Where Everything is Music:
The Influence of Arthur Schopenhauer on Harold Frederic and Kate Chopin

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A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

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Fairbanks, Alaska

May 2000
Abstract

In this study, I examine the influence Arthur Schopenhauer’s aesthetic philosophy had on Harold Frederic’s *The Damnation of Theron Ware* and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. While critics have recognized Chopin’s indebtedness to Schopenhauer, no one has identified how Frederic’s novel was influenced by Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Discovering Schopenhauer’s influence on Frederic’s novel allowed me to develop original readings of *The Damnation of Theron Ware* that challenge and clarify existing interpretations. With Chopin’s *The Awakening*, my knowledge of Schopenhauer allows me to further illuminate current readings while reconciling points of contention. By acknowledging Schopenhauer’s influence on these American novelists, I further the study of nineteenth-century America’s fascination with spiritual experience.
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Acknowledgments

This project would not have succeeded without the guidance of my committee members. My chair, Dr. Michael Schuldiner, provided invaluable advice and support through all stages of my research and writing process. I also am indebted to the advice of Dr. Eric Heyne and Dr. Roy Bird.
Chapter I: Schopenhauer's Will and the Flower of Existence

Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason.

--from the Preface to Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason

1A. Arthur Schopenhauer and the Will

Born in the city of Danzig in 1788, Arthur Schopenhauer would combine the teachings of Kant, Plato, and the Upanishads in his attempt to create a metaphysical doctrine accessible not only to his peers but to the public in general. In 1819, when The World As Will and Idea was published, Schopenhauer felt confident that his philosophy had been adequately articulated. Although the public’s reception of the work was subdued, Schopenhauer would spend the remainder of his life publishing essays which further elucidated his philosophy. Today, Schopenhauer, whose memory is overshadowed by the popularity of Nietzsche and Kant, is unjustifiably labeled as the world’s greatest pessimist. However, when one realizes how Schopenhauer’s despair is counter-balanced by a deeply reverent tone used to describe the transformational powers residing within art and music, one is able to see the gateway to deliverance in the heart of Schopenhauer’s pessimism.

From Kant’s “thing-in-itself” and Plato’s Forms, Schopenhauer took the idea of a transcendental reality one step further. To Schopenhauer, all material existence, all phenomena, are solely shadows of the primary force he specifically refers to as the will. As the critic Thomas Mann explains, the will is “something independent of knowledge, it
was entirely original and absolute, a blind urge, a fundamental, uncausated, utterly unmotivated impulse . . .” (6). Human attempts to define the will fail perpetually because the will resides beyond our perceptual capabilities. In our search to grasp the will, Schopenhauer states that “We are like a man who goes round a castle seeking in vain for an entrance, and sometimes sketching the facades” (I.128). Though our entrance into the castle is denied, Schopenhauer believes that the will “alone gives him [Man] the key to his own existence, reveals to him the significance, shows him the inner mechanism of his being, of his action, of his movements” (I.129).

Driven by a relentless and unquenchable desire, the will demands manifestation in the form of the material world. The process by which the will “objectifies” itself is referred to as the principle of individuality. Since the qualities of time and space do not belong to the will in itself, it must first acquire these properties before being objectified into material existence. Consequently, Schopenhauer is able to claim “Thus time and space are the prinzipium individuationis . . .” (I.146). Schopenhauer further elucidates the process of the will’s objectification by stating, “For it is only through the medium of time and space that what is one and the same, both according to its nature and to its concept, yet appears as different, as a multiplicity of co-existent and successive phenomena” (I.146). Even though the will is manifested by time and space as a plurality, Schopenhauer stresses the fact that “The multiplicity of things in space and time, which collectively constitute the objectification of will, does not affect the will itself, which remains indivisible not withstanding it” (I.166). Moreover, the will is equally represented in all phenomena. Because the will is “present entire and undivided” in
every object of nature, “true wisdom is not to be gained by measuring out endless space. It is rather to be attained by the thorough investigation of any individual thing, for thus we seek to arrive at a full knowledge and understanding of its true and peculiar nature” (1.168). Here one begins to see the peculiar emphasis Schopenhauer places not on objects, but on the importance of a sustained and concentrated perception.

Although the will is found in its entirety in each object of nature, Schopenhauer insists that the will has varying grades of objectification. The grades of objectification, “which are manifested in innumerable individuals, and exist as their unattained types or as the eternal forms of things” (1.168), are referred to by Shcopenhauer as Plato’s Ideas. In essence, the Ideas or grades of objectification are the changeless forms of individual things. The difference between the Ideas and the will is that Ideas are objects for contemplation while an inquiry into the will is possible only through an investigation of its manifestations. Universal forces such as gravity and impenetrability represent the lowest grades of the objectification of the will. At this level of objectification, which includes all laws of physics, the will is expressed “as blind striving, an obscure, inarticulate impulse” (1.195). The will’s grade of objectification increases as it is manifested in the earth, in plants, and in animals. According to Schopenhauer, the will “finds its clearest and fullest objectification” in man, “yet man alone could not express its being” (1.200). In order for the significance of the will to be fully “expressed,” man must be accompanied by all the gradations of the will. Schopenhauer eloquently expresses this point by observing that man needs the other gradations in the same manner “as the full
daylight is accompanied by all the gradations of twilight, through which, little by little, it loses itself in darkness” (I.200).

Although the will is responsible for the existence of all phenomena, it is also responsible for all the suffering and evil in the world. The blind impulse to create, which defines the will, causes each grade of objectification to struggle ceaselessly for matter, space, and time. Schopenhauer explains that “everywhere in nature we see strife, conflict, and alternation of victory, and in it we shall come to recognize more distinctly that variance with itself which is essential to the will” (I.191). Mann further explores this struggle: “The will, objectivating itself in all existing things quite literally wreaks on the physical its metaphysical craving; satisfies that craving in the most frightful way in the world and through the world which it has brought forth, and which, born of greed and compulsion, turns out to be a thing to shudder at” (8). When confronted with the stark vision of conflict which is our world, one question asserts itself above all others: “Every will is a will towards something, has an object, and end of its willing; what then is the final end, or towards what is that will striving that is exhibited to us as the being-in-itself of the world?” (I.212). Gravity, for instance, perpetually struggles to assert itself, “though a final goal is obviously impossible for it” (I.214). Likewise, humans believe we see “ends” to our desires and ambitions, yet we remain unfulfilled. Desires are constantly rekindled and reaffirmed as we become lost in a “constant transition from desire to satisfaction, and from satisfaction to a new desire” (I.215). In acknowledgement of man’s helplessness and his entanglement in an indefatigable cycle of needs and desires, Schopenhauer makes a bleak observation: “We are fortunate enough if there still remains
something to wish for and to strive after” (1.215). The residue remaining after sifting through the contents of existence is the unsettling realization that “every particular act of will has its end, the whole will has none . . .” (1.215).

1B. The Aim of Art: A Clear Vision of the World

Yet, in the midst of this turbulent cycle, where men find themselves enslaved by the unflagging influence of the will, there remains the possibility of deliverance. Schopenhauer insists that “in certain individual men knowledge can deliver itself from this bondage, throw off its yoke, and free from all the aims of will, exist purely for itself, simply as a clear mirror of the world” (1.199). According to Schopenhauer, one transcends the will by intensely concentrating on a work of art. Through aesthetic perception, which momentarily releases knowledge from the will, the perceiver ceases to be merely an individual and is transformed into the “pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge” (1.231).

To Schopenhauer, a “beautiful” entity is simply the cynosure of aesthetic contemplation. Yet there are two equally important sides to the process of aesthetic perception. First, the perception of anything beautiful “makes us objective, that is to say, that in contemplating it we are no longer conscious of ourselves as individuals, but as pure will-less subjects of knowledge” (1.270). Second, in the same manner that the perceiver ceases to be individual, the object of contemplation is also raised above individual categories. Instead of representing a particular thing, the object is elevated to the Platonic level of Ideas. For a true moment of aesthetic perception to occur, the pure
subject of knowledge and the Idea must simultaneously appear because they are
“necessary correlatives” (1.271). From these premises, Schopenhauer is able to conclude
that since everything can be observed in a “purely objective manner,” and since the will
and consequently its Idea is expressed in varying grades in every object of nature, “it
follows that everything is beautiful” (1.271).

In a similar manner, Schopenhauer observes that there “exists in all men this
power of knowing the Ideas in things, and consequently of transcending their personality
for the moment . . .” (I.252). This ability to remain in a state of pure perception, in which
one’s ego is lost, is the hallmark of genius. When defining “genius,” Schopenhauer
emphasizes the ability to relinquish one’s personal aims and desires: “genius is the
power of leaving one’s own interests, wishes, and aims entirely out of sight, thus of
entirely renouncing one’s own personality for a time, so as to remain pure knowing
subject . . .” (I.240). Since men of genius are endowed with the ability to sustain a state
of pure perception that reveals the Ideas, it is their responsibility to create works of art
which repeat or reproduce “the eternal Ideas grasped through pure contemplation . . .”
(I.239). Therefore, the artist must raise his awareness to the level of the Ideas because
“the comprehended Idea . . . is the true and only source of every work of art” (I.304).4
Like the phenomenal world, which is simply a manifestation of the Ideas, the artist’s
creations are also enabled through an apprehension of the Ideas. When noting the
similarities between the artistic process and the process by which the world was created,
Schopenhauer makes a passionate statement: “[art] achieves essentially just what is
achieved by the visible world itself, only with greater concentration, more perfectly, with
intention and intelligence, and therefore may be called, in the full significance of the word, the flower of life” (I.345).

Once art is created and its perceivers grasp the Ideas while also losing any sense of self in their transformation into will-less subjects of pure knowledge, a moment of unspeakable bliss overwhelms the subject. In a passage describing this moment, Schopenhauer emphasizes the necessary resistance to desires or the will: “Then all at once the peace which we were always seeking, but which always fled from us on the former path of the desires, comes to us of its own accord, and it is well with us” (I.254). This moment, which “arises only when the subject and object reciprocally fill and penetrate each other completely” (I.233), particularly affects people who are incessantly burdened by the will’s complex urges. Schopenhauer expresses this point by observing how “the man who is tormented by passion, or want, or care, is so suddenly revived, cheered, and restored . . . the storm of passion, the pressure of desire and fear, and all the miseries of willing are then at once, and in a marvelous manner, calmed and appeased . . .” (I.255-56). This passage is a prime example of Schopenhauer’s tendency to describe aesthetic perceptions as revitalizing, calming, and restorative experiences.

Schopenhauer proceeds to explain that different forms of art each inspire unique types of aesthetic experiences. According to Schopenhauer, this variation is because “the source of aesthetic satisfaction will sometimes lie more in the comprehension of the known Idea, sometimes more in the blessedness and spiritual peace of the pure knowing subject freed from all willing” (I.274-75). This subtle difference in the nature of aesthetic perception is due to the fact that some objects manifest higher grades of the will. For
instance, the perception of beauty in the organic world is dominated by the feeling of
will-less knowing because the natural world objectifies low grades of the will. Yet when
the aesthetic experience originates from the perception of man, who constitutes the “most
distinct revelation of will” (1.275), the experience consists mainly in the awareness of the
Ideas.

This discussion appropriately sets up Schopenhauer’s analysis of the different
forms of art and their contrasting aesthetic experiences. Schopenhauer believes that
when architecture is looked at not as a functional tool for survival but as an artistic
creation, one perceives ideas reflecting the lowest grades of the will’s objectivity (1.276-
77). The low grades of objectivity expressed by architecture are “gravity, cohesion,
rigidity, hardness, those universal qualities of stone, those first, simplest, most
inarticulate manifestations of will” (1.277). Therefore, due to the low grades of
objectivity expressed by architecture, the accompanying aesthetic pleasure “will consist
then principally in pure contemplation itself, free from all the suffering of will and of
individuality” (1.280). Architecture’s “sister art,” “artistic arrangements of water”
(1.281) also expresses low grades of the will’s objectification. Schopenhauer explains
that, “For what architecture accomplishes for the Idea of gravity . . . hydraulics
accomplishes for the same Idea, when it is connected with fluidity, i.e., formlessness, the
greatest mobility and transparency” (1.281).

Unlike the arts identified above, certain types of sculpture, painting, and poetry
express high grades of the will’s objectification. Since Schopenhauer asserts that human
beauty is “the fullest objectification of will” (1.285), it follows that the forms of sculpture,
painting or poetry, that express high grades of objectivity, take the human form or human emotions as their principal subject. These art forms create an aesthetic pleasure emphasizing the objective side or the Ideas more than they incorporate pure knowing into the experience. Yet, regardless of the grade of objectification expressed, each art form has the power to liberate individuals from the influence of the will. From this liberation, the world as will is utterly annihilated, while the world of Ideas is preserved in a pure and complete manner.

1C. Risking Everything for the Key Note

Of all the art forms discussed by Schopenhauer, music "stands alone, quite cut off from all the other arts" (I.330). Schopenhauer's theories on music border on the mystical and his confidence in his explanations appears questionable. While explaining how his explanation "is quite sufficient for myself, and satisfactory to my investigation" (I.332), Schopenhauer admits that "it is essentially impossible to prove this explanation" (I.332). With these cursory remarks aside, Schopenhauer proceeds to reveal an elaborate theory on music's relation to the world as will. The key difference between music and the other arts is that music does not repeat or express any Idea or grade of the will's objectification. In a critical passage, Schopenhauer describes the difference between music and other forms of art:

Music is as direct a objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself, nay, even as the Ideas, whose multiplied manifestation constitutes the world of
individual things. Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the *copy of the will itself*, whose objectivity the Ideas are.

When compared to the other arts, music's effect is "stronger, quicker, more necessary and infallible" (I.331), precisely because it is "the *copy of the will itself" (I.333).

Consequently, "the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself" (I.333).5

Since music does not represent a copy of any Idea, but instead represents the will itself, its relation to phenomenal existence also sets it apart from the other arts. In fact, music's relation to the physical world is very similar to the will's relation to phenomenal existence. Schopenhauer articulates this point by observing that music "passes over the Ideas, is entirely independent of the phenomenal world, ignores it altogether, could to a certain extent exist if there was no world at all" (I.333). The existence of music, combined with its independence from material existence, leads Schopenhauer to assert that the world can be viewed as either embodied will or embodied music (I.340).

Music's profound relationship with all phenomena gives it an undeniably universal quality. Schopenhauer insists that music is "in the highest degree a universal language" (I.339). This universality "gives music the high worth which it has as the panacea of all our woes" (I.338). Unlike the other arts, which only release the subject from the damaging influence of the will, music emotionally and spiritually revives listeners by instilling in them virginal perspectives towards existence. Schopenhauer expresses this central idea:

*The unutterable depth of all music by virtue of which it floats through our*
consciousness as the vision of a paradise firmly believed in yet ever
distant from us, and by which also it is so fully understood and yet so
inexplicable, rests on the fact that it restores to us all the emotions of our
inmost nature, but entirely without reality and far removed from their
pain. 1.341

It is precisely this restorative quality of music which distinguishes it as the most sublime
form of art.

