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The Literary Kiss: Gestures of Subterfuge

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Abstract: Of all the human gestures and physical actions shared between two people, very few can compete with the kiss in terms of its intimacy, meaning, function and polyvalence. Yet, in literature, the gesture is often more tinged with symbolic significance than sensory reality. In the real world, the kiss generally communicates the mutual seduction of two impassioned partners. When encountered in a literary text, however, the kiss is, often, first and foremost a cipher to be decoded. Analogous to all else, the kiss, which is given, taken, avowed, disavowed, meaningful, meaningless, becomes just another form of contrivance, another brand of irreality. Emotion is superseded by motive, candor by disingenuousness in an unending slew of backward and forward motions, movements and motions, yielding a text that is, at times, structured purely upon the relentless deceptions it proffers. Misery and happiness come and go, as though readily interchangeable; acceptance and rejection are mere variants of the same gestures of ambivalence. One might thus conclude that the kiss, at no point, adopts significance worthy of note, except as a metonym for and of factitiousness, vacuity and, perhaps, thinly veiled travesty. This essay explores the comportments and consequences of the kiss in Kate Chopin's *The Kiss*, wherein the act becomes a "weapon" of dubious sincerity, a strategic "move" that reveals ulterior motives and thus deftly prostitutes itself, willingly, nefariously. Moreover, in the given context, the kiss reveals the heroine's ostensible "liberation" to be more imagined than real. Her would-be triumph over gendered subjugation reveals itself to be little more than a romantic daydream- destined to shade gradually into a woeful nightmare of loneliness and social and mental imprisonment.

Key-words: Kate Chopin, *The Kiss*, feminism, deception, subterfuge

There is the kiss of welcome and of parting, the long, lingering, loving, present one; the stolen, or the mutual one; the kiss of love, of joy, and of sorrow; the seal of promise and receipt of fulfillment.

--Thomas C. Haliburton (1796-1865)

Upon thy cheek I lay this zealous kiss, as seal to the indenture of my love.

--Shakespeare

The kiss, defined patently as “[the] touch with, of, or upon the lips, especially as a sign of love, affection, greeting or reverence,”¹ is conventionally seen as a precursor to romance, the consummation of two lovers’ physical attraction to one another. It is a physical enactment of intimacy,² and its aesthetic depiction, in works of art, incites expectations in the minds of spectators/readers who envisage all that is possible in a subsequent liaison. It is an emotionally evocative stimulus, fraught with complexity, and which promises to culminate in a deeper level of emotional investment and physical intimacy. Because of its many positive overtones, the kiss is also a gesture that is easily trivialized. Politicians kiss babies on the campaign trail in order to demonstrate their wholesomeness, their capacity for affection. Celebrities blow appreciative kisses to their fans in a mock display of intimate familiarity. The blown kisses acknowledge the fealty of fans to star, and the wariness of a wild crowd best admired and acknowledged from a distance. It is a substitute -- an acceptable, if feeble one -- for intimacy. So, too, there is that affectionate parental kiss: sometimes natural, often though awkward in public displays when the child is no

¹ Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 2nd Edition, revised, 1996. Other definitions are postulated.

² Arguably, in relation to intimacy, the act of sexual intercourse may be considered the most blatant exhibition thereof. Arguments and counter-arguments abound. This is not to argue that the kiss, in and of itself, is necessarily intimate. It can, in any event, let loose all the possible imaginings, and is a physical act that can, by its very being, set the mind wandering and the tongues wagging.

longer young enough to negotiate (or outwardly accept) physical affection, but is still not old enough to betray (or forgo) the yearning to be overtly loved.

