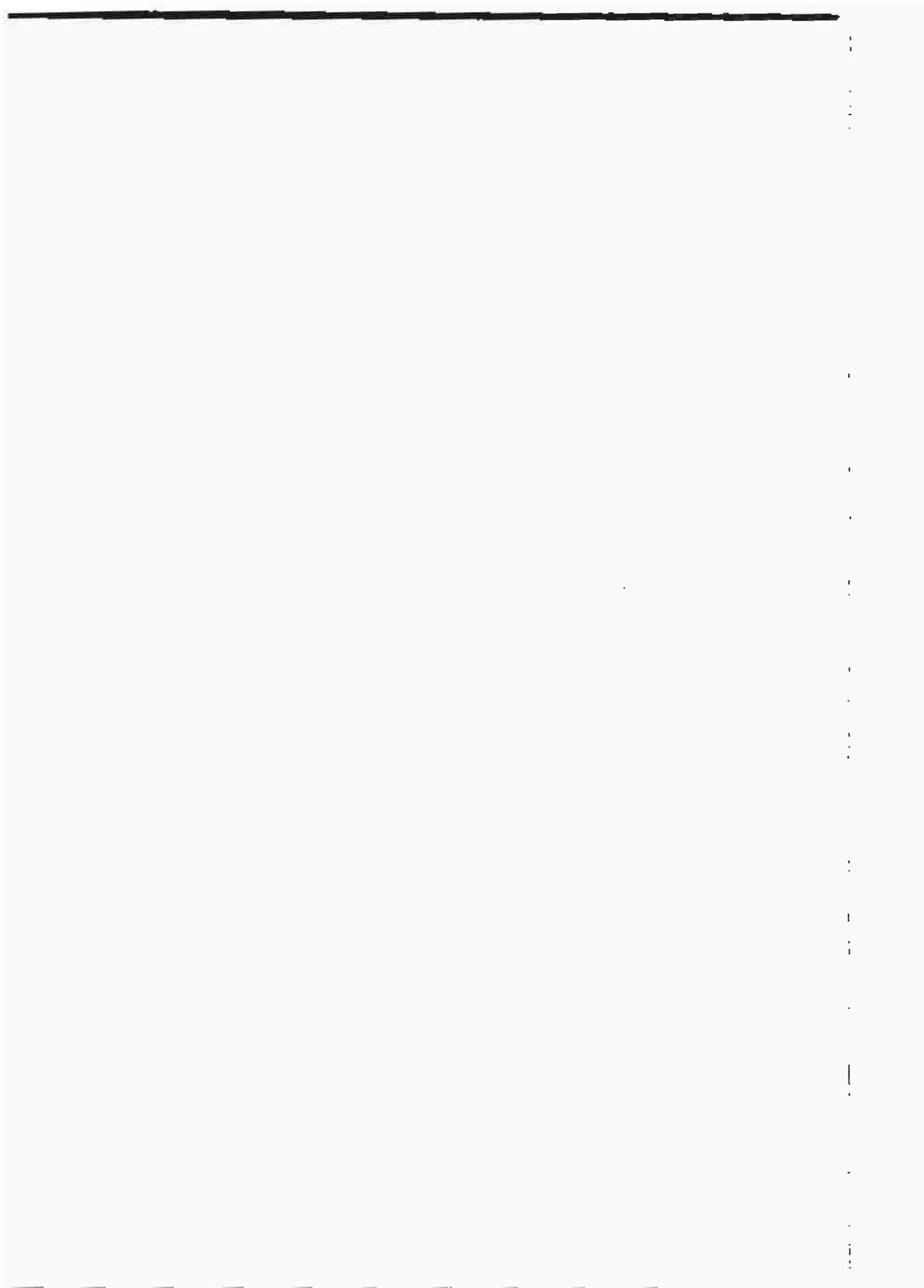


Passions that Hurt, Passions that Heal¹:
A Comparative Study of Mary E. Wilkins
Freeman's "Old Woman Magoun" and
Kate Chopin's "The Storm"

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The dictionary meaning of the word "passion" defines it as a strong emotion that can either be positive or negative. In this paper, the stories under study represent the two opposite connotations of the word. For while Freeman's story speaks of passionate hate and extreme anger, Chopin's text depicts the joy of emotional and sexual fulfillment.

Freeman's "Old Woman Magoun" tells the story of a country woman whose hatred for Nelson Barry, her son-in-law, drives her to kill her granddaughter rather than give her to the father she intensely detests. Conversely, in "The Storm", Chopin illustrates how passion, even illicit sexual desire, can lead to gratification and a sense of peace and contentment. By allowing Calixta and Alcée to fulfill their long awaited for desire for one another, the writer demonstrates how this sense of gratification has ultimately improved their respective lives. As such, the two stories represent the negative and positive connotations of passion, respectively.

