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One More Clever Writer Gone Wrong': A Critical Pentadic Analysis of the Reception of Kate Chopin's 'The Awakening'

Maren Archibald

Utah State University, maren.archibald@usu.edu

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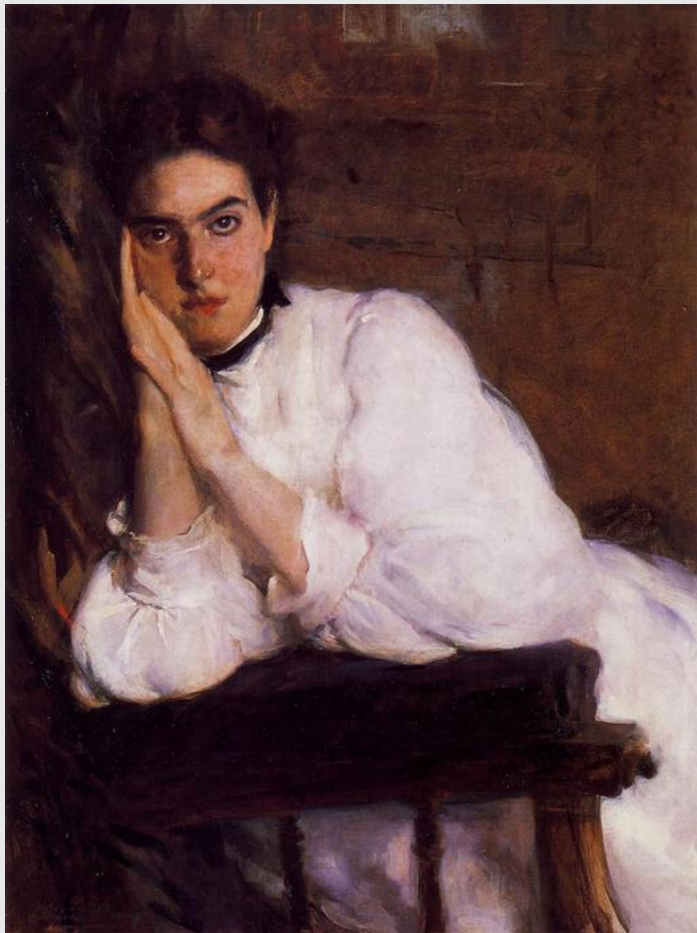




“One more clever writer gone wrong”

A critical pentadic analysis of the reception of Kate Chopin's
'The Awakening'





The Dreamer. Cecilia Beaux, 1894.

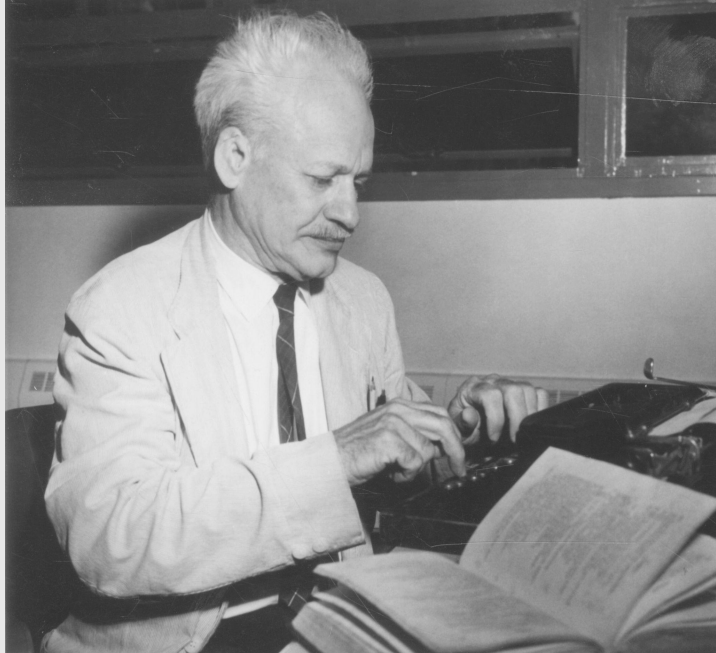
Edna Pontellier

- Spiritual and sexual awakening
- Absent mother
- Marital infidelity

“the dominant interpretive strategy of reviewers in 1899 was built on assumptions of reading as moral instruction and of women as selfless nurturers.”