In an attempt to more effectively convey the similarities between music and the
will, Schopenhauer designs an intricate analogy. He begins by reminding the reader of
how man, or the highest grade of the will’s objectification, is only complete when
accompanied by all grades of the will’s objectification. From this point, Schopenhauer
declares that “In the same way music, which directly objectifies the will, just as the world
does, is complete only in full harmony” (I.343). In order for this unity or harmony to
exist, the melody or highest tone must be accompanied by all other tones, including bass
notes. Indeed, the bass notes provide a foundation from which harmony is able to
develop. In the bass, Schopenhauer observes “the lowest grades of the objectification of
will, unorganised nature, the mass of the planet” (I.333). In the same way harmony
develops from the bass, the whole world arises from the lowest grades of the will’s
objectification. Even the methodical movement of a bass line mirrors its analogous
relation to “unorganised nature.” Schopenhauer expresses this idea by observing that
“The deep bass moves most slowly, the representative of the crudest mass” (I.334).
Between the bass and the melody, Schopenhauer identifies middle tones corresponding to
intermediate gradations of the will’s objectification. Schopenhauer further clarifies these points: “[musical tones] nearer the bass are the lower of these grades, the still unorganised, but yet manifold phenomenal things; the higher represent to me the world of plants and beasts” (I.334). Like the bass’ slow movement, which corresponds to the nature of its grades of the will’s objectivity, the middle tones move more rapidly because they represent the grades of objectification relating to plant and animal life (I.375).

The attribute distinguishing melody from its complementary tones is melody’s “intentional connection from beginning to end” (I.335). Schopenhauer feels that the complementary tone’s lack of intentional connection is “analogous to the fact that in the whole irrational world, from the crystal to the most perfect animal, no being has a connected consciousness of its own which would make its life into a significant whole” (I.335). However, Schopenhauer feels that man is the sole creature endowed with the ability to unify experience through reason. Schopenhauer describes this process by observing how man “constantly looks before and after on the path of his actual life and its innumerable possibilities, and so achieves a course of life which is intellectual, and therefore connected as a whole” (I.335). Melody has this “intentional connection” because it is the “high, singing, principal voice leading the whole and progressing with unrestrained freedom, in the unbroken significant connection of one thought from beginning to end representing a whole” (I.335). Thus one sees the crucial connection Schopenhauer makes between melody and man or the highest grade of the will’s objectification.
Schopenhauer’s discussion of how the will and man correspond to melody becomes clearer when he contemplates the role of the key-note in musical compositions. Schopenhauer begins by reminding the reader of how the will perpetually challenges man by issuing new desires which can only be satiated momentarily. Addressing this point, Schopenhauer remarks that man’s “happiness and well-being consist simply in the quick transitions from wish to satisfaction, and from satisfaction to a new wish” (I.336). Analogous to this cycle is the unrestrained movement of the melody which always returns to the key-note. Schopenhauer describes the nature of melody: “melody is a constant digression and deviation from the key-note in a thousand ways, not only to the harmonious intervals to the third and dominant, but to every tone . . . yet there always follows a constant return to the key-note” (I.336). The melody’s deviations from the key-note correspond to the “multifarious efforts of the will” (I.336). Yet, in the same way that man is able to constantly alleviate desires, the melody also returns to the key-note regardless of how elaborate its digression may become.

In his essay “On the Metaphysics of Music,” Schopenhauer expands on the ideas of melody and the key-note. Here Schopenhauer acknowledges how musical tones in opposition to the key-note provide “dissonance.” This “dissonance” is “the natural image of what resists our will” (Will and Representation II.451). These notes contrast sharply with “consonant” tones, which by relating to the key-note, provide listeners with “the image of the satisfaction of the will” (II.451). Yet even dissonant tones serve listeners by transmitting the dynamics of the will itself: “in this way does music never cause us actual suffering, but still remains pleasant even in its most painful chords; and we like to
hear in its language the secret history of our will and all its stirrings and strivings . . .

(II.451). Schopenhauer concludes this discussion by making an intriguing yet unsettling observation about the practical application of his metaphysical discourse. He states that in real life, like the melody in a musical composition, our will is “roused and tormented” consequently, “we are now the vibrating string that is stretched and plucked” (II.451).

The key to remember about Schopenhauer’s theory of music is that music does not express any specific emotion. Instead, music expresses the “extended quintessence” (Will and Idea I.338) of emotions like pain, horror, or peace of mind (I.338). Yet Schopenhauer is quick to point out that music’s effect on man is dynamic and immediate. Schopenhauer observes that “our imagination is so easily excited by music, and now seeks to give form to that invisible yet actively moved spirit-world which speaks to us directly . . .” (I.338). Music’s captivating power over individuals is due to the fact that the melody “records the most secret history of the intellectually-enlightened will” (I.335). Moreover, according to Schopenhauer, the melody’s expression of man’s inner life actually “says more” than the will which simply “expresses itself in the actual world as the series of its deeds . . .” (I.335). The implications of this statement are tremendous, for Schopenhauer is essentially declaring the value of music over life. In the end, music’s deep connection to the origin of all human emotions “explains the fact that suitable music played to any scene, action, event, or surrounding seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning, and appears as the most accurate and distinct commentary upon it” (I.339). By endowing humans with original perspectives towards the world and their lives, music restores individuals while releasing the self from the unswerving influence of the will.
1D. Tracing the Musical Theories of Arthur Schopenhauer

Even before Schopenhauer's 1819 publication of *The World as Will and Idea*, German intellectuals had passionately written about the transformative and restorative qualities of music. Like Schopenhauer, these various composers, theologians, and critics each uniquely expresses how music works as a medicinal language which revitalizes listeners while granting them new perspectives on life. One of the earliest German writers to foreshadow Schopenhauer's theories was a theologian named Wihelm Heinrich Wackenroder. In Wackenroder, Schopenhauer found a kindred spirit who also saw art and music as a means to transcend the suffering of existence. Schopenhauer’s biographer, Rudiger Safranski, claims that Schopenhauer was reading Wackenroder’s writings around 1807.7 In his 1797 *Heartfelt Effusions of an Art-Loving Friar*, Wackenroder passionately defends art:

One must with courageous arm reach through the pile of rubble into which our life is being crumbled, in order to hold on powerfully to art, to the great and enduring that extends beyond everything into eternity, which offers us its radiant hand down from heaven, so that in bold attitude we float above the wild abyss, between heaven and earth! (qtd. in Safranski 64-65)

Like Schopenhauer, Wackenroder reserved his highest praise for music. In 1799 Wackenroder wrote an emotional essay concerning the powers of music entitled “The Marvels of the Musical Art.” In the same way that Schopenhauer viewed music as the
most distinct commentary upon an individual’s inner life, Wackenroder saw music as a reflection of life itself: “sometimes music is for me entirely a picture of our life” (36). Wackenroder’s musings come even closer to resembling Schopenhauer’s theories when he discusses music’s power to restore individuals to an original and peaceful condition. In a revealing passage, Wackenroder articulates this process: “O, then I submerge my head in the holy, cooling wellspring of sounds and the healing goddess instills the innocence of childhood in me again, so that I regard the world with fresh eyes and melt into universal, joyous reconciliation” (37). This passage focuses on two aspects of music which are echoed by Schopenhauer in _The World as Will and Idea_. First, Wackenroder stresses the “healing” (37) aspect in the same way that Schopenhauer declares music “the panacea of all our woes” (I.338). Second, Wackenroder’s belief that music “instills the innocence of childhood” (37) directly corresponds to Schopenhauer’s assertion that music “restores to us all the emotions of our inmost nature” (I.341). The calming and pacifying influence of music is again mentioned when Wackenroder relates how “I close my eyes to all the strife of the world—and withdraw quietly into the land of music . . . where all our doubts and our sufferings are lost in a resounding sea . . . all the anxiety of our hearts is suddenly healed” (37). By emphasizing music’s ability to alleviate suffering and anxiety, Wackenroder again foreshadows Schopenhauer’s conceptions.

Another common theme evident in both Schopenhauer’s analysis of music and his predecessor’s remarks is the tendency to speak of music as a highly sophisticated and inspirational language. Wackenroder notes that music is “the most marvelous” (39) of the arts because “it speaks a language that we do not know in our ordinary life, which we
have learned, we do not know where and how, and that one would consider to be solely the language of angels” (39). Later Wackenroder would elaborate on the power of this musical language by remarking that music is “a language that no one has ever spoken, the native country of which no one knows, and that grips everyone to the core” (39). Schopenhauer would later elucidate music’s gripping effect by revealing how music conveys “the secret history of our will” (Will and Representation II.451).

Johann Gottfried Herder was another German theologian who wrote an elaborate essay in 1802 entitled “Music, an Art of Humanity.” Herder’s analysis of music’s power is more ambitious than Wackenroder’s because he attempts to physically explain how music impacts listeners. Herder argues that music attains its inscrutable power over people because the ear “reaches most deeply into the interior of his head” (42). Yet Herder’s writing also reflects the general themes previously noted. When describing the origins of sound, Herder speaks of the “restorative forces” (42) lying within sound itself. Herder also speaks of music as a language: “Music also must have the freedom to speak alone, as indeed the tongue speaks in its own right . . .” (46-47). To Herder, musical compositions which involve lively melodies have effects which could “become intensified up to the point of rapture” (49). While Herder’s essay tries to be scientific, he ends his discussion with a moment of mystical clarity. In a final attempt to justify music as the most profound art form, Herder writes that, “In dreams themselves there sounds to us nothing more celestial than music; it exceeds in charm all dreamed-of beautiful forms. The dying, finally, as examples show, are raised up from the earth by a tone heard inwardly” (50).
Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann is yet another German writer and music critic whose views on music sharply parallel those expressed by Schopenhauer. In an 1813 essay entitled “Beethoven’s Instrumental Music,” Hoffmann explores the remarkable power inherent in music. Like Schopenhauer, Hoffmann feels that music is the highest possible form of art. Unlike Schopenhauer, who praises music because of its direct relation to the will itself, Hoffmann exalts music because “its sole subject is the infinite” (59). However, both Schopenhauer and Hoffmann assert that music’s subject is beyond space and time and consequently, beyond human understanding. Due to music’s relation with the “infinite,” Hoffmann concludes that “music discloses to man an unknown realm, a world that has nothing in common with the external sensual world that surrounds him, a world in which he leaves behind him all definite feelings to surrender himself to an inexpressible longing” (59). Hoffmann again emphasizes music’s impact on man’s inner being when he observes how Beethoven’s “Symphony in C Minor” “enkindles an inner, blissful life within our breasts” (64). Like the previous writers, Hoffmann also compares music to a foreign and enchanted language. In a passage where he attempts to describe the emotions a subject encounters while listening to Beethoven, he observes that “at the center of the spirit realm thus disclosed the intoxicated soul gives ear to the unfamiliar language and understands the most mysterious premonitions that have stirred it” (63). A ponderous sentiment expressed by each of these philosophers concerns music’s attempt to communicate some type of invaluable knowledge. From this observation, one can conclude that, like Schopenhauer, these thinkers consider music’s source to be both divine and eternal.
1E. Schopenhauer's Influence on Creative Writers

After 1851, when Schopenhauer achieved international recognition, the ideas contained in his metaphysical discourse made their way into the intellectual circles of nineteenth century America. For poets, artists, and creative writers, Schopenhauer's theory of aesthetics was particularly significant because it provided a rational justification for the artistic lifestyle. In the following two chapters, I will analyze how Schopenhauer's influence on two nineteenth-century American writers, Harold Frederic and Kate Chopin, is revealed in their fiction. Often a familiarity with Schopenhauer's thought along with knowledge of an author's interest in Schopenhauer, clarifies areas previously misread by critics. While a special emphasis is given to the spiritual power of music, a broader reading of Schopenhauer's philosophy will provide the necessary tools through which Frederic's and Chopin's texts can be illuminated.
Notes for Chapter I

1 Schopenhauer would later reflect on how these three influences provided the critical foundation for his system of metaphysics: "I confess, incidentally, that I do not believe my teachings could ever have come about until the Upanishads, Plato, and Kant were able simultaneously to cast their rays into one man's mind" (qtd. in Safranski 202).

2 In 1958, Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* was translated by R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp. Haldane and Kemp translated "Vorstellung" as "idea." Yet in 1969, E.F.J. Payne submitted a new translation entitled *The World as Will and Representation*. Unless noted otherwise, my documentation refers to Haldane and Kemp's version; therefore, I refer to Schopenhauer's masterpiece as *The World as Will and Idea*. However, to prevent confusion, it is important to note that most critics refer to Schopenhauer's work as *The World as Will and Representation*.

3 Before *The World As Will and Idea* was published, Schopenhauer was exceedingly confident about his work's significance. In a passage from the cover letter, which accompanied a draft of his work, Schopenhauer asserts that, "My work, therefore, is a new philosophical system: but new in the full sense of the word: not a new presentation of what existed before, but a chain of thought linked to the highest degree, such has not previously entered any man's head" (qtd. in Safranski 238). Devastated by the book's initial failure, Schopenhauer would not publish any work for seventeen years.
In the Introduction to Arthur Schopenhauer’s Essays and Aphorisms, R.J. Hollingdale summarizes the dismal critical reception of The World as Will and Idea: “the book . . . was an utter failure: nobody bought it, nobody read it, nobody reviewed it” (31). Upon the 1851 publication of his last major work, Parerga and Paralipomena, Schopenhauer and his metaphysical system finally achieved fame and recognition.

4 “Idea” is capitalized because Schopenhauer only uses the term in a Platonic sense.

5 Schopenhauer’s use of the term “shadows” is another direct allusion to Platonic philosophy. In both the allegory of the line and allegory of the cave from The Republic, Plato uses the concept of a shadow to illustrate the deceptive nature of phenomenal existence. The strongest example of Plato’s influence lies in Schopenhauer’s conception of the will and the Ideas. In The Republic, Socrates reveals how Plato differentiates between individual things and their essences: “there is an absolute beauty and an absolute good, and of other things to which the term ‘many’ is applied there is an absolute; for they may be brought under a single idea, which is called the essence of each . . . The many, as we say, are seen but not known, and the ideas are known but not seen” (VI. 472). Furthermore, Schopenhauer’s conception of the will corresponds to Plato’s idea of the good which “may be said to be not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence, and yet the good is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power” (VI. 475). In a Platonic fashion, Schopenhauer
makes two key claims: one, true knowledge is only gained through a contemplation of the Ideas and two, the Ideas owe their existence and value to the will.

In “On the Metaphysics of Music,” Schopenhauer identifies the middle tones by stating, “The four voices or parts of all harmony, that is, bass, tenor, alto, and soprano, or fundamental note, third, fifth, and octave . . .” (Will and Representation II.447).