Despite the difference in the emotional pattern presented in each story, the two texts are typical examples of what is known as "regional writing", a popular genre that emerged and dominated the literary scene in America during the last three decades of the nineteenth-century. This tradition in fiction, as Bradbury and Ruland remark, aimed at "[capturing] the peculiar flavor of regions and districts, dialects and customs, dress and landscape"(p.191). Published in 1891, Freeman's story and Chopin's "The Storm", written in 1898 and published much later on², portray the typical characteristics of New England and Louisiana life, respectively. In "Old Woman Magoun", Freeman employs the setting of an old New England village and uses dialect to enhance the regional spirit she aims to portray. Chopin, too, sets her story in the predominantly Creole south and punctuates her text with French expressions, words and names to convey the specificity of the locale.

Just as each writer seeks to record the features of the region she belongs to and knows best, each writer also seeks to dramatize the emotional experience she imparts. In Freeman's story the emotional experience presented is passionate hate which drives the heroine to commit murder and thus corrupt her soul forever. On the other hand, Chopin's story portrays a case of passionate desire which leads to fulfillment and finally, a sense of

contentment for both partners. "Old Woman Magoun" is a story about negative emotions such as hatred, anger, possessiveness and fear whereas "The Storm" illustrates positive emotions such as desire, love and intimacy. This extreme difference in the connotations of the word "passion" is dramatized by both authors through the pivot around which each story revolves. In Freeman's story, the idea of power is the central pivot of the emotional pattern while in Chopin's the pattern relies on love and desire.

"Old Woman Magoun" presents a seemingly simple plot about a woman whose extreme hatred for her son-in-law drives her to kill her grandchild rather than give her to him. However, in reality the story is about a struggle for power between the sexes. In addition, Freeman also presents the "atrophied world her women...populate"(Anderson) and thus portrays an emotional pattern dictated by such a world.

To prepare the readers for the atmosphere of conflict, discord and injustice she underscores in her story, Freeman offers a description of the setting which is, indeed, far from appealing and which, as Bradbury and Ruland observe, represents "a grimly detailed [portrait] of New England life"(p.193):

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The hamlet of Barry's Ford is situated in a sort of high valley among the mountains. Below it the hills lie in moveless curves like a petrified ocean; above it they rise in green-crested waves which never break. It is *Barry's Ford* because at one time the Barry family was the most important in the place; and *Ford* because just at the beginning of the hamlet the little turbulent Barry River is fordable. There is however, now a rude bridge across the river. (p.207)

As is obvious from the description, the setting is neither lively nor pleasant to the eye and, as the author goes on to write, the town is also shabby and betrays both poverty and squalor for it had a "miserable little grocery, wherein whiskey and hands of tobacco were the most salient features"(p.207).

Furthermore, Freeman makes it a point, as early as the first page, to show how the inhabitants, particularly the males, of

Barry's Ford are neither hardworking nor ambitious as she posits them against Old Woman Magoun who takes the initiative to build the bridge and scolds the men saying: "If I were a *man*...I'd go out this very minute and lay the fust log. If I were a passel of lazy men layin' round, I'd start up for once in my life, I would"(p.207). Particularly important here is Freeman's emphasis on the strength of her heroine as opposed to the weakness of the males that surround her. She even spells it out when she writes: "The weakness of the masculine element in Barry's Ford was laid low before such strenuous feminine assertion"(p.207). Here, the writer is making a statement that suggests her feminist ideology since feminism, as Susan Gorsky remarks "implies a philosophical questioning of traditional values and ideas, from women's intellectual and emotional capacities to male-female relationships to the ways women and men think, act, and feel"(p.1).

Indeed, this story is an example of female power and strength of will. The whole text revolves around the heroine, Old Woman Magoun, and her defiance of male authority as well as her strong sense of control. The writer here seems to demonstrate what Margaret Fuller believes about women who have the power and energy to speak up as capable of achieving social respect: "Women who speak in public, if they have a moral power...that is, if they speak for conscience' sake, to serve a cause which they hold sacred, - invariably subdue the prejudices of their hearers, and excite an interest proportionate to the aversion with which it had been the purpose to regard them"(p.110).