In the above-cited instances, the kiss retains overtones of sincerity, of affection, of emotional attachment. The trivialization of the kiss does not diminish its positive resonances. More problematic, however, is the kiss that presents itself as seductively romantic, but masks darker motives, these not infrequently confusing to, and often indecipherable by, others. The seducer focused upon conquest, for example, resorts to the kiss so as to fulfill a momentary desire, or perhaps to assert a brand of superiority. A popular song may insist that “a kiss is just a kiss,” but a review of literary representations of this enigmatic gesture proves quite the opposite. When encountered in a literary text, the kiss is first and foremost a symbol to be decoded so as to garner contextual significance and representative value. Analogous to all other forms of double-edgedness, the kiss, which is variously given and taken, avowed and disavowed, meaningful and meaningless is such that the perspicacious reader often confronts a web of contrivance, another brand of *irreality*. Emotion is superseded by motive, candor by disingenuousness in an unending slew of backward and forward motions, movements and gestures, yielding a text that is structured purely upon the relentless deceptions it proffers. Misery and happiness come and go, as though readily inter-changeable; acceptance and rejection are, in turn, mere variants of like gestures of ambivalence. One might thus conclude that the kiss, so wielded, adopts no significance worthy of note, except as a metonym for and of factitiousness, vacuity and, perhaps, thinly-veiled travesty.

This is not to suggest that the ambiguity of the kiss is an exclusively modern concept. Even in the Bible, the kiss is portrayed as deliberately ambiguous. One might recall the infamous dioxan kiss of Judas. While the very act ostensibly marks fidelity and loyalty, it is, in fact, the confirmation of Judas’ betrayal in the garden of Gethsemane. Of course, in this early text, the odious duplicity

of the gesture was not lost on Jesus nor was its invidious purpose unknown to others. Such an exemplar of transparency notwithstanding, it remains so that in modern literary representations, the duplicitous nature of the kiss is rarely so easily deciphered. A kiss's meanings and intentions are much more multi-layered, paradoxical, often opaque, and in the case of Chopin, the kiss undermines and, in fact, annuls the text's ostensible message. The heroine's triumph over gendered subjugation reveals itself to be little more than a romantic daydream destined to shade gradually but surely into a nightmare of loneliness and conjugal entrapment.

It is surely of critical interest to note that, apart from its title and critical reception, Chopin's work invokes the kiss as nothing more than a tertiary element, a minimization of the ostensible subject-object and, as such, elicits a series of textual enigmas. The mimetic is contoured to undo itself, and to fail--irrevocably. Mimesis is effaced. Semiotically intoned, the kiss, tendered and withdrawn, absent and present, fixed and unfixd, meaning-ful and meaning-less, contorted signifier and signified in one, stands as a cipher of the text's overriding pattern: its blatant refusal to stabilize and its utter fragmentation. There is a sense of vacantness that under-girds each piece of the tale, each citation and each half-hearted contention. The gentility of tea service, the romantic lie (e.g., "he pressed an ardent, lingering kiss upon her lips"), the wealth sought and possessed, the intrusion of all (the groom no less than the friend), the ambiguous, histrionic encounters, the admonitions are all unframed, un-capped, de-centered images, each of which results in an unswerving process of addition and subtraction – yielding but annulation.

The Kiss opens as the heroine, Nathalie, and her suitor, Brantain, are seated together at the central figure's residence. The setting for the kiss is piquant and private. The picturesque atmosphere is evocative of intimacy and nervous seduction. Brantain, described by Chopin as rich, but socially insignificant and unattractive, is at the mercy of Nathalie with whom he is

hopelessly in love. Clearly, we can adduce that Nathalie does not believe marriage need be burdened by such considerations as love or emotions. Her overriding, if not singular, goal is financial security. Critics have noted the audacious strategy of Chopin by observing that “this story focused on the guile of a woman in attracting a man” and is presented “with a kind of sexual freedom (“...An ardent, lingering kiss upon her lips”) not often encountered in print during the 1890s.”³ Philologically, the text abounds with reiterated images of dimness, with shadowy (partially eclipsed) silhouettes: a setting that, by its very constitution forbids clarity and, thus establishes, even environmentally, per se, a matrix of uncertainty, if not of irreality; such a setting allows for visual and co-extensive forms of subversion. The locus of the minimalized action bears witness, not merely to visual impairment of sorts, to a darkness (with all of its metaphorical nuances), but to disarticulations: words spoken are either “stammered” or haltingly paused, underscoring this bounded forum of meaningless avowals and disavowals, tainted by amorphous form as much as by fundamental vacuity. There is a sense of pervasive decadence in this tea-room-like parlor, where sentiments are fleeting, forever evolving, devolving, disintegrating. The sitting-room, then, is esthetically and dialectically designed to encourage subterfuge and obfuscation.

