Kate tore it down herself (Toth 63-64). Her story "A Vocation and a Voice" about a young Irish boy from the Patch (the "Kerry Patch" being initiated into sex reveals Chopin's awareness of other controversial issues of sexuality and social class.

[12] Barbara Ewell writes of the ending of *The Awakening* as "perhaps the most ambivalent conclusion is all American literature. Edna is defeated in her quest for

Although *The Awakening* does have elements of a postmodern novel, I am not suggesting that Kate Chopin anticipated semiotics or postmodernism; only that these studies can give us a language—a lens, if you will, to extend the sight metaphor—to understand Edna's situatedness. As the outside within, both to the new self she is becoming and in the Creole society she inhabits, Edna functions as the objective apparatus of the camera and simultaneously as the subjective photographer. Full of very human contradictions (14), she is the focalizer, at times medium at times and at others the message.[13] Mariequita, who makes "eyes" (Chopin's emphasis) at Robert (34), establishes her vision as equal to Edna's, even if she does not have the privilege to overtly examine Edna as Edna examines her.

We can analyze but never really understand the alchemy that goes into making fiction. Just as Mariequita's name, Emily Toth, suggests, might be an echo from Mariquitta Garesché, the wife of Kate's childhood friend Kitty Garesché (42-43), things a writer has heard or seen become lodged somewhere and emerge changed or unchanged later. Umberto Eco muses on this idea in his essay, "Between Author and Text."[14] Denying that he ever wrote a particular line brought up during a debate with a reader, Eco comes to realize that he had read that line many years ago and had forgotten it. Though Eco's intention in this essay is really to deconstruct the tension between author, reader, and text, he has to admit to a very prosaic vulnerability: that he is human: "But by a sort of internal camera I

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self, but just as clearly, she is victorious" (164). See Burns, "Corrosive Sight," for a discussion of Eakins' picture (*Dark Side* 188-191). See Spies for a discussion of Eakins, "nervous illness, and gender in Victorian America."

[13] A term borrowed from R. Laurence Moore in his study of Spiritualist mediums, *In Search of White Crows*: the author focuses in this chapter on "dimensions of spiritualist behavior that lay under the expressed systems of belief" (103). For a fuller discussion on the influence of Spiritualism on Kate Chopin, see Nigro, "Kate Chopin and 'Super-spiritual superior' influences," *Faulkner and Chopin.*

[14] Barbara Novak examines the concept of the "archaeology" inherent in art: "Foucault observes that a painting "is shot through—and independently of scientific knowledge (*connaissance*) and philosophical themes—with the positivity of a knowledge (*savoir*)" (xi). Eco calls the influence of language (its "social treasure") to be made up of "the whole encyclopedia that the performance of that language have implemented"—that is, both Foucault and Eco are expressing in words what is inexpressible about art, whether visual or literary. Perhaps articulating different kinds of knowledge helps to explain why Edna is becoming aware of changes she still cannot understand (41), or why she has been given "perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman"(5).

had photographed these pages, and for decades the image...lay in the most remote part of my soul, as in a grave, until the moment it emerged again (I do not know for what reason) and I believed I had invented it" (88). Not really an argument for copyright infringement as much as an acknowledgment that artistic inspiration is not simple, or, as John Berger puts it, the camera changed the human notion of perspective, "maneuvering in the chaotic movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations" (17). Whether external or internal, the new art of photography was one area that women could enter, and did.[15]

What was the role of the female artist at the time?[16] Several scholars have written about Edna as an emerging artist and many have written about the challenges of being both an artist and a woman.[17] As I have stated and implied, I am considering Edna as a visual artist, painting her new life as it is unfolding around her, and her models were sparse. Surely she knew that Harriet Hosmer, whose statue of Thomas Hart Benton stands in Lafayette Park, was the artist "unanimously" selected to create the first public monument in Missouri history;[18] the installation of the statue in 1868 was attended by thousands of people. Perhaps she did not know directly that Hosmer had not married and that she said no female artist had "any business" being married (Nigro, "Hosmer," 62-63). According to Emily Toth, three of Harriet Hosmer's statues were installed in St. Louis by the 1990s; Chopin uses the last name "Hosmer" in *At Fault*, where, according to her biographer, she satirizes St. Louis people of celebrity. She almost certainly would not be aware of the *New York Times* article from 1894 in which Harriet Hosmer had characteristically been