It is, however, the hatred between the heroine and Nelson Barry that illustrates fully the powerful character of the heroine as well as the structure that informs the emotional pattern of the story. For whereas the "men cowered visibly" as the old woman scolded them, Nelson Barry "swore under his breath" while the heroine vehemently declared: "You can cuss all you want to, Nelson Barry...I ain't afraid of you"(p.207). Here, Freeman introduces the reader to the conflict between those two characters, a conflict that ultimately leads to the complicated emotional pattern which begets negative passions.

The quarrel between Old Woman Magoun and Nelson Barry appears to be over the possession of Lily Barry, the old woman's grandchild and Nelson's daughter. The personal vendetta goes

way back to the time Nelson married Lily's mother, deserted her when she was with child, and never bothered about his daughter after her mother died: "Nelson Barry had manifested no interest whatever in his daughter. Lily seldom saw her father"(p.208). The old woman hated Barry and made it a point to keep the girl away from him because to her, like to the rest of the townsfolk he "was the fairly dangerous degenerate of a good old family", and while "The shiftless population of Barry's Ford looked up to him as to an evil deity. They wondered how Old Woman Magoun dared brave him as she did. But Old Woman Magoun had within her a mighty sense of reliance upon herself as being on the right track in the midst of a maze of evil, which gave her courage"(p.208). In fact, the conflict between the old woman and her son-in-law is a struggle for power that manifests itself, physically, in the person of Lily.

4 Sadly, though, Lily becomes, literally, the victim of this struggle for power. For on the one hand, her grandmother deprives her of leading a normal life and, ultimately, destroys her in the attempt to protect her from the exploitation and evil disposition of Nelson, while on the other hand, the father wants to take her and give her in marriage to a friend as a form of payment for his gambling debts thus, destroying her in another way. Unfortunately, either way, the young girl is doomed and Freeman hints at that from the very beginning by giving Lily this unreal, childish characterization that permits her to portray her as an object in the struggle of wills between the old woman and Nelson Barry.

Our first introduction to Lily reveals the author's intention to use her as an allegorical figure rather than a real character, she writes:

Lily clasped her doll – a poor old rag thing – close to her childish bosom, like a little mother, and her face, round which curled her long yellow hair, was fixed upon the men at work. Little Lily had never been allowed to run with the other children of Barry's Ford. Her grandmother had taught her everything she knew – which was not much, but tending at least

to a certain measure of spiritual growth – for she, as it were, poured the goodness of her own soul into this little receptive vase of another. Lily was firmly grounded in her knowledge that it was wrong to lie or steal or disobey her grandmother. She had also learned that one should be very industrious. (p.208)

The extreme childishness of Lily and her grandmother's persistent efforts to shelter and control her, illustrates the writer's portrayal of this character in a manner that makes her seem very unreal; a sort of angel or fantastic image:

The girl turned uncomprehending eyes upon her grandmother at the sound of her voice. She had been filled with one of her innocent reveries of childhood. Lily had in her the making of an artist or a poet. Her prolonged childhood went to prove it, and also her retrospective eyes, as clear and blue as blue light itself, which seemed to see past all that she looked upon. (p.209)

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The tension in the story heightens when the girl is allowed out of her grandmother's sphere of control. When the old woman consents to let the girl go over to the store to buy some salt, a thing she never does for fear of having her see her father, the tragic events of the narrative begin. On her way there, Lily encounters a man whom she thinks is "handsome" with a smile that was "not only reassuring but wonderfully sweet and compelling"(p.210). Here, Lily appears to be, if only briefly, conscious of her own sexuality and even feels reassured when he holds her hand to the extent that she immediately "smiled up at him" (p.210). Yet, when he asks about her age and comments "As old as that?", she "[shrinks]" from him not knowing why. The fact that she senses that the stranger views her as a woman, and not as a child, disturbs her and drives her away from him. This confusion in Lily's mind is an inevitable result of the "prolonged childhood" and isolation enforced upon her.

The grandmother's fear of the child's growth into womanhood is indeed quite unnatural. It seems that Old Woman Magoun sees the girl's growth as heralding loss or degeneration especially that her own daughter was led to her death when she met Nelson and married him at sixteen. She, therefore, persists in treating the girl as a child and finds it perfectly normal that at fourteen Lily would still play with the rag doll. She even tells Sally Jinks "I ain't in any hurry to have her git married" because, as far as she is concerned, Lily is "nothin' but a baby"(p.210). Here, we can see that the old woman has some sense of hidden insecurity that threatens to surface every time she thinks of the girl growing up. It is as though Old Woman Magoun engages in what Tyson describes as a process of "avoidance (staying away from people or situations that are liable to make us anxious by stirring up some unconscious...repressed - experience or emotion)"(p.18). She keeps Lily away from her father, doesn't allow her to grow out of her childhood and avoids even thinking of her granddaughter as a young woman. Such unnatural behavior on the old woman's part does not prevent the tragedy she had tried to avoid for so long.