Chopin’s biographer summarizes the short story by noting that the heroine believes, without equivocation, that she can maintain a flirtatious relationship with one man even after marrying another; in the end, she has to console herself with her new husband, or, more realistically, perhaps, with “his millions.”⁴ The plot is simple enough, and reflects an issue of

³ Leary, Lewis, ed. *The Awakening and Other Stories by Kate Chopin*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970. See, in this vein, Gale, Robert L. *Characters and Plot in the Fiction of Kate Chopin*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009; and Koloski, Bernard, *Kate Chopin: A Study of Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne, 2006.

⁴ Toth, Emily, ed. *A Vocation and a Voice by Kate Chopin*. New York: Penguin, 1991.

socio-historical significance. In order for women to attain a certain status and self-liberation, money was an increasingly necessary commodity. The most expedient means by which to obtain financial success was to marry a gentleman of wealth (monied, if not so gentle). The decision to sacrifice passion in order to acquire wealth is not particularly unusual, either in literature or in life. In truth, the crossroads of ruthlessness and selfish machinations are often paved superficially with acts of feigned intimacy. Like Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's novel *The House of Mirth*, Nathalie understands that she cannot “combine independence and sensual satisfaction.” Echoes of like conflicts surface when, in *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier announces: “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.”⁵ Likewise, in *Athanaise*, the choice between freedom and its alternative is re-inscribed:

I don't hate him. It's jus' being married that I detes' and despise. . . I can't stand to live with a man, to have him always there; his coats an' pantaloons hanging in my room; his ugly bare feet - washing them in my tub befo' my very eyes, ugh!⁶

The decision to marry for money, therefore, is nothing particularly novel or shocking, and Chopin masterfully lays out before the reader the almost petulant (but matter-of-fact) maneuvering by Nathalie. With Brantain's marriage proposal, she hopes to gain access to what she materially wants while maintaining what she emotionally needs. As she entertains Brantain in her home, Harvy enters (unannounced) and bestows an impassioned kiss upon the heroine while her bona-

⁵ *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. First published in 1899 the work is set in the late nineteenth century on Grand Isle, off the coast of Louisiana on the *Chènière Caminada* across the bay from Grand Isle and in the city of New Orleans. It begins on Grand Isle, shifts to New Orleans, and concludes on Grand Isle.

⁶ *Athanaise* in Chopin, Kate. *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Per Seyersted, Ed. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1969/2006.

fide suitor looks on in full view, as witness. Because this sort of a kiss is normally exchanged between lovers, the reader is led to believe that Nathalie's affection is reserved, albeit surreptitiously, for the intruder, evoked as an acquaintance, with whom she shares a little more besides. The very words uttered by Nathalie following the lingering kiss are no less relevatory than surprising: in point of fact, she takes issue with the "visitor's" abrupt entrance, not, as might have been anticipated, with the witnessed kiss itself ("...What do you mean by entering the house without ringing?"). Nathalie does not scold Mr. Harvy for the stolen kiss, but for having invaded her privacy, or rather more likely, for having entered at an inopportune moment. Had a wealthy suitor not been in the room at that juncture, it is clear that both the intrusion and the kiss would have been more (perhaps most) welcome. She does not inquire, "How dare you kiss me?" aware that the response might have uncovered more than Nathalie was willing to share with Brantain.

What are we to make of this kiss and Nathalie's lopsided response? Is she expressing a desire to break all ties with Mr. Harvy in order to marry Brantain? Is she closing the door to any future moments of intimacy? Is she suggesting that the kiss would have been permissible in alternate circumstances? Is it the presumptuousness rather than the act proper of Mr. Harvy that so irks Nathalie, his unapologetic violation of her private space? After all, the kiss is clearly stolen, not mutually agreed upon. Had he requested permission to enter, Nathalie would have been in a position to oversee and, to some extent, at least, control the situation, to assume a deliberated pose. But Harvy's tempestuous embrace deprives her of the opportunity to master her sentiments. Instead, despite her awkward follow-up protestations, she is the passive (and, it would appear, not unwilling) recipient of another man's desire.