Wackenroder, who only lived to be twenty-six, is described by Safranski as “the comet of the Romantic religion of art” (61). An anonymous contemporary once commented on the mystical relationship between Wackenroder and music: “Music, above all else, seemed to pervade his entire being” (qtd. in Safranski 62). If Schopenhauer did read Wackenroder’s writings years before beginning The World as Will and Idea, Wackenroder’s vital contribution to Schopenhauer’s aesthetic philosophy should finally be acknowledged.
Chapter II: Schopenhauer and Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty

and frightened. Don't open the door to the study

and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

--Rumi thirteenth-century Sufi poet

2A. Harold Frederic and Illumination

Harold Frederic's 1896 novel *The Damnation of Theron Ware* is a dynamic example of Schopenhauer's influence upon a creative writer. Schopenhauer's role in Frederic's novel is most apparent in passages where music alleviates the suffering and anxiety of the main character, Theron Ware. Not only does music extinguish Theron's mental anguish, but music also endows Theron with a new perspective on life. Yet, as I will demonstrate, Theron's inability to see music or art as the primary way to eradicate his suffering condemns him to a torturous existence where desires and ambitions ceaselessly haunt him. As Schopenhauer would say, Theron's refusal to use art as a means of release leads him to live solely in the world as will.

Schopenhauer's influence on Frederic becomes certain when one analyzes Frederic's preparatory techniques for the writing of *The Damnation of Theron Ware*. Due to Frederic's extensive background as a journalist, his preparation for the writing of his novels was expansive and detail oriented. In an interview shortly after the publication of *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, Frederic elaborated on his intensive preparations:
I have had to teach myself all the details of a Methodist minister's work, obligations, and daily routine, and all the machinery of his Church.

Another character is a priest, who is a good deal more of a pagan than a simple-minded Christian. He loves luxury and learning. I have studied the arts he loves as well as his theology; I have waded in Assyriology and Schopenhauer; pored over palimpsests and pottery; and, in order to write understandingly about a musician who figures in the story, I bored a professional friend to death getting technical musical stuff from him.

(qtd. in Myers 53)

This passage is especially significant for this study because it provides proof that Frederic read Schopenhauer in preparation for the writing of his novel. In the following sections, I will first show how the character of Celia Madden embodies Schopenhauer's ideals concerning beauty and the function of art. Second, I will demonstrate how Theron Ware's boundless desires and religious doubts make him particularly susceptible to the impact of music. Third, I will analyze instances in the novel where music releases Theron from the controlling aspect of the will. Finally, I will discuss how Theron's damnation is directly tied to his inability to appreciate the contemplation of beauty, art, and especially music.
2B. Celia Madden As the Embodiment of Schopenhauer’s Aesthetic Philosophy

In the small, narrow-minded town of Octavius, which serves as the setting for Theron Ware’s damnation, Celia Madden stands distinctly apart from her peers. Celia’s independence, which is defined by her assiduous devotion to the fine arts, exhales her figure into the rarefied air of Octavius’ intellectual elite. Sharing Celia’s standing in this intellectual group are the Catholic priest Father Forbes and the peculiar and unsociable Dr. Ledsmar. Celia’s melancholic outlook on life, coupled with her insistence upon the need for music and art, leads me to assert that she represents Frederic’s attempt to embody Schopenhauer’s aesthetic philosophy in a fictional character.

Frederic’s characterization defines Celia by her relation to beauty and the arts. When introducing herself to the Rev. Theron Ware, Celia remarks that “I am Celia Madden. My father has the wagon-shops, and I—I play the organ at church” (47).

Celia’s education and appreciation for the arts is crystallized by the narrator’s observation that Celia appeared “to know everything there was to be known by the most learned, able to paint pictures, carve wood, speak in divers languages, and make music for the gods” (93). When Theron finally gains admittance into the Madden mansion, Celia explains the function of her workshop by stating, “If I want to paint, or model in clay, or bind books, or write, or draw, or turn on the lathe, or do some carpentering, here’s where I do it” (196). Celia’s surroundings again reinforce her relation to the arts when Theron is allowed into her private chamber: “Theron noted that the statues, the marble of which lost its aggressive whiteness under the lights, were mostly of naked men and women; the
pictures, four of five in number, were all variations of a single theme,—the Virgin Mary and the Child” (197). When looking at Celia as the embodiment of Schopenhauer’s ideals, it is appropriate that she reserves models and paintings of the human form, or the highest grade of the will’s objectification, for her inner-chamber.

Celia’s first conversation with Theron Ware also reveals how her personal philosophy revolves around an intense appreciation of the arts. Because Celia suspects that Theron may have a refined personality capable of contemplating art forms, she pointedly asks him, “are you fond of poetry, Mr. Ware?” (100). When the unassuming Reverend stumbles on this question, Celia decides to generalize her inquiry. Celia again asks Theron, “Are you fond of pictures, statuary, the beautiful things of the world? Do great works of art, the big achievements of the big artists, appeal to you, stir you up?” (101). Yet Theron is again unable to respond adequately to her questions because he has limited experience with art or “the beautiful things of the world” (101). Celia reveals her motives for questioning Theron by stating, “I have a reason for wanting to know—to satisfy myself whether I had guessed rightly or not—about the kind of man you are. I mean in the matter of temperament and bent of mind and tastes” (101). Apparently, the sterile atmosphere of Octavius leads Celia to search for those capable of artistic appreciation or those who could learn to appreciate art; consequently, Celia questions Theron in an attempt to discover whether he employs the power of genius. The fact that Celia is primarily concerned with Theron’s level of perceptual ability is revealed by her admitted interest in Theron’s “matter of temperament and bent of mind” (101).
During the course of the novel, Celia’s discussions of her personal philosophies further elucidate her character’s philosophical connection with Schopenhauer. Like Schopenhauer, Celia acknowledges Platonic influences: “I find myself much more in sympathy with the Greek thought, the Greek theology of the beautiful and the strong, the Greek philosophy of life. . . . Personally, I take much more stock in Plato than I do in Peter” (104). Celia’s comment on Greek civilization, “There was a nation where all the people were artists . . .” (200), again reveals her steadfast devotion to the creation and perception of art. When Theron pressures Celia to be more specific about her idea of being “Greek,” Celia responds with a statement which resonates with Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Celia plainly states that being “Greek,” means “lots of things. Absolute freedom from moral bugbears, for one thing. The recognition that beauty is the only thing in life that is worth while. The courage to kick out of one’s life everything that isn’t worth while; and so on” (208). Celia’s definition of “Greek” accurately relates to Schopenhauer’s statement that “to the genius the enforced occupation with the individual as such which constitutes the stuff of practical life is a burdensome drudgery” (“On Philosophy and the Intellect” 117). Both Celia and Schopenhauer see the perception of beauty and consequently the Platonic Ideas as the crucial goal of human perception. In addition to the Platonic tradition, Celia and Schopenhauer also share common Eastern philosophical traditions. When explaining Irish history to Theron, Father Forbes comments that, “Their religion is full of it [Eastern mysticism]; their blood is full of it; our Celia is fuller of it than anybody else” (288). Celia even quotes Schopenhauer when explaining to Theron why she adheres to Catholicism even though she stresses her
paganism: “You remember what Schopenhauer said,—you cannot have the water by itself: you must also have the jug that it is in. Very well; the Catholic religion is my jug. I put into it the things I like” (265). Though Celia’s relation to Schopenhauer’s philosophy is often subtle, here her indebtedness to the German philosopher is unequivocal.

In addition to their common philosophical heritage, Celia also shares Schopenhauer’s pessimism. Celia’s despairing view of life is most apparent when she tells Theron, “It’s a very paltry affair, this life of ours, at the best of it. Luckily it’s soon done with,—like a bad dream” (105). Like a true Schopenhauer disciple, Celia uses music and other fine arts to obliterate her suffering. In an example of this strategy, Celia explains to Theron that “It is one of my unhappy nights. . . . I didn’t know but the organ-music would calm me down . . .” (105). Later in the novel, Celia becomes more explicit when elucidating music’s restorative and medicinal powers. When describing Frederic Chopin’s music, Celia confesses that “He [Chopin] is the real medicine for bruised and wounded nerves” (193). Furthermore, when the anguished figure of Reverend Ware comes to Celia asking her to play Chopin, she remarks “Come, I’m your doctor. I’m to make you well again” (194). From Celia’s mirthless personality and her admiration for Plato to her enthusiasm for art and especially music, her character is clearly designed to embody Schopenhauer’s aesthetic philosophy.
2C. And All the Miseries of Willing . . .

To fully understand the profound impact which music makes upon the distraught figure of Theron Ware, one must analyze how his mental state made him keenly susceptible to such a religious experience. Before detailing the origins of Theron’s anxieties, one should remember Schopenhauer’s comments concerning the effect of aesthetic experience on those especially burdened with desires and passions. As noted earlier, in Schopenhauer’s discussion concerning the aim of art in *The World as Will and Idea*, he states, “This is why the man who is tormented by passion, or want, or care, is so suddenly revived, cheered, and restored by a single free glance into nature: the storm of passion, the pressure of desire and fear, and all the miseries of willing are then at once, and in a marvelous manner, calmed and appeased” (I. 255-56).

At the beginning of the novel, Theron’s character exudes confidence both in his religious outlook and in his marriage with Alice. Readers are permitted a glimpse into Theron’s spiritual standing when the narrator remarks, “The Call sounded, resonant and imperative, in his ears, and there was no impulse of his heart, no fibre of his being, which did not stir in devout response. He closed his eyes, to be the more wholly alone with the Spirit, that moved him” (24). The narrator also allows readers an inside view of Theron’s harmonious marriage by noting how Theron “would lapse into deep gravity, and ponder with a swelling heart the vast unspeakable marvel of his blessedness, in being thus enriched and humanized by daily communion with the most worshipful of womankind” (20). However, as we will see, Theron’s marriage and his position in the Church are decisive factors leading to his mental torment and spiritual agony.
Theron’s perceptions of religion and marriage drastically change as he becomes aware of his overall lack of knowledge. In an attempt to supplement his income, Theron decides that he could easily write a commendable book about Abraham. Yet after a feeble attempt at beginning his book, Theron comprehends “an unsuspected and staggering truth” (61). He is bewildered by the fact that “he was an extremely ignorant and rudely untrained young man, whose pretensions to intellectual authority among any educated people would be laughed at with deserved contempt” (61). Later, as Theron contemplates the organization of his book, he is again confronted with the brutal notion of his ineptitude: “a wave of self-condemnation suddenly burst upon and submerged the young clergyman” (63). After discussing his intellectual pursuits with Father Forbes and Dr. Ledsmar, Theron’s personal anxieties increase exponentially as he becomes overwhelmed by the amount of scholarly research he has not considered. Indeed, this unsettling conversation with Forbes and Ledsmar alters Theron’s view of even his home. After his return from Forbes’ home, the narrator describes how “the whole effect of the room was as bare and squalid to Theron’s newly informed eye as the atmosphere was offensive to his nostrils” (106-107).

After recognizing his intellectual shortcomings, Theron’s attempt to apprehend sophisticated philosophies severely transforms his perceptions of the Bible and his Methodist congregation. Theron’s new perspective on biblical figures is evident when the narrator observes that “the people he read about were altered to his vision. Heretofore a poetical light had shone about them, where indeed they had not glowed in a halo of sanctification. Now, by some chance, this light was gone, and he saw them instead as
untutored and unwashed barbarians, filled with animal lusts and ferocities . . .” (62).
From this moment on, Theron would grow increasingly anxious about the excruciating yet inevitable spiritual division between himself and his church: “He had passed definitely beyond pretending to himself that there was anything spiritually in common between him and the Methodist Church of Octavius” (137). No instance more clearly illustrates Theron’s repulsion towards his ministry than his reaction to his congregation’s maniacal demonstrations of faith. As the church members howled, wept, and collapsed at the altar, the narrator reveals how “the spectacle saddened and humiliated [Theron] now. He was conscious of a dawning sense of shame at being even tacitly responsible for such a thing” (161). However, Theron’s fears and anxieties over his ignorance, his church, and his marriage are most effectively encapsulated in this passage:

He must labor along among ignorant and spiteful narrow-minded people to the end of his days, pocketing their insults and fawning upon the harsh hands of jealous nonentities who happened to be his official masters, just to keep a roof over his head—or rather Alice’s. He must sacrifice everything to this,—his ambitions, his passionate desires to do real good in the world on a large scale, his mental freedom, yes, even his chance of having truly elevating, intellectual friendships. (151)

Theron’s frustrations with his simpleminded wife, coupled with his smoldering desire for intellectual alliances, lead him to seek out the friendship of Celia Madden. Driven by the wish to speak with Celia, Theron finds himself observing her figure in a window when “the thought of how unhappy and unstrung he was came to him now with
an insistent pathos that brought tears to his eyes” (191). One begins to suspect Theron’s
physical attraction to Celia when her touch makes him “glad . . . in every fibre of his
being” (193). Theron’s simmering desire for Celia becomes obvious when the narrator
details Theron’s reaction to her figure: “The sight convicted him in the court of his own
soul as a prurient and mean-minded rustic” (202). The unflagging passion for Celia, in
addition to Theron’s interminable and debilitating fears about his religious calling and his
marriage, rapidly push the young minister to a state of physical and spiritual exhaustion.
Consequently, Theron becomes a prime candidate for a moment of transcendence and
revitalization through an intense perception of art.

2D. Child of Light, Lover of Beauty

When Celia performs Chopin for the distraught Theron Ware, Frederic’s novel
reaches its emotional and spiritual climax. Furthermore, this scene, which occurs in
chapter XIX, provides the most persuasive evidence supporting Schopenhauer’s influence
on the novel. As we will see, Theron’s character is restored by music and given a fresh
outlook upon his life. However, to fully appreciate the impact of this scene, it is
important to acknowledge how Frederic employs music in moments leading up to chapter
XIX’s dramatic scene. Theron’s introduction to Celia Madden provides readers with the
first instance of music affecting the impressionable minister. When Theron follows a
procession accompanying a dying man to his death bed, Celia soon arrives to aid Father
Forbes in the Catholic ceremony. Celia’s emphatically rhythmic chanting curiously
penetrates Theron’s consciousness. In a passage describing the somber scene, it becomes
clear that Theron’s reaction cannot be explained by his inexperience with the dying:
“Theron had stood face to face with death at many other bedsides; no other final scene
had stirred him like this. It must have been the girl’s Latin chant, with its clanging
reiteration . . . which so strangely affected him” (45). The impact of Celia’s voice is
lasting, for as Theron leaves the room he is described as walking “as one in a dream”
(45).

Soon thereafter, as Theron sits alone in his study contemplating the disturbing
prejudices against the Irish and Catholics which dominate his culture and religion, his
anxiety is assuaged by the memory of Celia’s chanting: “then [Theron] smiled, and the
bad vision went off into space. He saw instead Father Forbes, in the white and purple
vestments . . . and he heard only the proud, confident clanging of the girl’s recital . . . like
strokes on a great resonant alarm-bell, attuned for the hearing of heaven” (51). Theron
continues to ponder the curious effect of Celia’s chanting, when he suddenly realizes:

Of all the closed doors which his choice of a career had left along his
pathway, no other had for him such a magical fascination as that on which
was graven the lute of Orpheus. He knew not even the alphabet of music,
and his conceptions of its possibilities ran but little beyond the best of the
hymn-singing he had heard at Conferences, yet none the less the longing
for it raised on occasion such mutiny in his soul that more than once he
had specifically prayed against it as a temptation. (52)

Although the Reverend is discouraged by the corrupting influences he sees in musical
expressions, Theron admits that “a love for music was in the main an uplifting influence,
These early instances of musical contemplation characterize Theron as one susceptible to larger artistic ambitions who also has the ability to use music or art to extinguish anxieties or any "bad vision" (51).