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At the store, the young girl meets her father who "for the first time in her life, kissed her, and the whiskey odor of his breath came into her face" and she "involuntarily started, and shrank away from him"(p.211). Naturally, Barry lays the blame on the grandmother whom he calls "that damned old woman" and immediately sets out to win his daughter's favor by stroking her cheek and buying her candy, an action to which the girl responds positively for, as Freeman writes: "Hereditary instincts and nature itself were asserting themselves in the child's innocent, receptive breast"(p.212).

The old woman's reaction to the news that Lily met her father indicates the fear, anxiety and mistrust she experiences: "Old Woman Magoun's face was that of one upon whom a long-anticipated blow had fallen"(p.213). In addition, she scares the girl who "was so frightened and bewildered by it all and, more than anything else, by her grandmother's face as she questioned her"(p.212). The old woman's fears increase when she learns about the presence of another man, and her immediate reaction is to lock-up Lily in her room and separate her from the reality of her surroundings:

"You go right up-stairs to your own chamber now", she said.

"Good land! Ain't you goin' to let that poor child stay up and see the fun?" said Sally Jinks.

"You jest mind your own business", said Old Woman Magoun, forcibly, and Sally Jinks shrank. "You go right up there now, Lily", said the grandmother, in a softer tone, "and grandma will bring you up a nice plate of supper."

"When be you goin' to let that girl grow up?" asked Sally Jinks, when Lily had disappeared.

"She'll grow up in the Lord's good time," replied Old Woman Magoun, and there was in her voice something both sad and threatening. (pp.213-214)

From this point forward, the struggle for power between the old woman and her son-in-law intensifies.

After the festivities of the evening are over, Nelson Barry visits Old Woman Magoun and demands to take his daughter. This encounter seems to be the "crisis which brings into the spotlight wounds, fears, guilty desires, or unresolved conflicts that [a person has] failed to deal with and demands action"(Tyson, p.23). The father's insistence on taking his daughter brings back memories of the mother's fate into the old woman's mind. The moment he mentions the mother, "The old woman made a sudden motion toward the man which seemed fairly menacing"(p.215), especially that she knows that his interest in the girl is based upon exploitation and not love. They both hurl accusations at one another, he blames her for "keeping her a child a long while"(p.215), while she hits back by telling him: "I know what it is... you have been playing cards and you lost, and this is the way you will pay him"(p.216).

In the end, the father gives her one week to prepare Lily to move into his house, and as he walks away he "reflected that Old Woman Magoun had a strong character, that she understood much better than her sex in general the futility of withstanding the inevitable"(p.217). The inevitable here, of course, is his gaining

the upper hand. However, smug as he is, Nelson Barry fails to see the real strength and power of Old Woman Magoun who ultimately defies his power, his maleness and his social standing. The fact is that, unlike him, she proves that she has no weaknesses and is prepared to even kill for what she thinks is right which renders Margaret Fuller's inversion of the verse "Frailty, thy name is WOMAN/The Earth waits for her Queen" into "Frailty, thy name is MAN/The Earth waits for its King?"(p.15), quite appropriate here. For while he proves to be "frail" because he cannot control his gambling and drinking, the old woman asserts her strength when she actually gives up the one thing she loves most, Lily, to death so as not to allow him to win the day and cause more harm.

The heroine's ensuing behavior illustrates what Starrett explains as the female's reaction to patriarchal ostracism: "Women have been "allowed", in [their] exclusion from important roles in the male structures, to develop other ways of knowing, thinking, and being. These ways can be described as emotional, direct, expressive, intuitive, immediate, subjective, relationship-centered"(p.188). True enough; the old woman's pattern of action after Nelson's threats is characterized by all the features Starrett enumerates. Her reaction is emotional, based, simultaneously, on her extreme love for Lily and hatred of Barry, which render her action both subjective and relationship-centered. Moreover, her two plans are direct as well as immediate. She starts by taking plan "A" which is to try and convince Lawyer and Mrs. Mason to adopt the girl and take her away from Barry's Ford and her father. When this plan fails, she wastes no time in carrying out plan "B" which entails killing Lily.