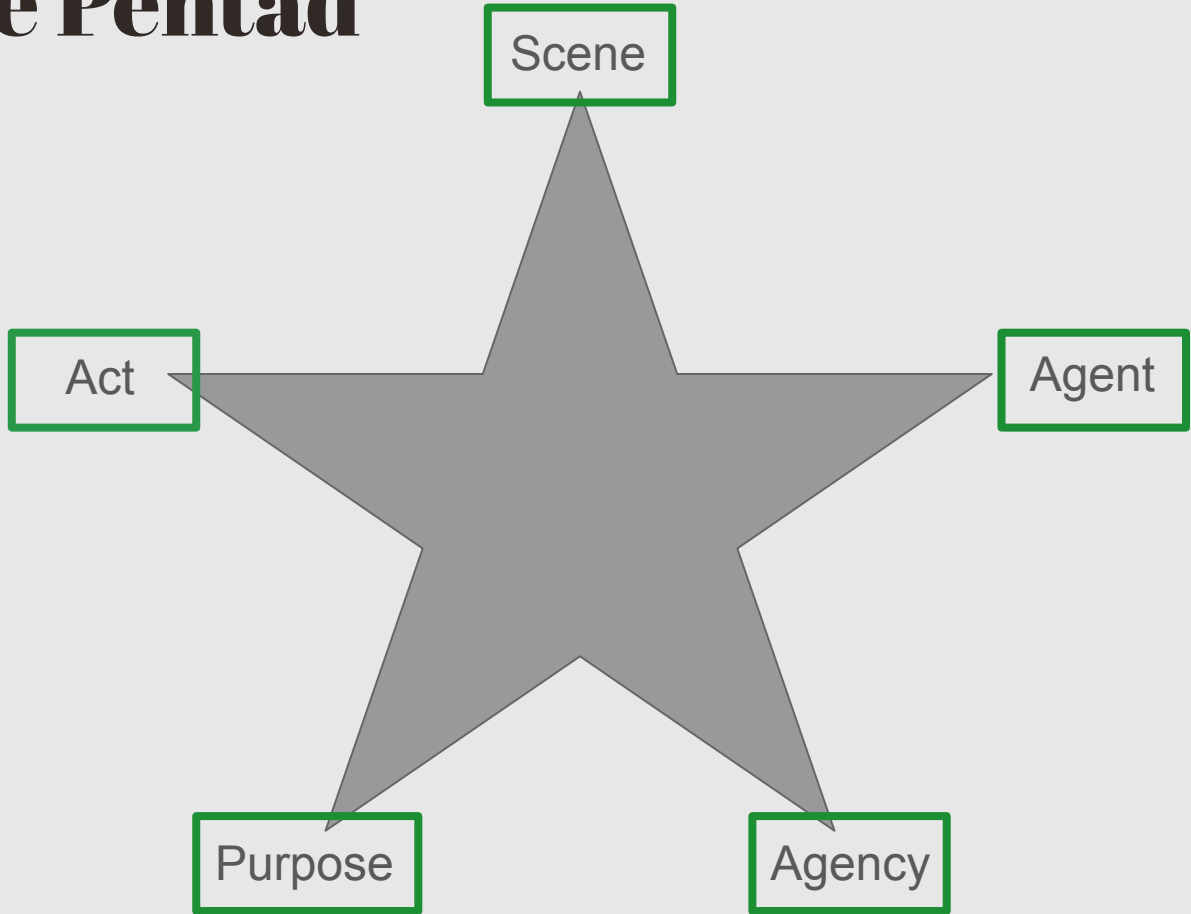
Corse & Westervelt, 2002

The Pentad



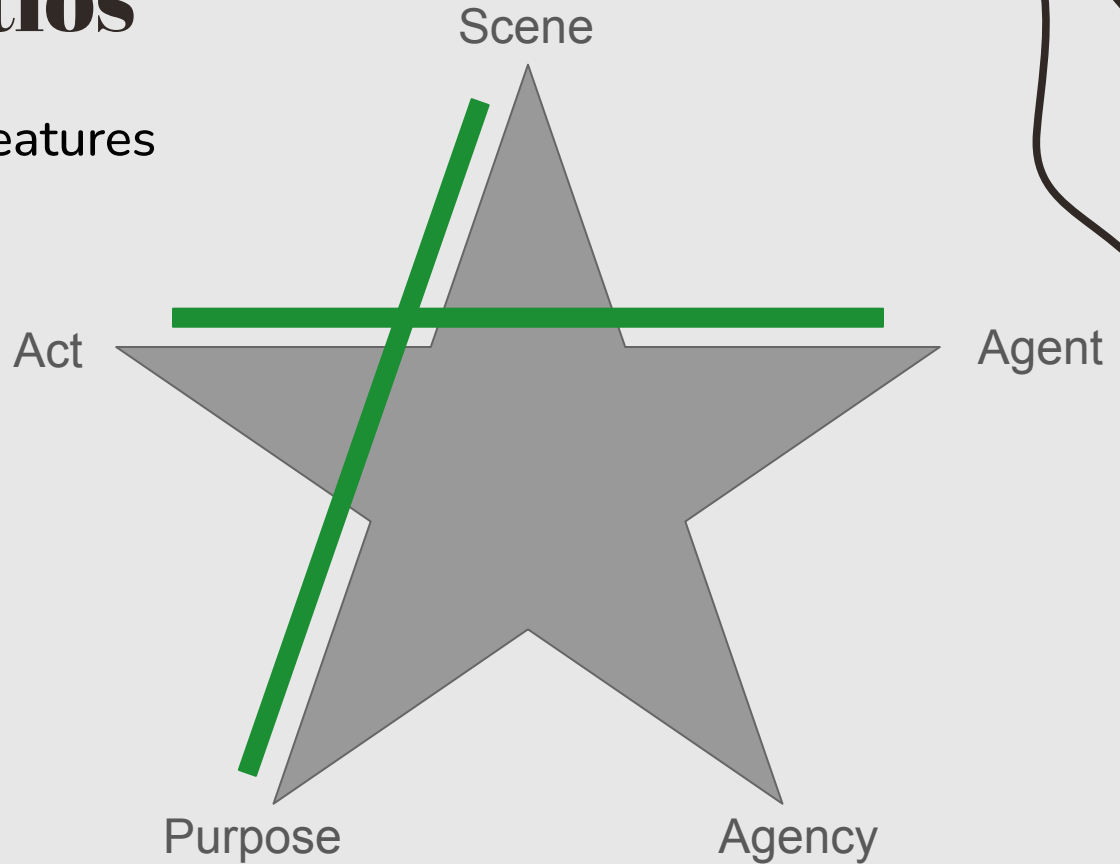
- Kenneth Burke
 - Motives of the rhetor
 - “What people are doing and why they are doing it”
-

The Pentad



Pentadic Ratios

- Show most prominent features of the text
- Vary based on rhetor



Review A

Providence Sunday Journal. Sunday, June 4, 1899.