Although Celia's chanting makes an indelible impression upon Theron, it is Celia's keyboard work which truly illuminates his inner being. The first time Theron experiences Celia's music occurs as he discusses his problematic ambitions for a book with Dr. Ledsmar. At a break in the conversation, Celia's music from the adjacent church floods the room. The narrator describes the ascending music by noting, "it rose as by a sweeping curve of beauty, into a firm, calm, severe melody, delicious to the ear.... It went on upward with stately collectedness of power, till the atmosphere seemed alive with the trembling consciousness of the presence of lofty souls, sternly pure and pitilessly great" (80). The powerful melody and the purity of the moment arrests Theron's being. The narrator observes this stunning impact by stating, "Theron found himself moved as he had never been before" (80). For a fleeting moment, before the "prosaic mechanical side of his brain" tells him he is "listening to organ-music, and that it came through the church close by," (80) Theron is released from his individual self, the "will," and his current anxieties.

As Theron leaves Father Forbes' residence, he notices "that his feet were keeping step to the movement of the music proceeding from the organ within the church.... It became a pleasure to identify his progress with the quaint rhythm of sound as he sauntered along" (85). This seemingly unconscious connection between Theron and the
music eases the tension over his lack of education while simultaneously restoring him with a fresher perspective. These changes are commented on when the narrator stresses, “There was something exceptionally juvenile and buoyant about his mood . . .” (85). The revitalizing effect of Celia’s music is again revealed when Theron “paused for a doubting minute or two, with bowed head, listening to the exquisite harmony which floated out to caress and soothe and enfold him” (85). Celia’s music, which is described as “rich, vivid, passionate, a celebration of beauty and the glory of possession” (86) mysteriously affects Theron, who “turned away irresolutely, half frightened at the undreamt-of impression this music was making upon him” (86). This instance demonstrates how music’s powerful ability to momentarily release one from the will or ego is extremely unsettling to those unprepared for the experience.

The most vivid example of music’s restorative and calming powers comes when Celia agrees to play Chopin for the dejected Theron Ware in chapter XIX. When the depressed Reverend approaches Celia speaking of total “collapses of the nerves” (192) and “moral and spiritual and mental breakdowns” (192), Theron confesses that “I feel as if good music tonight would make me well again. I am really very ill and weak—and unhappy” (193). Obviously, Theron’s previous experiences with Celia’s music have made him aware of music’s ability to transform his inner nature by relieving anxieties while reconstructing his perception of life. When Celia begins to play Chopin’s “Fourth Prelude,” which is described as “a simple, plaintive strain wandering at will over a surface of steady rhythmic movement underneath, always creeping upward through mysteries of sweetness,” (201) Theron’s posture is suddenly straightened “in a ferment of
awakened consciousness” (200). Theron’s state of mind at this instant is similar to the condition Schopenhauer describes when discussing moments of aesthetic perception. Schopenhauer describes the “genius” who loses himself in a moment of aesthetic contemplation as “defined by an exceptionally clear consciousness of things” (“On Philosophy and the Intellect” 131). Moreover, to those who have freed their intellects from the will, the world of Platonic Ideas appears with a striking “degree of clarity” (130). Since the perceiver is transformed into a pure subject of knowledge, the antithesis of this state is “one’s own self” (131). Therefore, transcendence through artistic perception alleviates anxieties because the perceiver ceases to be an individual. Though this transcendence is fleeting, the subject is left to grapple with his newfound knowledge of the Ideas. In Theron’s case, his experience with an “awakened consciousness” (200) will destroy his previously cherished notions concerning truth and human responsibility.

As Theron continues listening to Celia’s music, the narration makes it clear how Theron’s will, or the source of his troubling desires and intentions, begins to vanish. Theron’s complete unity with the moment of aesthetic perception becomes clear when Celia begins the “Seventh Waltz:” “Theron’s ears dwelt with eager delight upon the chasing medley of swift, tinkling sounds, but it left his thoughts free” (201). In a Schopenhaurian sense, Theron’s intellect has been freed from its servitude to the will. The tranquilizing effect of music is again commented on when the narrator describes the “Seventh Waltz” as “an exquisitely modulated and gently solemn chant, through which a soft, lingering song roved capriciously, forcing the listener to wonder where it was coming out, even while it caressed and soothed to repose” (201). The correlation to
Schopenhauer’s discourse on music is clear when one considers both the calming influence of Celia’s music and its ability to “free” Theron’s thoughts.

As Celia continues to perform Chopin, Theron’s fixation on the music gradually intensifies. Theron’s entrancement is apparent when the narrator points out how the “slow, deep, magnificent chords” entangled the Reverend in a “spell” (202). Inexplicably, Theron begins to sense that the music is trying to verbally communicate with him. This sensation is first noticeable when the narrator declares that “the music she made spoke to him as with a human voice” (202). During the “Third Ballade,” the idea of music as a language becomes more explicit: “It seemed to him that there were words going along with it,—incoherent and impulsive yet very earnest words, appealing to him in strenuous argument and persuasion” (205). Indeed, the music conveys the most profound of all truths—“the secret history of our will and all its stirrings and strivings” (Will and Representation II.451). Because music represents the will, which resides beyond the intellect’s conceptual limits, music appears, at least on a conscious level, as an “incoherent” language.

When analyzing Theron’s spiritual experience with music, it is crucial to remember Schopenhauer’s statement that music “restores to us all the emotions of our inmost nature” (Will and Idea I.341). This process of restoration undoubtedly alters a subject’s immediate perceptions of his surroundings and of himself. Theron readily confesses to Celia the profound impact of her music upon his consciousness: “I didn’t know anything about music at all. What I do know now is that—that this evening is an event in my life” (203). Not satisfied with this declaration, Theron again professes, “Oh,
if I only knew how to tell you . . . what a revelation your playing has been to me! I had never imagined anything like it. I shall think of it to my dying day" (207). In addition to Theron’s admissions, subtle changes in Theron’s character are revealed through Frederic’s carefully crafted narration. For instance, as Theron absorbs the music, the narrator relates that, “In the presence of such a face, of such music, there ceased to be any such thing as nudity . . .” (202). The sense that Theron has been transformed back to a purer state of being is repeatedly disclosed: “It was as if he had never looked into a woman’s eyes before” (206). Theron’s spiritual cleansing, his release from the will, his new eyes, lead him to exclaim, “You open up to me a whole world that I had not even dreamed existed . . . after to-night—you and the music have decided me. I am going to put the things out of my life that are not worth while” (208).

The type of restoration or revitalization that Schopenhauer acknowledges as occurring through intense aesthetic perceptions, becomes abundantly clear in the first passage of chapter XX:

It was apparent to the Rev. Theron Ware, from the very first moment of waking next morning, that both he and the world had changed over night. The metamorphosis, in the harsh toils of which he had been laboring blindly so long, was accomplished. He stood forth, so to speak, in a new skin, and looked about him, with perceptions of quite an altered kind, upon what seemed in every way a fresh existence. He lacked even the impulse to turn round and inspect the cocoon from which he had emerged. Let the past bury the past. (210)
As Theron reflects upon his new life in the “morning’s dawn of a new existence” (212), it becomes obvious that his total outlook on life has drastically changed. Theron immediately views his wife in a new and complementary fashion while also identifying himself not as a minister, but as a poet or “a child of light, a lover of beauty and sweet sounds . . .” (213). The narrator alludes to Theron’s preoccupation with the previous night’s events: “The spirit of that wonderful music came back to him, enfolded him in its wings. It seemed to raise itself up,—a palpable barrier between him and all that he had known and felt and done before. That was his new birth,—that marvellous night with the piano” (213). As Schopenhauer would say, the music served as a “palpable barrier” between Theron’s intellect and the corrupting impulses of his will.

Yet, Theron’s inability to utilize music or art as a means to subdue the urgings of his will leads to his final disastrous breakdown. Unfortunately for Theron, chapter XIX’s theatrical scene of music and spiritual illumination is the final such episode in the novel. Instead of concentrating on the true catalyst for his newfound freedom—music, Theron focuses his attention on gaining the love and admiration of Celia Madden. An example of how Theron’s preoccupation with Celia keeps him from realizing the liberating powers of music comes in chapter XXII. While wandering off from a Methodist revival, Theron walks into the woods and mistakenly stumbles upon a large gathering of Catholics. As Theron approaches the crowd, the narrator relates how “beyond all possibility of mistake, there came up to him the low, rhythmic throb of music. It was the merest faint murmur of music, made up almost wholly of groaning bass notes, but it was enough” (241). For a brief moment, Theron relishes the dance music which “charmed his ears” (242). Yet
upon finding Celia, Theron’s interest in the music is sacrificed for his desire to talk privately with her. During their passionate conversation, Theron vigorously declares his newfangled freedom. However, realizing Theron has failed to see music or beauty as the true tools for his transcendence, Celia states, “I’m afraid you deceive yourself. You are not by any means free. You are only looking out of the window of your prison, as you call it. The doors are locked, just the same” (257). Indeed, until Theron can realize the value of aesthetic perceptions as Celia does, he will struggle indefinitely as he becomes further imprisoned by the will.

Essentially, Theron’s key mistake resides in the declaration of his intention to “put the things out of my life that are not worth while” (208). While this sentiment may not in itself damn Theron, his refusal to integrate the perception of beauty or music does lead to his destructive breakdown. Instead of replacing his faith in Methodism with an admiration for beauty or art, Theron fills his emotional void with new desires and ambitions. As Theron becomes wholly driven by his enflamed “will,” his attempt to attain Celia’s love devastates his marriage. Theron’s wife, Alice, who is crushed by the change in Theron, vents her frustration by asserting “the space between us is so wide that we are worse than complete strangers. For strangers at least don’t hate each other . . .” (294). Even Alice’s uncharacteristic paroxysm does not stop Theron from following the elusive Celia to New York in a desperate attempt to profess his love. Upon hearing Theron’s naive admissions of love, Celia coldly responds to the vulnerable Ware: “I speak of others as well as myself, mind you,—we find that you are a bore” (331). Celia’s heartless admission, which the critic George Carrinton describes as “turning the knife in
the death-wound” (20), sends Theron upon a downward spiral of debauchery and suicidal tendencies.

The novel ends with the guileless Ware still unaware of how music was the key to his one moment of transcendence and true happiness. Instead, Theron’s dependence on insatiable desires and ambitions is painfully clear as he ends the novel contemplating a future political career: “I shouldn’t be surprised if I found myself doing something in that line. I can speak, you know, if I can’t do anything else. Talk is what tells, these days. Who knows? I may turn up in Washington a full-blown senator before I’m forty” (354). Ultimately, Theron’s steadfast reluctance to utilize music as a means to deal with the confusions and anxieties of life seals his fate. An observation of Schopenhauer’s provides a succinct commentary upon Ware’s condition: “When will crowds out knowledge we call the result obstinacy” (“On Psychology” 170).

2E. Illumination or Damnation: Challenging Existing Critical Interpretations

Since this study is the first to acknowledge how Schopenhauer’s influence should shape one’s view of Theron’s illumination and damnation, my ideas contrast significantly with previous critical responses. While I argue that Celia benefits Theron’s spiritual life by turning him into Schopenhauer’s pure subject of knowledge and perceiver of the Ideas, most critics identify Celia as the manipulative seductress solely responsible for Theron’s downfall. For example, when referring to chapter XIX’s moment of spiritual ecstasy, George Carrington describes Celia as “malicious” and Theron as “her victim”
By not recognizing Schopenhauer’s influence in chapter XIX’s pivotal sequence, critics have instead concentrated solely upon the scene’s sexual overtones. Consequently, the spiritual rebirth Theron experiences while listening to Celia play Chopin is commonly misconstrued as his “seduction” (MacFarlane 14). In a vivid example of this type of criticism, Sydney Krause states that “[Celia] seductively playing Chopin for Ware in her sanctum sanctorum, amidst the mouthing of nineties libertinism, becomes such a blatantly erotic performance as to constitute a rape of his senses” (62).

Unlike my interpretation, which views Theron’s damnation as a consequence of his inability to realize the importance of aesthetic contemplation, most critics see Theron’s acquired passion for music as a tragic development which precipitates his collapse. Thus, to simply state, as Meyers does, that the “ambition to develop his aesthetic self leads to his destruction” (125), ignores the restorative and calming influence of aesthetic perceptions. By realizing Schopenhauer’s role in Frederic’s novel, Meyers would view “destruction” as an inevitable consequence of willing while acknowledging how true knowledge and spiritual peace are acquired through moments of aesthetic contemplation. Other critics unaware of Schopenhauer’s impact have made similar mistakes. For instance, Elmer Suderman claims that “Theron’s counterconversion in Celia’s apartment, which is based on intuition, is just as illusive as the conversions of Theron’s parishioners . . .” (72). However, when Theron’s “counterconversion” is viewed through a Schopenhauerian context, one realizes that Theron’s moment of “awakened consciousness” (200) represents the most sublime level of perception where the perceived object is no longer “illusive,” but absolute and eternal. Jill Rubenstein’s
addition to this vein of criticism is noteworthy because her comments could easily be seen as a direct criticism of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic philosophy. Rubenstein expresses her take on Theron’s demise by declaring, “Theron Ware’s damnation is of a particularly American variety; he is the misguided New World Adam corrupted by the insidious influence of ideas from abroad—in this case . . . aestheticism” (105). According to Rubenstein’s construct, Schopenhauer represents the “insidious influence” of the Old World, while his aesthetic philosophy becomes the forbidden fruit.

Another source of critical disagreement originates from the paradoxical relationship between the English title, Illumination, and its American counterpart. When one considers Schopenhauer’s role in the novel, the presence of the dual titles is understandable since Theron is illuminated by Celia’s music and damned by his inability to fully appreciate the spiritual release afforded by aesthetic contemplation. Yet Myers believes that the two titles “illustrate perfectly [Frederic’s] uneasiness over Theron’s aesthetic development . . .” (125). However, Frederic’s interest in Schopenhauer speaks to the author’s interest in the inspirational qualities of art. Moreover, the fact that Frederic requested that the American edition also be entitled Illumination, makes Myers’ reasoning even more suspect. In a unique though misguided approach, Carrington claims that the titles are both ironic because Theron’s illumination “is a meaningless incident, soon over and done with” while there is no true damnation “because he does not change and is not capable of change” (23). Carrington’s claims seem unfounded for two reasons. First, Theron’s illumination cannot be viewed as “a meaningless incident” since it unintentionally triggers a series of tragically impudent decisions by Theron while also
revealing the path towards true knowledge and will-less existence. Second, Carrington’s belief that Theron does not suffer any damnation dismisses how the final scene’s narration portrays a pathetic figure preoccupied with newly established desires and ambitions, which by their very implausibility, insinuate the inevitable failures awaiting the Wares. Yet, even when one refrains from speculating about Theron’s future, his damnation is unmistakable when one considers his failure to recognize the serenity and insight accessible through art along with his obsequious relation to the will. Krause’s description of Theron at the novel’s end reinforces the damnation which envelopes him: “he is at the end a mental cripple, tenaciously unable to distinguish the simple facts about his experience (where it was good, where bad) and living up to the bourgeois values he had once decried as soul destroying” (65). Essentially, Carrington’s belief that one must be “permanently corrupted and punished” (23) to be truly “damned,” represents a naive notion of human suffering. For often, as in Theron’s case, the cruelest injustice is one’s actual life.