More telling and central to the array of textual dilemmas is this: Nathalie's unflinching passivity during the kiss-act stands in diametric opposition to the text's depiction of her as a woman

in control of her destiny. Much that preceded and surrounds the Harvey incursion sets out to establish her sense of empowerment: her very involvement with Brantain is neither accidental nor coincidental. She plotted her future, confidently, waiting for the targeted one (the object of her non-desire) to declare himself, then to accept him as her suitor. Her relationship is the result of rational and significant calculation. Brantain had material wealth, and by assuming the role of spouse, she, too, would enjoy the trappings of luxury, freeing herself of the need to want. In this light, then, the kiss threatens to expose all that Nathalie hoped to camouflage (her lack of passion for Brantain relative to Harvy), and to reveal the person beneath the persona. More importantly, Harvy's intrusiveness and his aggressive behavior render Nathalie submissive rather than dominant, a status she hoped to avoid or overcome by marrying into wealth. In an instant, she loses control of her carefully crafted scenario by the stolen kiss.

In a timid but hesitant explanation to Mr. Brantain, the heroine insists that Harvy is an old acquaintance, more sibling than close friend. She thus exploits the polyvalent nature of the kiss by trivializing it. Harvy's kiss, she insists, was just a familial greeting. Obviously, her rather crude lie is intended to efface or supplant the reality of the visual evidence. What appeared as the erotic is transformed, albeit artificially, into the platonic. Her explanation, it must be noted, is not particularly persuasive. The ardor and length of the kiss belie its innocence. This brief narrative thus challenges the very notion of truth, as we know it. Verity, veracity, authenticity are foreign to the script: all is awkwardly formulated and there is no firm ground (no terra firma) which might lend even a mote of credibility to the exchange process (either verbal or gestural). Even the title of the work serves to confound in that the reader anticipates that this titular attribution will engender some sort of reciprocal emotional investment on the part of the interacting personages. On the contrary, the kiss alters the reader's impression of Nathalie as a woman in charge of her own

destiny. The illegitimacy she strived to conceal is at once center-staged, relegating her yet again to a dreaded position of inferiority.

In a related vein, *The Kiss* establishes a narrative hierarchy that runs counter to the text's surface structure. Brantain, the wealthy suitor would appear to be the logical hero; Nathalie, the cunningly successful heroine; Harvy, an inconvenient and unwelcome intruder. But both Brantain and Nathalie remain oddly tertiary to the events transpiring in the narrative. The would-be suitor sits idly by while the woman he is courting shares a passionate embrace with a more dashing male. The unkissed Brantain, the reader might aptly conclude, is not beloved by Nathalie because her true affection is otherly directed, reserved for the man whose approach she only bemoans in the after-glow. Brantain's reaction to the witnessed act reveals something of his character: he is a fellow one can easily dupe, to the extent, in fact, that his acceptance of such a chintzy out places in doubt any mote of heroism that might have formerly (if implicitly) characterized him. He fashions a specious, self-appeasing guise to which he himself falls prey: thus, the act of witnessed non-restraint, the unambiguous bond between his betrothed and another man is taken to be innocent. Or so he feigns. Yet even here, appearances may be doubly deceiving. He is, after all, something of a strategist himself. He sought Nathalie's attention eagerly and persistently – a pursuit that required critical evaluation and tactical planning. Perhaps, his ready acceptance of what counters visual reality is yet another strategy designed to bind Nathalie to her lie, thus neutralizing the threat of his male rival. By pretending to accept Nathalie's explanation, he can effectively transform fiction into truth. Textually, such a transformation beckons our attention.

The brazen young man who enters the room, later identified rather unceremoniously as Mr. Harvy, appears to be Nathalie's former lover, a man for whom she yearns emotionally. If, at first blush, one presumes that Harvey is acting in a natural and spontaneous manner upon encounter of

his romantic interest, his sincerity becomes less apparent and more troubling as the tale progresses. His very reaction suggests that the kiss is well planned, an assertion of his own authority over Nathalie and superiority over his rival (“the second man reacts with confusion and amusement, as well as defiance).” He enters unannounced, a breach of protocol that conveys a sense of aggressiveness and empowerment and, following such intrusion, he acts unabashedly. Chopin’s words in describing his move towards Nathalie evoke cold confidence and masculine dominance: “A stride or two brought him to her side [where he bent] over her chair before she could suspect his intentions.” Although he asserts his innocence, (he knew not that Brantain was in the room), it is difficult to assess the validity of this claim, particularly when uttered by a somewhat manipulative architect of action. Besides, his apology was not designed to regret the kiss but to regret the potential hijacking of Nathalie’s plans. And, too, the second kiss in the story reveals a Harvy who is not nearly as authentic as he might have initially appeared. In fact, one might argue that the sole or principal function of the second kiss is to call into question Harvy’s motives during the first and his stance of innocence.