“Mrs. Kate Chopin is another clever woman, but she has put her cleverness to a very bad use in writing ‘The Awakening.’”

Review A

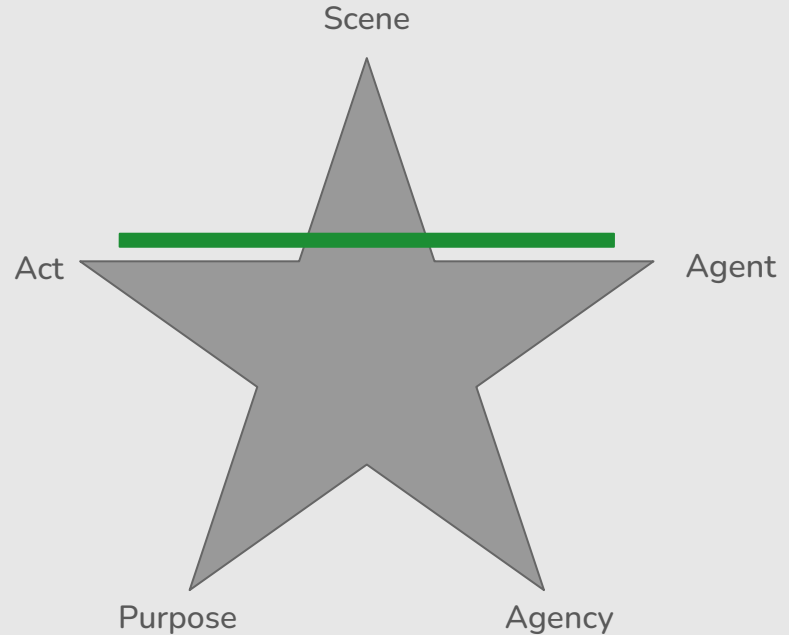
Providence Sunday Journal. Sunday, June 4, 1899.

Act: Writing the novel

Agent: Kate Chopin

~

Motive: Chasten Chopin



Review B

The Nation. August 3, 1899.

“It is with high expectation that we open the volume, remembering the author's agreeable short stories, and with real disappointment that we close it.”