However, there are critics who, like myself, see both a damnation and an illumination at work in Frederic’s novel. By acknowledging the significance of Frederic’s contrasting titles, John Raleigh feels justified in claiming that “what happens to Theron is also an illumination that casts relentless and searching light on the illiberal fanaticism of his religion and on the paltriness and inflexibility of his upper-New York State rural background” (211). Though unaware of Schopenhauer’s influence, Raleigh’s conception of music as a catalyst for spiritual experiences is revealed by the following observation: “when Celia clad in Grecian robes plays Chopin for him, the scales drop
from his eyes” (211). Like Raleigh, Sydney Krause also apprehends both an illumination and a damnation at work in Frederic’s novel. Moreover, in her article “Harold Frederic and the Failure Motif” Krause establishes a key point concerning the nature of Theron’s struggle which directly corresponds to my conclusion: “His knowledge did not so much fail him as he failed it, so that in conceding defeat he peremptorily closed himself off from his finer possibilities . . . Hence, his greatest failure is predicated on the fact that, once enlightened, he really did not have to fail . . .” (56). Like myself, Krause stresses the sanctity of Theron’s moment of spiritual clarity or illumination: “Regardless of Ware’s subsequent conduct, there is no gainsaying the genuineness of his original feelings” (66). The strong resonance existing between this reading and my own is attributable to Krause’s commitment to distinguishing Theron’s illumination from his damnation. Although Krause does not comprehend Schopenhauer’s influence upon Frederic’s novel, her interpretation advances the critical discussion by providing a more insightful analysis of Theron’s transformation. Ultimately, these critical disagreements and ambiguities will be resolved by a thorough investigation into Schopenhauer’s influence.
Notes for Chapter II

1 Frederic’s work was published in England with the title Illumination. Shortly before the American debut, Frederic requested that his work keep the English title. However, in March of 1896, the book was published in America as The Damnation of Theron Ware. Subsequent American editions were published with Illumination as a subtitle.

2 Frederic worked as a proofreader for the Utica Herald and the Utica Daily Observer in 1875. In 1880, he held the position of editor at the Utica Daily Observer. From 1884 until his death in 1898, Frederic worked as the London Correspondent for the New York Times.

3 Although both the public and critical receptions of Frederic’s novel were and continue to be overwhelmingly positive, he has consistently received criticism over the characterization of Celia and Theron. In 1985, Samuel Coale observed that Celia’s “exaggerated paganism makes her the least believable character in the book” (58). Likewise, John Raleigh stated that “Celia herself, it must be admitted, is the Achilles heel of the novel, never quite credible and always verging on the preposterous” (216). Criticism concerning Frederic’s characterization can be traced to the novel’s earliest reviews. For instance, in an anonymous article from the August 1896 edition of the Atlantic Monthly, the writer claims that Frederic had “no genuine foundation for [Theron’s] character” (272). Furthermore, this reviewer comments on chapter XIX’s
climatic scene by stating: “to make [Celia] try the effect of a sort of musical cathartic
upon the minister’s rigidly conventional conscience,—this portion of the story strikes one
as very artificial and out of key” (272). The boldest criticism comes from a November
1898 Bookman review where Gertrude Atherton proclaims that “in all fiction there is no
cracter so remorselessly developed as Theron Ware” (37).

4 In Schopenhauer’s essay “On Religion: A Dialouge,” he expounds upon the
Greek system of religion. Modeled after a Platonic Dialouge, Schopenhauer’s essay
portrays a heated discussion between Philalethes and Demopheles concerning the value
of religion. When Demopheles states that religion is needed to maintain a civilized
society, Philalethes responds by addressing the unorthodox religiosity of the Greeks:

They had no sacred scriptures, and they had no dogmas which were
taught, adherence of which was demanded of everybody, and which were
imprinted on the minds of children. Nor did the administrators of their
religion preach morals or worry about what people were doing or not
doing. (102)

5 Schopenhauer’s writing are saturated with references to Eastern religions. For
instance, in the essay “On Religion,” Schopenhauer makes repeated references to
Buddhism, Brahmanism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism. Schopenhauer’s essay “On the
Suffering of the World,” also stresses many facets of Buddhist philosophy. In “On
Ethics,” Schopenhauer acknowledges that the foundation of his morality and his entire
ethical system is provided by the *Vendatas* (140-42). Each of these essays first appeared in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851). For an abridged version of these works, see R.J. Hollingdale’s *Arthur Schopenhauer: Essays and Aphorisms*.

In an article appearing in the October 1898 edition of *The Saturday Review*, Julia Frankau, a friend of Frederic’s, comments upon Celia’s characterization by stating that Frederic himself “was frankly Greek—pagan if you like” (572). The article is attributed to “an old friend.” Furthermore, in a series of essays written for the 1876 *Index*, Frederic describes organized religion as “the arch-enemy of true, free government, of mental and moral liberty” (175).

Celia’s comparison of life to a bad dream is very similar to Schopenhauer’s tendency to use “dream” imagery when describing life. In “On the Indestructibility of Our Essential Being by Death,” Schopenhauer observes that “life can be regarded as a dream and death as the awakening from it” (70). In order to clarify the illusionary quality of phenomenal existence, Schopenhauer states, “the more clearly you become conscious of the frailty, vanity and dream-like quality of all things, the more clearly will you also become conscious of the eternity of your own inner being . . .” (68). These essays were also published in *Parerga and Paralipomena*.

In a Schopenhauerian sense, it is fitting that Theron encounters the “groaning bass notes” (241) as he meanders through the woods. For the bass represents “in harmony
what unorganised nature, the crudest mass, upon which all rests, and from which everything originates and develops" (I.334).

Raleigh’s insight into Theron’s damnation should be acknowledged for its truth, power, and eloquence:

There is a Theron Ware in all of us, a capacity for pride and its consequence, damnation. And this pride is of the most inviting and powerful kind—not pride of place or position or wealth, but pride of the intellect: the beguilingly insidious idea that we know more than others and are somehow wiser and better than they are. (210)
Chapter III: Schopenhauer and Kate Chopin's Fiction

Do not fear that I shall ever of my own will rush to dizzy heights. Unfortunately we are subject to the circumstances and the maladies of our time, whether we like it or not. But with the number of precautions I am now taking, I am not likely to relapse, and I hope that the attacks will not begin again.

--Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother Theo

3A. Kate Chopin, Dr. Kolbenheyer, and Schopenhauer

Unlike Harold Frederic, whose connection with Schopenhauer has not been explored by other critics, Kate Chopin is a nineteenth-century American writer whose indebtedness to Schopenhauer has been critically acknowledged.¹ Chopin’s exposure to Schopenhauer’s philosophy can be traced to her return to St. Louis in 1884. Only two years after her husband Oscar succumbed to a poorly diagnosed case of malaria, Chopin returned with her six children to the city of her birth. Chopin’s transition to St. Louis was eased by her mother, Eliza O’Flaherty, who also resided in the city. However, upon Eliza’s death in June of 1885, Chopin fell victim to a devastating depression. Her daughter, Lelia, would later reflect on the profound effect these and other deaths had on Chopin: “I think the tragic death of her father early in life, of her much loved brothers, the loss of her young husband and her mother, left a stamp of sadness on her which was
never lost” (qtd. in Seyersted 48). Suddenly at age thirty-four, Kate Chopin found herself submerged in loneliness and despair.

Though reluctant to share her most private thoughts with her peers, Chopin did have one friend, Dr. Frederick Kolbenheyer, who provided her with a trustworthy confidant (Seyersted 67). Seyersted notes that in Chopin’s time of mourning, Kolbenheyer was the only figure in her life who successfully consoled her (48). Kolbenheyer, an obstetrician and Chopin’s family doctor, was a radical anarchist whose political ideas led to his departure from his native Austria (Seyersted 48, Toth 130). Kolbenheyer’s unique personality and ferocious intellect have been well-documented, as has his keen understanding of nineteenth-century German philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and especially Schopenhauer (Seyersted 49). Daniel Rankin, Chopin’s first biographer, noted that Kolbenheyer greatly influenced Chopin’s “religious opinions and philosophic attitude toward life” (qtd. in Seyersted 49).

After receiving Chopin’s letters from Louisiana, Kolbenheyer, who according to Seyersted “was struck by the literary quality of her descriptions” (49), encouraged Chopin to write creatively. Seyersted points out that Kolbenheyer realized the income from writing would obviously benefit the widowed Chopin and her six children, yet Kolbenheyer may have had larger goals in mind (49). As an avid reader of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic discourse, Kolbenheyer was well aware of art’s ability to console those struck by grief. Seyersted speculates that “the Doctor’s main reason for encouraging her to take up writing was probably that he hoped it would give her some relief from the emptiness and deep despair to which her losses had reduced her . . .” (49).
Kolbenheyer’s influence on Chopin cannot be overemphasized, for as Emily Toth asserts, the doctor “provided the crucial spark” (129) in Chopin’s transformation into an artist. The critic Greg Camfield summarizes how these different events shaped Chopin’s literary beginnings:

For Chopin, then, distraught at the deaths of all her loved ones except her children, Schopenhauer’s philosophy offers the solace that suffering is a necessary part of life, but that by understanding this necessity, the individual can rise above it by surrendering its individual desires, either in art or in ascetic renunciation.

Following Kohlbenheyer’s explicit suggestion, Chopin tried art. (9)

Chopin’s exposure to Schopenhauer’s philosophy was not solely confined to her intimate discussions with Dr. Kolbenheyer. By the early 1890s, Chopin had made several intellectual acquaintances by hosting a “literary salon” at her home. One regular at Chopin’s weekly gatherings was a writer, teacher, and composer named William Schuyler. Schuyler, who “set several Chopin poems to music” (Toth 130), and Kolbenheyer were instrumental in introducing Chopin to the St. Louis Philosophical Society. According to Seyersted, this Philosophical Society, which originated in 1866, was formed by Germans “who wanted to live out their enthusiasm for philosophy and the arts” (69). This group of devoted art lovers undoubtedly discussed Schopenhauer’s aesthetic philosophy. Another intellectual group, which formed as a consequence of the St. Louis Philosophical Society, was the St. Louis Movement. This group and their Journal of Speculative Philosophy focused primarily on Schopenhauer’s German contemporary, Hegel. Indeed, Seyersted notes that the St. Louis Movement’s “school of
idealistic Hegelian philosophy had made a national impact” (63). This rich abundance of German philosophy, which permeated the St. Louis area in the 1890s, along with Chopin’s close relationship with Dr. Kolbenheyer, makes it safe to conclude that Chopin was well aware of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. In the following sections, I will confirm Penelope A. Lefew’s assertion that “the strongest indication of Chopin’s familiarity with Schopenhauer . . . exists in her own writing” (75).

Since this present study is concerned with the illuminating powers of music, it will be useful to note Chopin’s personal experience as a musician before moving into an analysis of Schopenhauer’s influence upon her fiction. In Toth’s introduction to Kate Chopin’s Private Papers, she points out that Chopin learned the piano during her sporadic thirteen-year stay at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Louis (195). Moreover, Chopin, who “was a lover of music all her life” (195), studied music more rigorously as an adolescent at the St. Louis Academy of the Visitation. Seyersted acknowledges that in 1891 Chopin read a paper entitled “Typical Forms of German Music” to the Wednesday Club of St. Louis (65). Furthermore, Chopin’s first published work was a musical piece entitled “Lillia. Polka for Piano” (Toth 195). Chopin’s musical orientation is even more apparent when one considers that her first published short story, “Wiser Than a God,” appeared in the Philadelphia Musical Journal. When one acknowledges Chopin’s love for music along with her exposure to Schopenhauer’s philosophy, the fact that her fiction resonates with allusions to music’s spiritual powers comes as no surprise.
Chopin’s first published short story, "Wiser Than a God," illustrates how her first inclinations as a writer were deeply connected to her appreciation of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic philosophy. In the story, published in 1889, a young musician, Paula Von Stoltz, focuses intensely upon her music while also tending to her sick mother. In the story’s opening sequence, Paula’s mother, who is distressed over the recent death of her husband, commands Paula to play: “Don’t chatter, Paula; some music, some music!” (127). Interestingly enough, Paula chooses Frederic Chopin’s “The Berceuse;” the same piece Celia plays for Theron Ware in chapter XIX’s dramatic episode. In “Wiser Than a God,” the Chopin piece also works medicinally by restoring the listener to a calmer state of mind. In the passage describing Mrs. Von Stoltz’s response to “The Berceuse,” music’s immediate impact becomes clear: “Mrs. Von Stoltz leaned her head back amongst the cushions, and with eyes closed, drank in the wonderful strains that came like an ethereal voice out of the past, lulling her spirit into the quiet of sweet memories” (127). In this passage, one again observes how Schopenhauer’s influence leads a writer to characterize music as a communicator or “voice” that momentarily releases the subject from the “will” or current anxieties. When Paula expresses concern over the tears in her mother’s eyes, Mrs. Von Stoltz’s reply speaks directly to Schopenhauer’s assertion that music is “the panacea of all our woes” (I.338): “You [Paula] have given me a joy that
you don’t dream of. I have no more pain. Your music has done for me what Faranelli’s singing did for poor King Phillip of Spain; it has cured me” (128).³

Paula’s character embodies Schopenhauer’s ideals concerning the nature of artistic genius. Her ability to lose herself in music, to play “in happy unconsciousness” (132), directly corresponds to Schopenhauer’s belief that true artists, or people of genius, possess the “power of leaving one’s own interests, wishes, and aims entirely out of sight, thus of entirely renouncing one’s own personality for a time, so as to remain pure knowing subject, clear vision of the world” (I.240). Moreover, Schopenhauer believes that once artists have experienced the true nature of things, or the Platonic Ideas, they become obsessed with their art and with the contemplation of beauty (I.241). This is exactly what happens in Chopin’s story, for after the death of Paula’s mother, Paula devotes her life to music. Paula’s unwavering commitment to her music becomes painfully clear when she is forced to refuse a marriage proposal. Even though she loves her suitor, Paula realizes she cannot sacrifice her music for anything or anybody. Paula expresses her frustration over her love’s myopic view of life in an energetic passage: “What do you know of my life. . . . What can you guess of it? Is music anything more to you than the pleasing distraction of an idle moment? Can’t you feel that with me, it courses with the blood through my veins? That it’s something dearer than life, than riches, even than love?” (134). Paula’s assertion that music is “dearer than life” (134) is particularly relevant to this study because of Schopenhauer’s belief that melody is a more valuable object for contemplation than life itself since melody “records the most secret history of this intellectually-enlightened will, pictures every excitement, every effort,
every movement of it” (1.335). Gregg Camfield’s article “Kate Chopin-hauer: or Can Metaphysics Be Feminized?” also analyzes connections between Schopenhauer’s aesthetic discourse and Chopin’s story. Camfield notes that the title “Wiser Than a God,” refers to the artist who is “superior to the primal forces that drive the world” (9). Indeed, Paula’s decision to choose music over love, or any other desires, illustrates her mastery over the “will.” As Theron Ware’s damnation has shown us, this ability to sacrifice one’s desires for pure aesthetic contemplation is the central difference between an acceptable life and one scarred by misery and frustration.