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[15] For a discussion of early female photographers in St. Louis, see my article on the Potters, "The Potters: 'moulded on the wheel,'" in *Women in the Arts: Eccentric Essays in Music, Visual Arts and Literature*, pp. 204-205.

[16] See Linda Nochlin's icon(oclast)ic article, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" for a discussion of the significance of gender in art history.

[17] For a thorough examination of the challenges faced by female literary artists in the nineteenth century, see Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. For female visual artists, see, for example, Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, Part Three, "Gender on the Market," 120-217. For Edna as visual artist, see, for example, Kathryn Lee Seidel, "Picture Perfect: Painting in *The Awakening*; Lynda S. Boren, "Taming the Sirens: Self-Possession and the Strategies of Art in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*; Deborah E. Barker, "The Awakening of Female Artistry; Carole Stone, "The Female Artist in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: Birth and Creativity."

[18] http://www.archive.org/stream/harriethosmerlet00hosm/harriethosmerlet00hosm_djvu.txt

"stirring up" San Francisco artists with her remarks: "Our ideas of art are apparently confined to portraiture—ideal art is vanished. Poetry in art, as poetry in practice, is little in accord with our too utilitarian age." [19] However, six months before Hosmer's comments in the paper, Kate Chopin had published an article in *St. Louis Life*, a review of Hamlin Garland's essays on art, *Crumbling Idols*: "He suggests—what no one who has thought upon the subject is ready to dispute—that the youthful artist should free himself from the hold of conventionalism...he should be creative and not imitative" (Chopin, *Complete Works* 693-694). Chopin probably read some of the countless books that advised wives how to behave, such as the prolific and widely read author Lydia Sigourney's popular *Whisper to a Bride*, which states: "Blessed bride, thou art about to enter this sanctuary, and to become a priestess at its altar...in these very cares, more than in the haunts of pleasure, or in the giddiness of mirth, is the secret of woman's happiness" (*Whisper* 44; 49). Or perhaps she read this article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on May 14, 1895: "Wife Who Retains Her Maiden Name and Won't Obey."

So, when Kate Chopin's friend C.L. Deyo published a review in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* about *The Awakening* as "sad and mad and bad" on 20 May 1899, she was in good company. Revolt was everywhere. The self-satisfaction of St. Louis noteworthies might be excused in their honest effort to surpass the Chicago Columbian Exposition that was "meager" in its exhibit of the Arts and Crafts movement, "a protest against the monotony of machine-made things...a recognition of...the individuality of the worker and of the value of artistic feeling and knowledge, in whatever medium expressed" (Official Catalogue, Department of Art, 17-18). Clearly, Edna's painting, whatever its quality, is a protest, as she refuses to stay home on her appointed day to entertain guests with tea and becomes "insolent" (57); she defies Mrs. Sigourney and refuses to act "*en bonne menagerie*" (the good housewife) (Culley 57). And although Edna rejects the label "painter" for herself (57), Kate Chopin certainly was aware of artistic expression and knew a number of local artists (Bonner n.p.) According to Thomas and Judith Bonner, the "strong visual experience" reflected in Chopin's writing is a reflection of her exposure to visual art, and she was likely to have known the work of William Merritt Chase,[20] George Caleb Bingham, and Bessie Potter Vonnoh, who exhibited ten artworks at the Fair. Perhaps Kate Chopin had seen the 1895 portrait of

[19] http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html

[20] According to Sarah Burns, Chase was the "exemplary" artists of the era. Chase was a contemporary of John Singer Sargent.