Although the old woman wants to avoid plan "B" she, nonetheless, considers it from the start. On their way to Greenham to visit the Masons, Lily notices the deadly nightshade laden with berries and asks her grandmother if she could have some but the old woman answers: "You can't have any now"(p.218). The fact that she never tells the girl that these are poisonous berries and uses the word "now" means that she is indeed thinking of an alternate plan if the adoption plan fails. In addition, when she comes out of the lawyer's office and sees Lily eating sour apples and drinking milk, she immediately thinks of using that as an

explanation for the girl's death later on. She even scolds the girl in the presence of Mrs. Mason, saying: "You ought never o have drunk milk and eat a sour apple...Your stomach was all out of order this mornin', an' sour apples and milk is always apt to hurt anybody"(p.219). Thus, with the failure of the adoption plan, the heroine pursues the other alternative.

On their way back to Barry's Ford, Lily notices that "the strange look on her grandmother's face had deepened...and had a feeling as if she were looking at a stranger"(p.220). Here, the old woman's resolve to carry out her plan rather than give in to Nelson becomes clear. She allows the girl to sit by the nightshade and makes no attempt to stop her from eating the poisonous berries:

"These look like nice berries", she said.
 Old Woman Magoun, standing stiff and straight
 in the road, said nothing.
 "They look good to eat," said Lily.
 Old Woman Magoun still said nothing, but she
 looked up into the ineffable blue of the sky, over
 which spread at intervals great white clouds
 shaped like wings.
 Lily picked some of the deadly nightshade
 berries and ate them.
 "Why, they are real sweet," said she. "They are
 nice." She picked some more and ate them.
 (pp.220-21)

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Before long, the girl starts suffering from poisoning and finally collapses when they reach home. Conveniently too, the poor victim perpetuates the myth of the adverse effect of sour apples and milk when she tells Sally Jinks, who circulates the news, "I ate some sour apples and drank some milk"(p.221).

Lily's illness worsens and as she complains to her grandmother about how awful she feels, the old woman lulls Lily's pains by recounting the blessings of the heavenly, fantastic world she will be departing to. The woman "talked as Lily had never heard her talk before, as nobody had ever heard her talk before. She spoke from the depths of her soul; her voice was as tender as the coo of a dove, and it was grand and exalted"(p.222),

going on and on about the "beautiful place" where "it is always light" with tall flowers that never fade and walls of "gold", houses of "silver", and people who "all have wings"(p.222). She even tells Lily that she will become an angel in that place and will never be sick. Here, Freeman's detailed description of the old woman's conversation with the dying girl emphasizes the point she makes earlier about the heroine's persistence in viewing the girl as a child as well as her keenness on preserving her purity by likening her to an angel. Furthermore, in qualifying the after-life world as a fantastic and heavenly domain as opposed to the ugliness of reality where people like Nelson Barry exist and where all men "ain't" nice as she tells Lily (p.218), the writer demonstrates her heroine's hatred of the other sex and her determination to challenge male authority.

Lily dies and Nelson Barry is defeated by Old Woman Magoun. Her triumph is like "the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency, of a female "object" who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position"(Butler, p.2489). The heroine's strength and will power become more obvious when Nelson Barry comes to see the girl and finds himself incapable of doing anything. It is too late to call for a doctor and he can neither make her feel better nor use her to achieve his aims. Thus, Barry emerges here as the loser whose smugness led him to think that he could outwit the old woman who wins the day. In fact, his weakness and impotence stem from his selfishness and inability to have feelings or passions that direct his actions; he is even incapable of real sadness as he watches his child die "he stood regarding the passing child with a strange, sad face – unutterably sad, because of his incapability of the truest sadness"(p.224).

On the other hand, Old Woman Magoun's intensity of emotions compels her to think and act and thus attain power as Starrett explains: "Passion and power, active power, are the same thing. And both reside in the mind"(p.190). The heroine's achievement lies in her defiance of Barry and her preventing him from corrupting the child. In addition, by Lily's death she also succeeds in wiping out the Barry lineage forever and ultimately, uprooting an evil seed from Barry's Ford. By killing Lily, the Barrys have no way of continuing the family line since Nelson is

the only living male and the only other relative he has is a "half-witted sister"(p.216) who is not fit for marriage and procreation. Thus, the old woman succeeded in gaining power over her enemy.