3C. “Mother Women” and the Unessential

Using art to offset the inevitable suffering of existence is again Chopin’s central theme as she explores Edna Pontellier’s transformation in her 1899 work, The Awakening. Even though Edna is occasionally freed from her overwhelming emotions or “will,” she, unlike the true artist figure of Paula Von Stoltz in “Wiser Than a God,” ultimately fails in her attempt to escape the pains of life through artistic ambition. Though I will argue against LeFew’s assertion concerning Edna’s lack of artistic talent and the belief that Edna’s suicide does not represent a failure, LeFew, like myself, acknowledges Schopenhauer’s powerful influence in The Awakening: “Edna Pontellier’s many efforts to escape or satisfy her will reflect Schopenhauer’s influence on the novel. The central role of music as both a source of release and expression and a means of escape is identical to the role Schopenhauer gave music . . .” (77). By expanding on
Schopenhauer’s influence and examining the different types of artist figures portrayed in The Awakening, I will argue that Edna’s failure is not due to her lack of talent. Instead, Edna lacks the “courageous soul” possessed by someone like Paula Von Stoltz, which would permit her to dedicate her life to the service of art.

While I will demonstrate that the most instrumental catalyst in Edna’s “awakening” is her experiences with art and especially Mademoiselle Reisz’s music, the narration makes it clear that several other factors also worked to expand Edna’s inner-life: “There may have been—there must have been—influences, both subtle and apparent, working in their several ways... but the most obvious was the influence of Adele Ratignolle” (18). Indeed, the critic Maria Anastasopoulou notes that Adele “triggers a release of emotional expressiveness and self-analysis that prepares Edna for the more violent response to Mademoiselle Reisz’s music, the moment when Edna actually confronts the truth of her life” (22). A simple ocean-side conversation is an excellent example of Adele’s ability to loosen Edna’s reserve. When Adele asks the meditative Edna what she is thinking, Edna initially replies, “Nothing” (21), but instantly amends her response by tracing the origins of her thoughts to a specific day of her childhood in Kentucky. Adele presses Edna to be more specific, eventually leading Edna to the observation that “during one period of my life religion took a firm hold upon me; after I was twelve until—until—why, I suppose until now, though I never thought much about it—just driven along by habit” (22). While these admissions may seem trivial or off-hand, the reader is made aware of this exchange’s true significance when the narrator relates how Edna became “flushed and felt intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor. It
muddled her like wine, or like a first breath of freedom” (24). As Carole Stone suggests, Adele “guides Edna towards warmth, openness, and creativity” (25).

Yet Adele is not an entirely positive influence upon the impressionable Edna Pontellier. Unlike Edna, Adele is one of the “mother-women . . . who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (10). Adele’s motherly instincts go against Edna’s very nature, for, as the narrator reveals, the absence of Edna’s children “seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her” (24). The subtle yet dramatic temperamental differences between Adele and Edna become apparent during a conversation about their children. When Edna explains that “she would never sacrifice herself for her children . . . the two women did not appear to understand each other or to be talking the same language” (62). In a passage, which foreshadows Edna’s fall from conventional motherhood to troubled artist, she elucidates her meaning: “I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn’t give myself. I can’t make it more clear; it’s only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me” (62). While Edna’s inclusion of her “life” in the category of the “unessential” may seem tragic or perplexing, this distinction directly corresponds to Schopenhauer’s philosophy. The perceptive LeFew notes this by stating, “The unessential, including her individual life, was expendable. Schopenhauer made the same distinction between life and the essential: though the individual’s life may end, the will, the life force of the world as well as the individual, continues” (82). Essentially, physical
existence, birth, and death, are inconsequential because they exist in time and space; true knowledge is gained from the changeless and immortal Platonic Ideas.

Even Adele's marriage distresses Edna. In sharp contrast to Edna's marriage, which was "purely an accident" (23) and where there is "no trace of passion" (24), Adele's situation is described as "domestic harmony" (74). Edna, who feels weddings are "one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth" (87), observes Adele's domestic situation and is "moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle—a pity for the colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment" (74). As Edna begins to realize how artistically and spiritually confining marriage is, as "a certain light" began "to dawn dimly within her" (17), she privately rebels against her own marriage by stamping upon her wedding ring and shattering an expensive vase just "to destroy something" (69). A key passage relating Edna's conception of marriage points to frustrations she endures in her attempt to become an artist. The narrator describes Edna's feelings about marrying Mr. Pontellier by observing that Edna "felt she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams" (24). In a Schopenhauerian sense, the world of reality or appearances, which Edna resigned herself to, is illusionary and unrewarding, while the spiritual realm of Platonic Ideas contains true fulfillment and the longed for release from one's "will." Therefore, Edna's attempt to re-open the "portals" through art is immensely difficult because of her enslavement to her husband, children, and society's expectations. Stone summarizes these points by declaring that, "By constantly reminding Edna of her duty to her children, [Adele] binds her to society's
rules and impedes her creative growth" (26). James Justus expands on Adele’s role in Edna’s crisis: “Edna is caught between the claims of ‘mother-women’ and those of ‘artist-women,’ between the sensual aspects of Creole women, who adjust to society by celebrating their procreative powers, and the brittle independence of liberated artists, who resist their culture’s sociological limitations with their own kind of creative powers” (111). While Adele Ratignolle leads Edna to new frontiers of openness, Adele simultaneously serves as an insistent reminder of everything Edna despises about her life.

Since this study is primarily concerned with Schopenhauer’s influence and consequently Edna’s attempt to become an artist, it is crucial to note how Adele herself utilizes and views art. A pianist herself, Adele’s “soiree musicales” (72), which provide entertainment for the Ratignolles’ friends, include flutists, cellists, pianists, dancers, and vocalists. When Adele performs for the attendants of Grand Isle, the narrator relates that “she played very well, keeping excellent waltz time and infusing an expression into the strains which was indeed inspiring” (31). Yet, the key passage revealing Adele’s limited understanding of music’s power states, “She was keeping up her music on account of the children... because she and her husband both considered it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive” (31). Once again one sees how Adele’s every action is directed towards her domestic life. More importantly, this passage makes it obvious that Adele sees no spiritual value to music, for it acts only to “brighten” the unessential or the material instead of one’s inner life.

Another pseudo-musician figure, Miss Highcamp, also graces Edna with her music. Chopin carefully constructs Miss Highcamp’s character by first describing her as
"worldly but unaffected . . . with an indifferent manner and blue eyes that stared" (97). Miss Highcamp’s inartistic and insensitive mood is repeatedly emphasized. For instance, when Edna accompanies Miss Highcamp to the horse races, the “fever of the game” gets “into [Edna’s] brain like an intoxicant” (98), but Miss Highcamp “remained, as usual, unmoved, with her indifferent stare and uplifted eyebrows” (98). Moreover, after returning from the races, Miss Highcamp criticizes her daughter for choosing to attend a Dante reading instead of the races (98). This type of closed-mindedness and general immunity to life contaminates the purity of Miss Highcamp’s music. The narrator describes Miss Highcamp’s playing and Edna’s stunned reaction: “Miss Highcamp played some selections from Grieg upon the piano. She seemed to have apprehended all of the composer’s coldness and none of his poetry. While Edna listened she could not help wondering if she had lost her taste for music” (99). Perhaps Chopin’s message here is that talent alone does not elevate art to the level of the spiritual.

In his essay “On Genius,” Schopenhauer acknowledges this type of artistic failure. First, Schopenhauer states that man’s intellect, which was created to serve the “will,” exhibits varying degrees of reliance upon the “will.” In normal men, the intellect remains grounded in the will; consequently, these men are “only capable of personal aims” (302). However, when the intellect is delivered from the “will,” it becomes more active and is able to see objectively. The highest separation between the intellect and the “will” is found in geniuses. Unlike normal men, a man of genius sacrifices personal goals and desires to apprehend the Platonic Ideas so art can be created. Would-be artists, whose intellects are completely bound to their “wills,” create miserable art. Calling these
misguided artists "bunglers" (301), Schopenhauer delivers a scathing observation of their lives and art: "Therefore [bunglers] succeed at most in appropriating what is external, accidental, and arbitrary in the genuine works of others as mannerisms, in doing which they take the shell instead of the kernel, and yet imagine they have attained to everything, nay, have surpassed those works" (302). Miss Highcamp's sterile interpretation of Grieg's fervor is a shining example of a failure in art that reflects a more tragic failure in life.

3D. Genius, Courage, and Salt Water

Standing in stark contrast to the "mother-women" like Adele Ratignolle and dispassionate artists such as Miss Highcamp, is the curious figure of Mademoiselle Reisz. Unlike the "indifferent stare" (98) of Miss Highcamp, Reisz possesses eyes that "glow" (33). Chopin's emphasis in detailing the eyes of the artists relates well to Schopenhauer's discourse on artistic genius. According to Schopenhauer, while geniuses possess "the knowledge from which all genuine works of art . . . proceed" (On Genius 293), the "essence" of genius lies "in the perfection and energy of the knowledge of perception" (293). The heightened perceptual capabilities of artists is required so they can "see the universal in the particular" (297). Therefore, realizing the crucial role perception plays in artistic creation, Chopin pays specific attention to the eyes of her artists. From the very outset, Chopin stresses the alertness and strength of Edna's perception. For instance, the narrator describes Edna's eyes as "quick and bright" (4);
moreover, "she had a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there
as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought" (4). At another instance, the
narrator relates how Adele becomes "arrested" by Edna's "absorbed expression which
seemed to have seized and fixed every feature into a statuesque repose" (21). From these
initial descriptions, one begins to suspect that within Edna and Reisz there lie powers of
observation capable of discerning Schopenhauer's Platonic Ideas.

One first becomes aware of Edna's desire to paint when she attempts to sketch Adele.
At first Edna is described as simply "dabbling," yet in her art "she felt a satisfaction of a
kind which no other employment afforded her" (14). Schopenhauer would assert that this
unique sense of "satisfaction" is caused by the separation of Edna's intellect from her will
and the subsequent knowledge of the Platonic Ideas. When addressing the intellect's
release from the will, the perception of the Ideas, and the desire to reproduce these Ideas
in art, Schopenhauer's emphasis on an awakening resonates with Edna's situation:
"What is called the awaking of genius, the hour of initiation, the moment of inspiration, is
nothing but the attainment of freedom by the intellect . . . " (298). As we will see, Edna's
sense of independence is tied, though perhaps unconsciously, to her increasing passion in
art. In this first scene of artistic ambition, the narrator also reveals that Edna possesses
innate artistic talent: "She handled her brushes with a certain ease and freedom which
came, not from long and close acquaintance with them, but from a natural aptitude" (14).
Interestingly enough, two critics have ignored this passage and mistakenly assumed that
Edna lacks sufficient talent to succeed as an artist. The usually perceptive LeFew notes
that Edna "does not possess the artistic means for her own liberation" (77). Likewise,
Dawson claims that “If indeed Edna is acquiring an artistic disposition, then she is in a terrible situation, without the artistic ability to support or satisfy her impulses . . .” (95-96). However, due to the narration’s repeated emphasis concerning Edna’s strong perceptual abilities and particularly the passage which notes her “natural aptitude” (14), the fact that Edna possesses artistic talent is undeniable.

Soon after experiencing her “first breath of freedom” (24) with Adele and noticing the elusive “satisfaction” (14) afforded by her art, Edna is emotionally and spiritually aroused by Mademoiselle Reisz’s music. The narration leads up to the dramatic moment by noting that “Edna was what she herself called very fond of music. Musical strains, well rendered, had a way of evoking pictures in her mind” (33). The narration continues to describe the different types of images Edna visualized during Adele Ratignolle’s playing (33). Suddenly, the narration shifts into a vivid description of Reisz’s music:

The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier’s spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth. (33-34)

Edna’s curiously virginal reaction to Reisz’s playing points to the fact that a new self is slowly emerging in Edna. Edna’s newly found openness with Adele and her fresh experience with her own art have unconsciously made her more sensitive to beauty, art, and especially music. The music discloses the “abiding truth” (34) because, according to Schopenhauer, “suitable music played to any scene, action, event, or surrounding seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning, and appears as the most accurate and distinct
commentary upon it” (I. 339). One could debate whether the “abiding truth” (34) illuminates the absurdity of Edna’s current situation, the laborious nature of her marriage, or her desire to become an artist, yet one cannot deny that Reisz’s music makes an immediate impact upon Edna.

The crucial aspect of this scene, pointing to both Reisz’s superior artistic genius and Edna’s increasing receptivity to beauty, is the fact that Edna does not visualize any mental images during Reisz’s playing. The narration describes this telling aspect:

She waited for the material pictures which she thought would gather and blaze before her imagination. She waited in vain. She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her. (34)

Chopin’s presentation of Edna’s imageless perception of music is perhaps the most refined correlation to Schopenhauer’s theories of music present in this study. Because Reisz possesses true genius and is consequently able to sustain a perception of the Platonic Ideas, her music “speaks not of things but of pure weal and woe” (“On Aesthetics” 162). Schopenhauer elaborates on this issue by stating: “The true work of art leads us from that which exists only once and never again, i.e. the individual, to that which exists perpetually . . . in innumerable manifestations, the pure form or Idea” (160). LeFew also notes this critical point:

Here music is not a picture of [Edna’s] desires; it is desire itself, just as music is not a copy of the human manifestations of the will but rather a representation of
the will itself, according to Schopenhauer. . . . This kind of experience with music is that which can provide the living individual with the highest form of release from the will. (79)

In Edna, Reisz sees a potential artist capable of discerning the universal in her music, for she plainly admits, “You are the only one worth playing for” (34). In an admission of her profoundly spiritual connection to Reisz’s playing, Edna would later respond to the evening’s events by asking, “I wonder if I shall ever be stirred again as Mademoiselle Reisz’s playing moved me to-night” (38).