Details continue to accumulate: during the wedding reception, Mr. Harvy approaches Nathalie with a message from her husband. Brantain tells him to kiss the bride, thereby enabling the continuation of their would-be friendship. This is the perfect moment to confirm the heroine’s unmitigated belief in the possibility of marriage to one and satisfaction with another. It is not clear if Chopin intended for Nathalie to feel complimented or offended by her husband’s unconventional “gift” of a sanctioned kiss from a former lover. What is clear, however, is that she greets the offer with a bright and tender smile as her eyes meet and fix upon Mr. Harvy’s. Resplendent in her hour of success and consumed with a misguided sense of triumph, she appears to have executed a masterstroke – at once sustaining her secret love while assuring access to her husband’s wealth.

Not insignificantly, too, her husband's complicity allows her to sheath her outrageous betrayal in feigned obedience.

But the "real" masterstroke belongs to Mr. Harvy. After relating the "mission," he defiantly counters both the reader's and Nathalie's expectations by refusing to deliver the assigned kiss. His explanation proves both dexterous and subtle, perhaps tinged with a touch of cruelty: "But, you know," he went on in a voice low and controlled, "I didn't tell him so, [for] it would have seemed ungrateful, but I can tell you. I've stopped kissing women; it's dangerous." The words are as disingenuous as they are opportunistic. Harvy's decision not to kiss Nathalie effectively disempowers her for a second time. Not only does he take ownership of the situation by refusing to do what his "competitor" requests, but, too and no less strikingly, he deprives Nathalie of that which she clearly desired. By refusing to accede to the husband's request, he comes across as more self-disciplined and ethical than Nathalie who manifests every indication of enthusiasm while destroying any plans of subterfuge that Brantain might have had. The event does not conjoin the two lovers; rather it births a bond of honor between two gentlemen, a fealty effected through the intermediary of a wife with no say in the matter. Nathalie's sexual power is thus neutralized (nullified) by her status as a tool of contrivance summoned to solidify a male friendship. It is then, Mr. Harvy who is the real victor, if any victory there be. In one fell swoop, Harvy earns the somewhat dubious trust of Brantain; he asserts his moral mastery over Nathalie by rejecting the possibility of an accessible extra-marital relationship; and, too, he reveals himself to the reader as the untrustworthy scoundrel that he is. His refusal is designed to humiliate the heroine/bride, perhaps to retaliate for her quest to achieve independence, a decision that obliged her to choose Brantain over Harvy. Ultimately, all choices are withdrawn from Nathalie, who becomes the agent of others' ploys. Her urge to control is superseded by her newfound impotence.

Mr. Harvy, as it turns out, is quite the brilliant schemer – at once the victim and the victor. He optimizes and expands the dimensions of Brantain’s request to kiss the bride in a conjunctive effort to ingratiate himself with the groom (the thief of his erstwhile lover) and to assert his mastery over the bride. As such, he is, be it in a limited way, the sole figure of triumph. Nathalie’s loss in a game she thought to have mastered is compelling not least of all for its irony, but also for its invocation of multiple betrayals generated by, and associated with, two kisses (one stolen, one denied).

The heroine’s amoral and detached attitude toward infidelity is manifest in the frosty, care-free ending she affixes to the narrative: “Well, she had Brantain and his million left. A person can't have everything in this world; and it was a little unreasonable of her to expect it.”⁷ A conclusion unarguably flat and painfully insipid, which fails explicitly to advance the text, which suggests a kind of regression, a movement back to the minimalist content of the story, and a gloss of sorts. It leaves in its wake an unfulfilled reader, one who is betrayed, in a sense, as are each of the members of the textual triad: all of the manipulators, each momentarily dominant, each momentarily exultant, each finally doomed to loss and subject to the rebound effects of trickery. The reader is no less the object of betrayal than are the characters in evidence.