However, this success comes at a great price: the life of an innocent girl who is caught between her grandmother's passionate hate and her father's selfishness in a struggle for power. Indeed, Freeman's heroine has intense emotions which stem from discord, conflict and struggle and therefore are channeled in a negative direction that ultimately produces death and suffering. No doubt the old woman is affected by Lily's death and, although she "continued to live as she had done before", she never forgot the deep scar that her actions begot and she "carried with her, as one might have carried an infant, Lily's old rag doll"(p.224), as a constant reminder of her negative passions that destroy and hurt. Yet, we cannot really blame the old woman for behaving in that way since she, like many of Freeman's characters "function[s] [within the] context of restrictions others or they themselves have placed upon them"(Anderson) For had there been justice and had it not been for Nelson Barry's selfishness and evil behavior towards her daughter, and his use of his social position to cause havoc within the community, Mrs. Magoun may not have acted in that horrible manner. In other words, if she had not been subjected to poverty and oppression as a female, she may have channeled her emotions in a constructive direction.

Conversely, Kate Chopin illustrates the positive connotation of passion in "The Storm" which is a sequel to another story that takes place five years earlier and is entitled "At the 'Cadian Ball". The first story introduces the characters of "The Storm" and hints at the relationship between them. At the ball, we have the banal Bobinôt who is head over heels in love with Calixta, the beautiful and intriguing half-Cuban young woman. Alcée Laballière, the handsome, rich and attractive planter goes to the ball and flirts with Calixta who seems to enjoy it very much and looks forward to some sort of permanent liaison. However, fate interferes when Clarisse, Alcée's cousin, follows him there and declares her love which he happily accepts and forgets Calixta who opts for Bobinôt as husband. In "The Storm" which Toth describes as "a startling fantasy of sensuality"(p.316), a shift in the relationship between the characters occurs. The text tells the story of Alcée

Laballière who "marries Clarisse – but ...desires the "Spanish vixen" Calixta" five years later when they both have other partners but "have not forgotten an earlier rendezvous, with its secrecy and mystery and sin"(Toth, p.170).

Chopin starts her story by emphasizing Bobinôt's mediocrity when she posits him first against his son then against Alcée later on. She writes that he was "accustomed to converse on terms of perfect equality with his little son" who "was four years old and looked very wise" and who "laid his hand on his father's knee and was not afraid"(p.281) when the storm started. Furthermore, the writer also shows how Bibi, the four year old child, knows more about his mother's character and the household's daily routine than his father does. He tells Bobinôt that his mother will be afraid of the storm to which the father replies: "She'll shut the house. Maybe she got Sylvie helpin' her this evenin'", but the little boy confirms: "No; she ent got Sylvie. Sylvie was helpin' her yistiday"(p.281). Here, Chopin is suggesting early on in the story that the relationship between this married couple lacks something. Perhaps she is also giving the reader a hint at an excuse for her heroine to desire a more passionate relationship.

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The writer then introduces Calixta who is said to have "felt no uneasiness for their safety" and "sat at a side window sewing furiously on a sewing machine"(p.281). By combining the word "furiously" with the following sentence which reads "she felt very warm and often stopped to mop her face on which the perspiration gathered in beads. She unfastened her white sacque at the throat. It began to grow dark...(p.282), Chopin introduces her heroine's frustration and tension and sets the scene for the heated encounter that is to follow.

As the storm gains momentum, Alcée Laballière appears on horseback and she realizes that she has not seen him alone since she got married. When he asks her permission to wait until the storm is over, she invites him to the front gallery but soon realizes that:

His voice and her own startled her as if from a trance, and she seized Bobinôt's vest. Alcée, mounting on the porch, grabbed the trousers and snatched Bibi's braided jacket that was about to

be carried away by a sudden gust of wind. He expressed an intention to remain outside, but it was soon apparent that he might as well have been out in the open: the water beat in upon the boards in driving sheets, and he went inside, closing the door after him. It was even necessary to put something beneath the door to keep the water out. (p.282)

As the above passage indicates, Calixta's encounter with Alcée brings back memories of a dream world she had once lived in. However, more important here is the forcefulness of character that Chopin endows him with. This is especially evident in the vocabulary items she employs to describe his actions like "mounting", "grabbed" and "snatched" and the fact that he went inside, uninvited, and closed the door. It is obvious here that the writer underlines this man's active and forceful nature as opposed to Bobinôt's inactivity and mediocrity intentionally as Brown remarks: "Chopin's narrative strategy in a story is to introduce two men who represent contrasting or opposing male types to suggest alternative life styles and the possibility of different choices".

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Unfortunately, however, Calixta's choice was made for her the day Alcée decided to marry Clarisse. Yet, this does not rule out the fact that she still finds him attractive and desirable especially in comparison to Bobinôt who seems to offer her a passionless life of mediocrity. Similarly, Alcée who had chosen his social equal in marriage, in keeping with the "dominant ideologies [that] become "naturalized" in society" (Muirhead), still passionately desires Calixta despite the fact that she represents the "non-white" female who "occupied by virtue of class and ethnicity a culturally "low" social and economic position"(Mathews), according to nineteenth-century social codes. And although he notices that she "was a little fuller of figure than five years before when she married...she had lost nothing of her vivacity"(p.282). She, too, was full of "sensuous desire"(p.284) for him.