A subsequent journey to the ocean reveals how deeply empowered Edna feels after listening to Reisz play. Indeed, after attempting to learn how to swim all summer, Edna suddenly succeeds: “A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before” (36). In these passages describing Edna’s obsession with the sea, one begins to see a mysterious connection between music and the ocean. In the same way that Edna is released from all anxieties when listening to Reisz’s music, when she swims “she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself” (36). Evidence supporting this correlation can be found in Chopin’s description of the sea—“It broke like a mournful lullaby” (7)—and in Chopin’s description of musically aroused passions which assault Edna’s inner-being “as the waves daily beat upon her” (34).

Moreover, in the same way that music speaks directly to one’s inner life, the “sea speaks to the soul” (17) and invites “the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose
itself in mazes of inward contemplation” (17). Here again the notion of a loss of self or a liberation from the will is directly tied to an intense type of contemplation. LeFew, who also notices this dynamic connection between music and the sea, relates that “Both the movement of the sea and the strains of Mademoiselle Reisz’s music envelop, contain, and in fact represent Edna’s inner ebb and flow, her striving and reaching, her movement and calm . . .” (80). Furthermore, the “inner ebb and flow,” which LeFew feels music and the sea “represent,” is essentially Edna’s will itself. If one comprehends how the sea and music represent phenomena capable of liberating Edna from the will, her magnetic attraction towards both becomes understandable.7

As Edna begins to confront existence with her newly empowered identity, which boasts an original sense of control of both body and soul, it is imperative for her well-being that she stay focused on her art and the perception of beauty—the only pure forms of release from the will. Yet Edna approaches this new stage in her life in an extremely nonchalant and naive manner. Her lack of foresight and failure to recognize the need to concentrate on her art as a pure form of release becomes obvious: “However, she was not seeking refreshment or help from any source, either external or from within. She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility” (42). Since Edna relinquishes all responsibility, her new enthusiasm for life is soon entangled in a burning sexual desire for Robert Lebrun.

Predictably, her growing desire for Robert coincides with an abrupt indifference towards her art. An earlier passage from the narration alludes to the perilous situation
awaiting the newly awakened Edna: “But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!” (17). Edna’s transformation is “exceedingly disturbing” because the pleasure she derives from art and the separation of her intellect from her will actually work against her very nature by denying the needs of the will. At this point, Edna’s challenge becomes clear; can she comprehend the futility in pursuing relationships which promise an ephemeral satiation, or can she see the true value of dedicating herself to art? Moreover, will Edna make the valiant decision made by Paula Von Stoltz in “Wiser Than a God,” and sacrifice her need for companionship to fulfill her true artistic potential? When Robert leaves for Mexico to pursue financial opportunities, Edna is devastated and feels “that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded” (59). However, Robert’s absence allows Edna’s attention to return to her art work. Though burdened by the thought of Robert, which “was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her” (71), Edna tells Adele that “Perhaps I shall be able to paint your picture some day. . . I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something” (73). After Adele reassures Edna of her talent by glowing over a still-life—“this basket of apples! never have I seen anything more lifelike” (73)—Edna resumes her art work with a renewed sense of purpose and drive.8 As she begins to abandon her more superficial household duties in order to perfect her art, Mr. Pontellier grows enraged and exclaims “There’s Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn’t let everything else go to chaos” (75). Yet Edna replies resolutely to her insensitive husband: “I feel like
painting. . . Perhaps I shan’t always feel like it” (75). Unphased by her husband’s shallowness, Edna moves to her atelier at the top of the house and energetically resumes her work: “She was working with great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything, however, which satisfied her even in the smallest degree” (75). The fact that Edna is not easily “satisfied” by her own work again speaks to her innate talent, for true artists are not easily pleased or given to purposeless self-praise.

Yet there are instances where Edna’s lack of total focus on her art becomes apparent. For instance, as she paints in her study, the narrator relates that “A subtle current of desire passed through her body, weakening her hold upon the brushes and making her eyes burn” (76). Edna’s intense longing for Robert leads her into an abyssmal depression, and “life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation” (76). When Edna’s desires and ambitions, her “will,” become overpowering, she feels compelled to visit Mademoiselle Reisz and “above all, to listen while she played upon the piano” (77). This passage reveals how Edna, when assailed by passions, seeks music as a source of revitalization. The fact that Reisz’s music is the primary objective of Edna’s visit becomes clear with her blunt assertion, “I don’t know whether I like you or not” (82). Regardless of their sociability, Reisz’s take on a Chopin Impromptu is again mesmerizing: “The music grew strange and fantastic—turbulent, insistent, plaintive and soft with entreaty” (84). As the music calms Edna’s “will,” she is reminded of when previously ignored voices were manifested within her: “Edna was sobbing, just as she had wept one midnight at Grand Isle when strange, new voices awoke in her” (84).
Before leaving Reisz’s residence, a crucial conversation concerning the nature of the artist occurs between Edna and her musician friend. When Edna tells Reisz, “I am becoming an artist” (83), Reisz assesses Edna’s chances:

I do not know you well enough to say. I do not know your talent or your temperament. To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts—absolute gifts—which have not been acquired by one’s own effort. And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul. . . . The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies. (84)

While Chopin has previously noted Edna’s possession of “absolute gifts” (84) with the reference to Edna’s “natural aptitude” (14), one may question whether Edna has an artistic temperament. Several instances, exemplifying Edna’s fragile artistic focus, demonstrate how she lacks the artistic “temperament” Reisz refers to. For instance when Edna feels depressed (76) or when the weather is “dark and cloudy” (97), she cannot work. Often Edna is simply “not in the humor” (71) to work and must wait for “the sun to mellow and temper her mood” (97). Unlike Edna, who is easily susceptible to mood swings, Reisz maintains focus and a sense of detachment: “Nothing ever seemed to astonish her very much” (104). It is precisely the musician’s calm acceptance of both life’s beauty and its monstrosity that allows Reisz to master “her beloved instrument” (106).

Yet Reisz’s stature as a true artist is due to more than her calm and focused artistic temperament. Ultimately, it is Reisz’s ability to live a solitary life which allows her to fulfill her artistic potential. Reisz’s apartment is a rich symbol of her artistic ambitions
and her desire to live in solitude. The narrator addresses Reisz’s remote apartment by noting, “Some people contend that the reason Mademoiselle Reisz always chose apartments up under the roof was to discourage the approach of beggars, peddlars and callers” (81). However, Greg Camfield suggests that the elevated locale of Reisz’s dwelling may suggest either Reisz’s superiority to her peers or her inflated sense of self: “And while unfashionable, her [Reisz’s] apartments are, literally, above everyone else” (14). Other critics praise Reisz’s character while noting her dedication to the solitary life; Dyer remarks that “In spite of the personal price that solitude has made her pay, Mademoiselle Reisz is the center of beauty in the novel . . .” (95). And Carole Stone makes a similar observation when she declares that Reisz “exemplifies the solitary life of the dedicated artist” (25).

Still some critics have sharply attacked Reisz’s role in Edna’s illumination. James Justus specifically criticizes the narrator’s description of Reisz’s physical features as she plays: “She sat low at the instrument, and the lines of her body settled into ungraceful curves and angles that gave it an appearance of deformity” (84). Justus claims that “Chopin’s description of her at the piano is clearly meant to suggest a spiritual impoverishment . . .” (110). This type of criticism reflects the misconceptions which are possible when one is unaware of Schopenhauer’s influence in the novel. Once one realizes Chopin’s identification with Schopenhauer’s aesthetic discourse, Reisz’s powerful music suggests the highest form of spiritual achievement. Without reference to Schopenhauer, Dawson responds to Justus’s claims by noting how Reisz fits into a tradition of virtuoso musicians like Liszt or Paganini who were mentally and physically
distinct (91-92). Lynda Boren vehemently denounces Reisz as a “sorceress” (190) and a
“thinly disguised witch” (86) who “violates” (190), “enslaves” (191), and “seduces Edna
with heavy doses of Frederic Chopin’s most evocative music” (86-87). Though it is true
that Reisz’s name is similar to the German word “reizen,” which means to enchant or cast
a spell on (Camfield 17), Boren’s criticism again ignores Schopenhauer’s influence upon
the novel by suggesting that Edna’s powerful encounters with music are deleterious
spiritual experiences. The final type of criticism leveled against Mademoiselle Reisz
centers upon her lack of creative output. Justus elaborates on this point by observing that
“despite her creed—‘the artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies’—
she is no more ambitious about her music than Edna is about her painting” (110). Yet
Reisz’s dedication to a solitary artistic life, which revolves around her music, clearly
demonstrates a more disciplined approach to art than Edna’s. Boren adds to this branch
of condemnation by declaring Reisz “a ‘slave’ to the great musicians of the past whose
work she interprets, thereby ‘scavenging’ from a male-dominated field” (182). Yet in
order to be released from one’s will, which is, according to Schopenhauer, the goal of life
and art, the creation of original works of art is not required. Though perhaps lacking in
creative works, no one should dismiss or diminish Reisz’s ability to induce a spiritual
euphoria in Edna.\textsuperscript{10}

Even though Edna’s artistic development is enriched by her experience with solitude,
she still proves overly susceptible to sexual desire. In Robert’s absence, Edna’s sexual
energy is channeled in the direction of the handsome and charismatic Alcee Arobin.
Arobin’s ability to incite Edna’s will is apparent when the narrator describes how Alcee
“sometimes talked in a way that astonished her at first and brought the crimson into her face; in a way that pleased her at last, appealing to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her” (103). The key word pointing to Alcee’s effect upon Edna’s will is “animalism.” Indeed, Schopenhauer’s will is animalistic because the will lacks “knowledge, and is merely a blind incessant impulse” (I. 354). Likewise, Edna’s “will” “stirred impatiently” (103) as it demands satiation. In the same way that Edna abandoned her art when she became infatuated with Robert, she again shifts her focus from her work to Alcee. However, on an unconscious level, Edna’s being is painfully aware of how her artistic impulses are sacrificed for her sexual desires. This deep level of comprehension is revealed by a dream of Edna’s: “Edna was dreaming of Mr. Highcamp playing the piano at the entrance of a music store . . . while his wife was saying . . . What a pity that so much talent has been neglected . . .” (100). Like Edna’s attempt at painting, Mr. Highcamp is competent, yet he remains waiting at the “entrance” to true artistry and self-knowledge.

Feeling the oppressiveness of her sexual desires while also enduring subconscious reprimands for her lack of artistic commitment, Edna again seeks the calming influence of Mademoiselle Reisz: “There was nothing which so quieted the turmoil of Edna’s senses as a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz . . . the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna’s spirit and set it free” (104). Music’s power to eliminate Edna’s anxieties by releasing her from the will’s bondage is again apparent when Reisz plays: “the music penetrated her whole being like an effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul” (106). Unlike the domesticated Adele Ratignolle, who considers music “a
means of brightening the home . . .” (31), Edna embarks on a true contemplation of art by allowing Reisz’s music to brighten her inner-being, thereby releasing her from her desires and fears.

As Edna converses with Mademoiselle Reisz, her artistic progress becomes evident. Feeling that she has “gained in ease and confidence,” Edna, who is beginning to sell her works, reveals that an art dealer named Laidpore “is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality” (105). Undoubtedly, Edna’s rapid development as a professional artist is attributable to her brief experience with solitude and the artistic satisfaction experienced therein. This taste of solitude leads to Edna’s bold decision to move into a smaller house where she will have more privacy to work. In detailing her plans to Reisz, Edna remarks that “I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence” (105). As Edna begins to see the advantages of “freedom and independence,” her life starts to mirror Reisz’s in its dedication to art and the newfound respect for solitude.

Sensing Edna’s growth as an artist, Reisz gives Edna sage advice: “The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth” (110). To Camfield, this passage reflects the deep impression made upon Chopin by Idealist philosophies like Schopenhauer’s. Camfield explains this passage’s significance by stating that, “In the context of [Chopin’s] Idealism, Chopin means that Edna must not merely defy social conventions, but must defy her nature itself, her need to participate in
the world that passionately lures her" (15). Like Paula Von Stoltz from "Wiser Than a God," Edna must make conscious sacrifices in order to become a great artist.

First, Edna must acknowledge that her pursuit of Robert or Alcee ultimately undermines her artistic ambitions while simultaneously providing only impermanent satisfaction. Robert Levine notes that "Robert may well be the attractive object of Edna's restless passion, but her desires are more limitless and absolute than anything Lebrun has to offer" (74). Levine's use of the word "absolute" is appropriate here, for Edna's sexual desires are meaningless when compared to her artistic desires which expose the "Absolute" or the Platonic Ideas. Moreover, Levine's criticism hits upon the central idea of desire's insatiable nature, which Schopenhauer conveys in the following passage:

No attained object of desire can give lasting satisfaction, but merely a fleeting gratification; it is like the alms thrown to the beggar, that keeps him alive to-day that his misery may be prolonged till the morrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with their constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we can never have lasting happiness nor peace. (I. 253)

Yet it seems as if Edna is destined to forever be Schopenhauer's "subject of willing," for she refuses to overcome her sexual passions. Soon after leaving Reisz, Edna kisses Alcee and is subsequently made aware of her "overpowering love" (111) for Robert. At a dinner given in honor of Edna's immanent move to her new home, the narration clarifies her tortured state of mind. As Edna entertains her visitors, "she felt the old ennui overtaking her; the hopelessness which so often assailed her, which came upon her like
an obsession, like something extraneous, independent of volition” (118). At this point, Chopin’s narrator employs a strikingly musical vocabulary. For instance, the narration describes Edna’s state as “a chill breath that seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords wailed” (118). The emphasis on dissonant tones is again stressed: “The voices of Edna’s disbanding guests jarred like a discordant note upon the quiet harmony of the night” (120). As noted in chapter one, dissonance, to Schopenhauer, “becomes the natural image of what resists our will . . .” (II. 451). At this point in the novel, the narrator’s emphasis on dissonance speaks to how Edna suffers under the weight of desires. In the most direct connection between Schopenhauer’s ideas and the musical language employed by Chopin’s narration, Edna confesses to Alcee that “I feel as if I had been wound up to a certain pitch—too tight—and something inside of me had snapped” (122). This is the same image used by Schopenhauer when he describes our will assaulting us with desires: “we ourselves are now the vibrating string that is stretched and plucked” (II. 451). Clearly, the narration’s emphasis on dissonance represents an attempt to portray Edna as spiritually and emotionally unsatisfied or out of tune. Dawson, who ignores Schopenhauer’s influence, makes a useful observation about the narration’s tendency to employ musical metaphors: “The metaphors, which pervade the narrative voice, portray Edna’s thinking in terms of music, suggesting a stability and a reliability in conjunction with music” (94). Regardless of Dawson’s lack of familiarity with Schopenhauer, Edna does utilize music as a stabilizing force; consequently, to ensure peace of mind, Edna develops a reliance upon Reisz’s music.
Moving into her new “pigeon” house enables Edna to again extract from solitude the power and focus required to produce genuine works of art. The unaccustomed sense of privacy and isolation immediately reinvigorates Edna’s beleaguered state of mind. The narration carefully articulates the inspiring effect of Edna’s new surroundings:

There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. (124)

The multifaceted release from her social and family responsibilities allows Edna to focus on the new artistic direction of her life. As Edna begins to see herself as an artist, the power of genius is awakened within her. Edna’s newly freed meditative nature suddenly “apprehends the deeper undercurrents of life” (124). In a Schopenhauerian sense, Edna begins to see the illusionary quality of material existence as she begins to “apprehend” the guiding forces, the “undercurrents,” or Platonic Ideas which embody true meaning. Carol Christ comments on this process by referring to Chopin’s title: “To one who has ‘awakened,’ conventional notions of reality seem as unreal and illusory as the world of dreams does to a person abruptly aroused from sleep” (18). Empowered by the solitude, Edna resumes her work. Again one sees evidence of Edna’s artistic progress when a picture dealer arranges some sales while inquiring whether Edna would be interested in studying art in Paris (137). Edna’s indecisive response, “possibly” (137), again demonstrates her inability to completely sever her family ties in order to be a more
devoted artist. By not leaving for Paris, Edna opens herself to the complete mental and spiritual collapse she experiences when her children and husband return to find her isolated being transfixed upon life's "deeper undercurrents" (124) in her new unfashionable abode.

