



The Awakening

Kate Chopin (1850 – 1904)

Read by:	Elizabeth Klett	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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The Awakening is one of the first American novels that focused on women's issues and is now seen as a landmark feminist work. Originally titled *A Solitary Soul* and set in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast at the end of the 19th century, it is the story of Edna Pontelier, wife of a New Orleans businessman and mother of two sons who struggles to manage her family duties with her desire to be true to her emotions. The conflict becomes evident at the outset when, while vacationing, she falls in love with Robert, the son of the owner of the Grand Isle resort. He flees to escape the impossible situation, and Edna returns home to retreat from both her family and New Orleans social life. Left alone for a time, she dallies with a rakish acquaintance, becomes friends with Mme. Reisz, an eccentric musician, and pines for Robert, who returns, only

to run away again in shame. The story does not have a happy ending.

The Awakening met with a mixed response due to its ruthlessly honest treatment of issues usually swept under the rug. The psychological insight, social commentary and realistic narrative mark it as an important link the development of American modernism. Critics rank the book alongside her contemporaries Edith Wharton and Henry James and among the first of the works in the Southern tradition of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Tennessee Williams.

Kate Chopin (February 8, 1850 – August 22, 1904) was an American author of short stories and novels considered as a forerunner of the feminist authors of the 20th. She was born Katherine O'Flaherty in St. Louis to a successful Irish immigrant father and a mother from the French community. At age 5 her father died and she was raised by her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. She married Oscar Chopin at age 20, moved to New Orleans and gave birth to six children in the course of nine years. Her husband's cotton brokerage failed in 1879, forcing a move to Natchitoches Parish to manage plantations. He died in 1892, deeply in debt, and after two years of trying to manage Kate moved back in with her mother in St. Louis. She began writing articles and stories to pull herself out of depression and became quite successful, publishing in the newspaper and in literary magazines. She had lived in several different cultures – Irish, French, Cajun, and Creole – and concentrated on women as strong individuals with wants and needs struggling to find identity within the strictures of 19th century Southern and Catholic cultures. Her second novel, *The Awakening*, was ahead of its time in addressing uncomfortable subjects and not well received, but is now considered a classic. She is now considered one of the important writers of her time. She died in 1904 after suffering a brain hemorrhage at the St. Louis World's Fair.