Particularly important too is Chopin's subtle insinuations about Calixta's and Alcée's passionless relationship with their partners. For example, when the visitor enters Calixta's house, he sees the bedroom which Chopin describes, saying: "Adjoining

was her bed room, with Bibi's couch along side her own. The door stood open, and the room with its white, monumental bed, its closed shutters, looked dim and mysterious"(p.28). The description of the room as dark, "dim and mysterious" with a huge "white" bed, gives the impression that the matrimonial relationship between Calixta and Bobinôt is banal and maybe passionless. Moreover, the fact that the little boy's bed is inside the room, and that the mother has her own couch too, serves as an indication of the lack of intimacy in the relationship. Similarly, when, at the end of the story, Clarisse reads her husband's letter telling her not to hurry back, she welcomes this news and, as the writer tells us "Devoted as she was to her husband, their intimate conjugal life was something which she was more than willing to forego for a while"(p.286). In addition, when Calixta and Alcée make love, he discovers that

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The generous abundance of her passion, without guile or trickery, was like a white flame which penetrated and found response in depths of his own sensuous nature that had never yet been reached. (p.284)

Thus indicating that his and Clarisse's marital intimacy does not satisfy him.

As such, the pivotal point around which passion revolves in this story is desire and a longing for fulfillment. Because of the absence of sexual and emotional fulfillment in their marital relationships, Calixta and Alcée indulge in an intimate passionate encounter which ultimately satisfies them. In consequence, both seem to "[change] by such intimate moments; both awakened to the possibilities of a fuller, richer life"(Brown). In reality, this intimacy betters their respective lives and we see them feeling satisfied and therefore, more capable of dealing with their spouses with less frustration and more acceptance.

Chopin employs the storm as a backdrop for the turbulent emotions, desires and frustrations of her hero and heroine. Her description of the setting sets the mood of frustration and nervousness preceding the encounter:

The rain was coming down in sheets obscuring the view of far-off cabins and enveloping the distant wood in a grey mist. The playing of the lightning was incessant. A bolt struck a tall chinaberry tree at the edge of the field. It filled all visible space with a blinding glare and the crash seemed to invade the very boards they stood upon. (p.283)

On the other hand, the writer alters the weather conditions that follow their sexual encounter to indicate fulfillment and harmony:

The rain was over; and the sun was turning the glistening green world into a place of gems. Calixts, on the gallery, watched Alcee ride away. He turned and smiled at her with a beaming face; and she lifted her pretty chin in the air and laughed aloud. (p.285)

In contrast to her initial furious sewing, the heat she felt, the perspiration she was wiping off, and the "disturbed look on her face"(p.283), Calixta feels confident and happy for "she lifted her pretty chin in the air and laughed aloud". Likewise, Alcee's forcefulness and irritability, when he first walks into the house and "[flings] himself into a rocker"(p.283), soon gives way to a feeling of satisfaction and happiness as he "smiled at her with a beaming face".

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In this situation, as Toth suggests, Chopin "made the passion a matter of mutual power and desire"(p.320). Both characters have desire for one another and both, consciously and deliberately, pursue the fulfillment of this desire. Furthermore, this fulfillment seems to have empowered them and given them a better understanding of their situations:

In fact, in Chopin's Creole stories revolving around an intimate moment between a man and a woman, whether a story is told from a male or a female perspective, the narrative follows a similar pattern of discovery. For both men and

women such epiphanies lead to self-knowledge as well as a better understanding of cultural norms and of the ways these norms do not satisfy psychological needs. (Brown)

And despite the fact that their experience may have shown them that their respective marriages are not fulfilling, they, nonetheless, learn to cope better with their partners.