Ultimately, two main events precipitate Edna's suicide. First is the much anticipated return of Robert Lebrun. Though Edna and Robert eventually confess their love for one another, Edna is devastated by Robert's refusal to pursue a relationship. However, witnessing Adele's excruciating labor is the most powerful event precipitating Edna's suicide. Unlike Adele, who is furious, incoherent, and unmedicated, Edna was heavily sedated during the births of her children. As Edna calmly observes the harrowing scene, the narration relates the reasons for her uneasiness: "Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered. She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being" (135). Now, confronted with the stark reality of Adele's struggle, Edna watches "With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature" (146). Edna's private "revolt" against Nature and Fate reveals her absolute disdain for her inescapable and restrictive role as a mother. Perhaps Adele sees in Edna's face that look of stunned horror, for as Edna says good night, Adele exclaims, "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!" (140). Adele's words reverberate within Edna, shattering her dreams of ever achieving the solitude necessary to create her art. The brutal impact of Adele's message is later disclosed: "Still she remembered Adele's voice whispering, 'Think of
the children; think of them.' She meant to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound . . .” (148). Edna’s decision to take her own life proves her earlier declaration true; indeed, she would give her life for her children, but not her self. Realizing that her true self yearns to be born as an artist and that her children will ultimately prevent this birth, Edna resigns herself to suicide.

As Edna commences her tragic walk to the sea, the narration clarifies the true reason for her fatal decision. In her last moments, Edna finally realizes the futility of her sexual passions as she is released from her desires: “There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence . . .” (151). This type of stance towards reality, in which Edna comprehends the uselessness of her desires, is precisely the attitude demonstrated by true artists like Mademoiselle Reisz or Paula Von Stoltz—yet it arrives too late for Edna. The thought of her children solemnly drives Edna into the frigid waters. The narration succinctly describes how Edna’s children serve as the main reason for her death: “The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul’s slavery for the rest of her days” (151). In the sea’s “abysses of solitude” (152), Edna finally achieves the solitary existence she so fervently sought in society.

In response to Edna’s suicide, critics have responded in drastically contrasting ways. Most critics, like Manfred Malzhan, proclaim Edna a failure:
Ultimately, Edna’s rebellion is a failure: she does not find a new place in society, having given up her old one for good. She is not an Adele Ratignolle, who can content herself with being a leisured housewife and mother. Neither is she a Mademoiselle Reisz, capable of sublimating her desires in search for artistic achievement. (33)

Unlike Malzhan, who believes Edna completely disregards her obligations or gives “up her old one for good” (33), I see Edna as unable to escape her constricting maternal role. While Edna does succeed in escaping her social obligations, the fact that the thought of her children resonates like a “death wound” (148) speaks to the unbearable burden Edna’s children present to her. In contrast to Mamemoiselle Reisz or Paula Von Stoltz, who are “willing to live with the thought of being alone, with only art as their true companion” (Dyer 93), Edna rejects this notion of a solitary existence because of her young children.

However, unlike myself and Malzhan, some critics do not see Edna as a failure. For instance, Lefew bluntly suggests that “Edna’s death cannot be viewed, as some critics suggest, as a denial of the world or a surrender of a defeated woman” (81). Though more complex than LeFew’s observation, Weatherford expresses a similar belief by stating that “Edna does not fail as an artist, but she apparently feels that she has failed to measure up to Reisz’s standards. At the critical moment, Edna is not sustained by Reisz’s friendship but rather shamed by her definition of the artist” (106). Yet there are several key problems with Weatherford’s analysis. For one, Edna’s friendship with Reisz is repeatedly diminished or questioned by the narrator, who incessantly comments on
Edna’s disdain for Reisz’s personality. Moreover, while Reisz does set the “standards” for artistry within the novel, she simply works as Chopin’s mouthpiece. It cannot be questioned that an assiduous devotion to one’s craft is required to become a true artist. Reisz does not invent these ideals; she, as Justus would say, simply “inherits the tradition” (92) of artistry. Therefore, while Edna does fail to maintain Reisz’s standards, Edna is ultimately failing as an artist. Furthermore, the narration’s symbolism points to Edna’s failure as an artist by utilizing the symbol of a bird: “A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water” (151). This image obviously alludes to Reisz’s previous comment concerning the strong wings of artists who soar “above the level plain of tradition and prejudice” (110). Chopin’s symbolism may suggest that Edna not only fails Reisz’s standards, but also fails to fulfill Chopin’s personal expectations of an artist.

Ultimately, one may again use Schopenhauer’s influence upon Chopin to declare Edna a failure. Drawing on the tradition of David Hume, who denounced suicide while proclaiming the immortality of the soul, Schopenhauer uses his theory of the will to discuss suicide. Since the true source of life, the will, exists in a timeless and spaceless manner, Schopenhauer believes that death only destroys the individual and not the life force. In his essay “On Suicide,” Schopenhauer articulates the pointlessness of suicide:

Suicide may also be regarded as an experiment—a question which man puts to Nature, trying to force her to an answer. The question is this: What change will death produce in a man’s existence and in his insight into the nature of things? It is a clumsy experiment to make; for it involves the destruction of the very
Essentially, Edna’s suicide only changes the garment or the physical body where consciousness resides. Moreover, implicit in Edna’s suicide is her belief in the superiority of the will over art. In “On Genius,” Schopenhauer argues that being an artist is challenging because one must deny all personal desires and aims in order to perceive the Platonic Ideas. Similar to Reisz’s assertion that an artist must possess the “soul that dares and defies” (84), Schopenhauer insists that only those maintaining a level of “seriousness” which “does not lie in the personal and practical, but in the objective and theoretical, are in a position to apprehend what is essential of the world, thus the highest truth . . .” (302-03). Moreover, Schopenhauer acknowledges how individuals engrossed in family obligations will never produce true art: “In almost all it [‘seriousness’] lies exclusively in their own well-being and that of their families; therefore they are in a position to promote this and nothing else . . .” (302). Edna’s innate talent, combined with her inability to see how resistance to her own instincts could transform her into a great artist, leads to a refutation of LeFew’s conclusion. LeFew declares Edna’s suicide “an affirmation of life, or more precisely, the power of life over the individual” (81). Yet, a more authentic “affirmation of life” entails one achieving a momentary release from the will and a creation of art. In this fleeting moment of aesthetic perception, man tastes freedom and perceives the eternal or the Platonic Ideas. Yet, in suicide, man affirms not life, but his own spiritual frailty. Edna’s suicide stands as a testament to the tragedy inherent in a myopic view of the universe and oneself. In the end, she poses Schopenhauer’s question, while never intending to wait for an answer.
Notes for Chapter III

1 Chopin's major biographers, Rankin, Seyersted, and Toth, each briefly mention Schopenhauer's influence on Chopin's fiction. In her essay "The Nullification of Edna Pontellier," Katherine Kearns mentions Schopenhauer but does not "claim either Schopenhauer or Nietzsche as direct sources for the novel but as powerful spokesman for the Kantian assumptions of autonomy . . ." (63). However, two critical responses which center on Schopenhauer's influence are Gregg Camfield's "Kate Chopin-hauer: Or Can Metaphysics Be Feminized?" and Penelope LeFew's "Edna Pontellier's Art and Will: The Aesthetics of Schopenhauer in Kate Chopin's The Awakening."

2 The elevated reputation of Hegel, Schopenhauer's older contemporary, disturbed Schopenhauer, as did the unpopularity of his own philosophical text. According to Magee, a Schopenhauer scholar, Schopenhauer regarded Hegel "as a charlatan and a betrayer of the Kantian inheritance" (20). From 1820-1822 Schopenhauer attempted to lecture at the University of Berlin. In an admission of his lack of respect for Hegel, Schopenhauer scheduled his lectures during Hegel's classes. When no one attended Schopenhauer's lectures, he was forced to abandon his teaching career. Magee describes the effects of these events upon Schopenhauer: "He became more and more frustrated and enraged by his situation, more and more contemptuous of the stupidity of mankind, more withdrawn, more isolated, as the years went by" (20).
Farinelli, a remarkable Italian soprano castrato, lived from 1705-1782. His career brilliantly relates to Schopenhauer’s ideas concerning the restorative and healing powers of music. Farinelli’s talents were requested by Elisabeth Farnese, who was married to King Philip V. In order to cure Philip V of a devastating depression, Farnese tried to interest Philip in music “to keep them from thinking of more turbulent matter” (Keene qtd. in New Grove Dictionary 398). Keene describes the impact Farinelli’s voice made upon the King: “From this time the King’s disease gave way to medicine, and the singer had all the honor of the cure” (398). Remarkably, Farinelli became Philip’s personal musician for twenty-five years at the rate of 50,000 francs a year (Oxford Dictionary of Music 242).

In his article “The Unawakening of Edna Pontellier,” James Justus makes a similar observation. When focusing on the aforementioned passage, Justus states that “Marriage for Edna closes ‘the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams.’ But these portals are of course not forever closed, since the burden of her story is the reopening of the doors to the ‘realm of romance and dreams’” (112).

When we look back at “Wiser Than a God,” Adele’s decision to play a waltz becomes significant. Paula Von Stoltz also plays waltzes but mainly when she is employed to do so for the pleasure of high society; when left alone Paula performs more emotionally responsive compositions by Chopin. However, Adele’s performance of a waltz not only signifies the conventionality of the setting, but also of the player.
Edvard Grieg lived from 1843 to 1907. Grieg was a brilliant pianist and the key figure in Norwegian nationalistic music. Fearless in artistic pursuits and compositions, Grieg incorporated impressionistic ideas into his compositions while drawing inspiration from his native country's natural settings. Grieg’s "freer handling of dissonance" (New Grove Dictionary 717) may have lead Chopin to associate him with Schopenhauer, who also commented extensively upon the attributes of dissonance.

Although I disagree with LeFew on two previously acknowledged points which I will address later, LeFew and I share a basic sentiment concerning how one could approach The Awakening. Namely, we both assert that a familiarity with Schopenhauer will elucidate several of the novel's ambiguities, like Edna's attraction to the sea. LeFew clarifies her point by stating:

If readers recognize Schopenhauer's influence at work . . . many of the novel's problematic features—Edna's ambiguous and unfocused search for the unknown, Mademoiselle Reisz's strange and evocative power, and, of course, Edna's suicide—become meaningful parts of Chopin's unified narrative vision of Schopenhauer's concept of the will. (75).

Even though LeFew and I both use Schopenhauer as a critical approach, we disagree on the implications of Edna's suicide.
In a curious passage, which illustrates Schopenhauer's ability to anticipate counter-arguments, Schopenhauer addresses acceptable subjects for still-life paintings:

the [Dutch painters] err by representing articles of food, which by their deceptive likeness necessarily excite the appetite for the things they represent, and that is just an excitement of the will, which puts an end to all aesthetic contemplation . . .

Painted fruit is yet admissible, because we may regard it as the further development of the flower . . . without being obliged to think of it as eatable; but unfortunately we often find, represented with deceptive naturalness . . . butter, beer, wine . . . which is altogether to be condemned. (I. 269)

In a similar fashion, Schopenhauer believes that nudes, "whose position, drapery, and general treatment are calculated to excite the passions . . ." (I. 269), also ruin any type of aesthetic contemplation by inciting the "will."

By referring to the musicologist Lawrence Kramer, Dyer expands on these remarkable musicians: "Cultural historian Lawrence Kramer contends that Paganini's tall, pale, emaciated figure, combined with his technical wizardry on the violin, gave him a 'satanic mystique' while Liszt's incredible pianistic ability and characteristic mane of long, lank hair contributed to his 'demonic/erotic aura'" (qtd. in Dyer 92).

While not criticizing Reisz's character for lack of creativity, K.J. Weatherford does observe that to Reisz, one's talent and "personal courage" are more important than "what one creates" (106). Interestingly enough, Chopin's contemporary, Walt Whitman,
strongly emphasizes the value of original works of art. In the Preface to his 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman has this to say about creativity: "nothing is finer than silent defiance advancing from new forms . . . he is greatest forever and forever who contributes the greatest original practical example. The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one" (13).
Conclusion

If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken and so die.

--from Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night

Music’s effect upon man’s inner life has always been recognized. As the idea of transcendence and music began to accompany each other in art, literature, and religion, several attempted explanations of the relationship between music and transcendence proved unconvincing. In Schopenhauer, however, a systematic discourse is presented which elucidates the cause of and reason for music’s ineffable place in man’s spiritual life. Today, people continue to regard music’s place in the spiritual life of man as a mystical experience that is by its very nature unexplainable. Yet, through an understanding of Schopenhauer’s discourse, light can be thrown upon this aspect of man’s spiritual existence and the mechanisms that make life so dynamic and empowering.

Like those immune to the captivating power of music, literary critics who have observed instances of music and transcendence in fiction, have often dismissed these episodes as meaningless or corrupting. As I have shown, interpretations of Harold Frederic’s The Damnation of Theron Ware and Kate Chopin’s The Awakening have been limited by critical responses which have not adequately explored the true meaning of spiritual experiences either triggered or accompanied by music. By acknowledging Schopenhauer’s influence upon these writers, I have been able to clarify certain critical interpretations that do not acknowledge Schopenhauer’s powerful influence. For
instance, in Frederic’s work I have demonstrated how Theron’s damnation results from his refusal to fully appreciate the value of aesthetic perceptions while his illumination is caused by Celia’s magnificent music. In a similar fashion, an acknowledgement of Schopenhauer’s influence on Kate Chopin allows one to see how Edna’s experiences with Reisz’s music represent the highest form of spiritual experience. Moreover, an understanding of Schopenhauer’s definition of genius enables one to refute the negative criticism aimed at Reisz. Ultimately, a study of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics is beneficial in two ways. First, by acknowledging the influence of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic philosophy upon creative writers, the meaning of certain texts is illuminated. More importantly, Schopenhauer’s philosophy provides a compelling explanation for the consoling and restorative powers inherent in art and music.
Works Cited


"Mr. Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware.*" *Atlantic Monthly* 78 (1896): 270-72.