Where then does this leave the text and its protagonists? Is this a tale of mere devolution or is it other? Ultimately, the kiss not given is emblematic of all the heroine has sacrificed in her quest for self-liberation. One may argue that by minimizing the impact of the loss of Harvy’s affection, Chopin is endeavoring to portray the heroine as victor. In the world-view of the writer,

⁷ Seyersted, Per. *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1969. Consult, too, the illuminating essays collected in Bloom, Harold (ed.), *Kate Chopin*. New York, Chelsea, 1987; Banton, Jeannette, *Kate Chopin: Feminist Perspectives*: Chester, UK: Chester University Press, 2012; Aston, Margaret, *Kate Chopin Reconsidered*. New York: Citadel Publications, 2001; and the useful study of Stein, Allen F. *Women and Autonomy in Kate Chopin’s Short Fiction*. New York, Peter Lang, 2005.

she observed that “Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer; than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life.” So it is not altogether surprising that the writer depicts Harvy's refusal to kiss Nathalie, not so much as a triumph for him, but as a minor (or limited) setback for the heroine, a necessary sacrifice in her quest for self-determination and control. She rolled the dice and realized a partial victory. While a double success may have been her never-actualized dream, it is perhaps better to gamble and lose a little than to accept the tyranny of a gender-driven society in which, as is Chopin's undergirding principle, women are subservient to men. It is reasonable to assert that such a writerly stance underpins and over-determines the whole of the text.

In an alternate and more tightly framed optic, if one envisages the kiss as a textual signpost, Nathalie's “victory” appears to be not a victory at all, and exposes an ambivalence about female roles, akin to those that Barbara Ewell identifies as characteristic of Chopin's work.⁸ What is interesting for our purposes is that, from outset to conclusion, it is the kiss-act that puts in rather clear relief to what degree the heroine remains subordinate--dominated rather than dominant--despite her slate of largely unsuccessful ruses. Of all engaged parties, she is, in fact, the least in control. Harvy stole the original embrace without her consent; and, but moments subsequent to the wedding ceremony, it is the groom who asserts his authority by ordering another to embrace the new bride on his behalf – as though he wills a distancing, whence Harvy proclaims: “...but he has sent me here to kiss you.” The sheer hubris of it all. Or is the delegation of the kiss a derivative of ill-will, affirmed temerity and tacitly conveyed hurt? In all instances, the kiss underscores the

⁸ Ewell, Barbara C. *Kate Chopin*. New York: Ungar, 1986. Interesting hypotheses are put forth by: Toth, Emily, *Unveiling Kate Chopin*. University Presses of Mississippi, 1999; and by Papke, Mary, *Verging on the Abyss: The Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton*. New York: Greenwood, 1990. Insightful and relevant semiotic perspectives are offered in three key works: Stern, Mark L., *Troubling Fictions*, Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr, 2013; Barthes, Roland, *Empire of Signs*. Richard Howard, trans. New York: Hill and Wang; and Barnett, R.-L. Etienne, *Philological Fraud: Imperiled Representation in Joycean Fiction*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Leiden University Press, forthcoming (2014).

heroine's fundamental lack of agency, and serves to reiterate yet again the conspicuous and untenable motives behind her sham marriage.

At face value, the kiss, enigmatic and tender, reposes quietly and unperturbed, removed from the turmoil swirling around it. But if the kiss is traditionally a sign of harmony and unity, innocuous and redundant, it can also become, as it so often does, an insidious tool of conquest, an engineered apparatus by which to beguile and delude the beneficiary and, others, too, co-extensively. Literary texts can but expose the kiss's many sidedness: its capacity to establish dominance, to terrorize, to subdue, to belittle, to ingratiate and infuriate. Yet and most crucially, one cannot ultimately invoke the kiss's symbolic nature in that the sub-structures that regulate the narrative (or, at least, Chopin's narrative) forbid the investment of identifiable meaning (be it direct or by proxy), sub-structures that tender and withdraw, enact and retract the fundamentals of multi-layered, symbolically interpretable representation. As such, the telling focuses on one obfuscating phenomenon: the retraction of promises (not merely those shared among the personages, but any and all implicitly offered to the reader). As consequence, this is a tale of irrevocable failure. The literary kiss, then, is but a form of "textual fraud" (its extant status devoid of credible value). Chopin's brief narration center-stages betrayal, challenges authenticity and valorizes consummate illegitimacy.

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