Afraid of the wrath of the "over-scrupulous housewife" and mother, Bobinôt and Bibi "entered cautiously at the back door"(p.285), only to find a happy Calixta waiting for them.:

She sprang up as they came in.
 "Oh, Bobinôt! You back! My! But I was uneasy. Were you been during the rain? An' Bibi? He ain't wet? He ain't hurt?" She had clasped Bibi and was kissing him effusively. Bobinôt's explanations and apologies which he had composing all along the way, died on his lips as Calixta felt him to see if he were dry, and seemed to express nothing but satisfaction at their safe return. (p.285)

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She behaves as a most loving wife and mother and expresses her gratitude to the husband who thought of her and bought her a can of shrimps saying: "Shrimps! Oh, Bobinôt! You too good fo' anything!". She kisses him and promises the family a wonderful evening "*J'vous répons, we'll have a fea's to-night!*"(p.285). It is then that the tension and anticipation give way to a sense of harmony that prevails the household:

Bobinôt and Bibi began to relax and enjoy themselves, and when the three seated themselves at table they laughed much and so loud that anyone might have heard them s far away as Laballiere's. (pp.285-6)

Similarly, Alcée goes home after the storm and writes "a loving letter" to his wife telling her to stay with their babies for as

long as she likes if she is happy because he believes that "their health and pleasure were the first things to be considered"(p.286). Clarisse, too, was "charmed upon receiving her husband's letter", and felt that his allowing her to stay longer was "the first free breath since her marriage"(p.286). Chopin then ends her story with a most telling statement: "So the storm passed and every one was happy"(p.286) thus indicating the positive effect of Calixta's and Alcée's intimate encounter.

Because, as Tyson suggests "sexuality is one of the clearest and most consistent barometers of our psychological state in general"(Tyson p.27), fulfilling its needs becomes a necessary part of emotional health. By showing that her hero and heroine have managed to better their lives through sexual fulfillment, Chopin underscores the importance of achieving a balance between one's social, physical and psychological needs.

Unlike Freeman who represents the destructive and painful aspects of passion, Kate Chopin in "The Storm" demonstrates how passion can yield positive results. However, both writers like all "nineteenth-century women writers avoided censure for taking up the pen by adopting various strategies in which the gendered images of patriarchal culture are accommodated on the surface level of the work"(Allen, p.146). They employ marriage, discuss male/female relationships and expound the concept of male dominance in their stories. Nevertheless, each writer has her own technique. For whereas Mary E. Wilkins Freeman uses a style that is "simple, without a superfluous word", marked by "short, economical sentences, with no waste"(Blum, p.86), and a setting which conveys an atmosphere of hardship, poverty and struggle in her New England narrative, Chopin employs lyrical language, a seemingly peaceful domestic atmosphere, and turbulent weather conditions to qualify her story about human desire and fulfillment.

In addition, each writer's choice of heroine demonstrates the emotional pattern she portrays. Freeman's Old Woman Magoun is a rough, tough, hardworking, joyless country woman whereas Calixta is a passionate, beautiful coquette who has a hold over all the men in her life. Furthermore, their respective choice of titles underlines the focal point in each story. Freeman's title draws the reader's attention to the importance of the heroine, her character

and her struggle, whereas Chopin's "The Storm" focuses the attention on the human condition rather than on the characters.

Far from being a success story, Freeman's text illustrates the heroine's struggle against injustice, poverty and male dominance and thus, it demonstrates the negative side of passion. On the other hand, Chopin's story reveals no sign of discord or struggle but rather demonstrates a state of mediocrity which changes to one of harmony and fulfillment, especially at the end, leaving us with a positive expression of passion. As such, one can easily say that "Old Woman Magoun" is a manifestation of passion that hurts whereas Chopin's "The Storm" demonstrates how passion can become a healing force.

¹ This part of the title is taken from the subtitle of James. Jennifer, PhD, *Women and the Blues*, San Francisco: Harper, 1988. This article does not depend on or use any part of James's book.

² According to Joyce Carol Oates the story appeared for the first time in 1969 in Per Seyersted's edition of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. J.C. Oates (ed), *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992.

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NOTES

¹All references to the play in this paper are to the Penguin Books edition, 1977.

²Peter Shaffer quoted in Oleg Kerensky, *The New British Drama: Fourteen Playwrights since Osborne and Pinter*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977. p. 58.

³Eugene Unesco, *The Physician's Panorama*, quoted in John Bull's *Stage Right: Crisis and Recovery in British Contemporary Mainstream Theatre*. Macmillan, 1994. p. 48.

⁴See Doyle W. Walls, "Equus: Shaffer, Nietzsche, and the Neurosis of Health", *Modern Drama*, 27 (1984), pp. 314-23; and C. J. Gianakaris *Peter Shaffer*. London: Macmillan, 1992.

⁵Peter Shaffer, quoted in Brian Connell in "Peter Shaffer: The Two Sides of Theatre's Agonised Perfectionist", *The Times*, 28 April 1980, p. 7.

⁶Peter Shaffer quoted in Barbara Gelb '... And Its Author', *New York Times*, 14 November 1965, sec.2, p. 4.

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