Review B

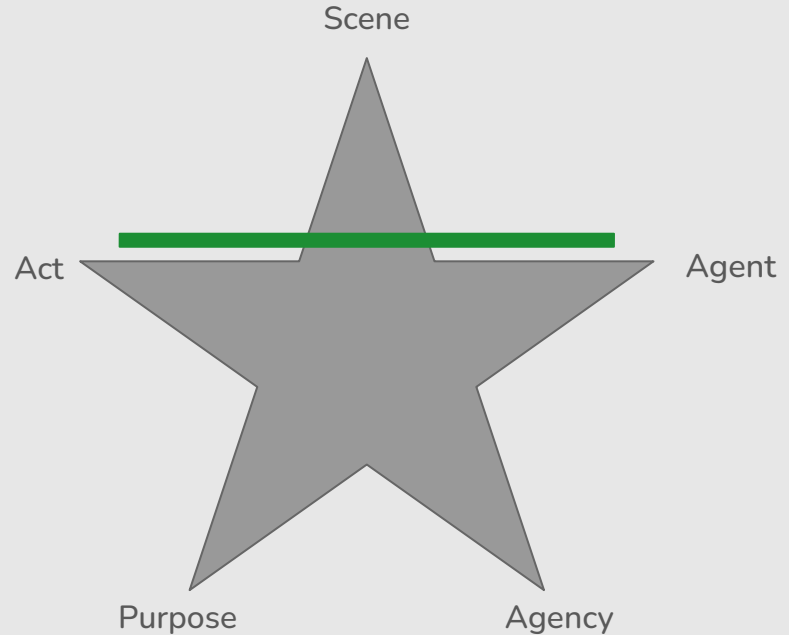
The Nation. August 3, 1899.

Agent: Kate Chopin

Act: Writing the novel

~

Motive: Insult Chopin



Mrs. Chopin's accustomed fine workmanship is here, the hinted effects, the well-expended epithet, the pellucid style; and, so far as construction goes, the writer shows herself as competent to write a novel as a sketch. The tint and air of Creole New Orleans and the Louisiana seacoast are conveyed to the reader with subtle skill, and among the secondary characters are several that are lifelike. But we cannot see that literature or the criticism of life is helped by the detailed history of the manifold and contemporary love affairs of a wife and mother. Had she lived by Prof. William James's advice to do one thing a day one does not want to do (in Creole society, two would perhaps be better), flirted less and looked after her children more, or even assisted at more accouchements—her chef d'œuvre in self-denial—we need not have been put to the unpleasantness of reading about her and the temptations she trumped up for herself.

Chopin's Retraction

Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to my self) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and **working out her own damnation** as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But **when I found out what she was up to,** the play was half over and it was then too late.

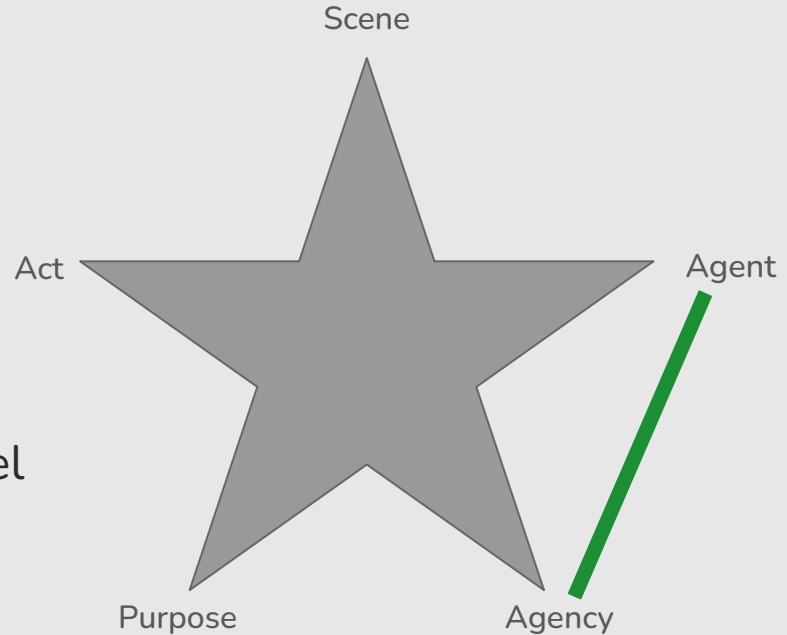
Chopin's Retraction

Agent: Edna Pontellier

Agency: Kate Chopin

~

Motive: Feign innocence; reaffirm novel



Chopin as a revolutionary



Stormy Sea. Gustave Courbet, 1869.

- Positionality as an author and a woman
- A message beyond moral instruction

References

Borchers, T., & Hundley, H. (2018). *Rhetorical Theory: An Introduction, Second Edition* (2nd ed.). Waveland Press, Inc.

Burke, K. (1969). *A Grammar of Motives*. University of California Press.

Chopin. (1998). *The Awakening and Selected Stories* (M. Gilbert, Ed.). Penguin Classics.

Corse, S. M., & Westervelt, S. D. (2002). Gender and Literary Valorization: The Awakening of a Canonical Novel. *Sociological Perspectives*, 45(2), 139–161. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2002.45.2.139>