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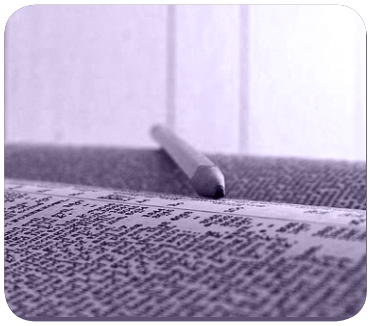

Fallen Women: A study of female subjectivity and competing writing modes in Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Kate Chopin's the awakening

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FALLEN WOMEN:
A STUDY OF FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY AND COMPETING WRITING MODES IN GUSTAVE FLAUBERT'S *MADAME BOVARY* AND KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING*

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‘I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures. None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives.’

— Jane Austen, *Persuasion 54*

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I. Introduction. From Lost to Found: The Awakening's Enigmatic Journey of Exclusion and Rediscovery

'A book lying idle on a shelf is wasted ammunition.'
— Henry Miller, *The Books in My Life* 23

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1873), Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), Theodor Fontane's *L'Adultera* (1882) and *Effi Briest* (1895) or Leopoldo Alas's *La Regenta* (1884-85)—amongst many others—belong to a lengthy and well-established tradition of classics that have male authorship as their common denominator. Time and again, the sex signature of the masculine author has served to shape and dominate the literary canon. Although some exceptions have been known to exist among female writers such as Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe or the Brontë sisters, the consequences of such monopolization have been rather tragic for women writers, whose literary productions remained, for a long time, under scrutiny due to the condition of their sex. To such segregation and perusal, Kate Chopin was no stranger.

With the previously mentioned texts, *The Awakening* (1899) has very much in common. They share similar motifs, plot lines, and patterns, but most importantly, they share the central theme of female adultery and/or the female quest for self-fulfillment. Thus, a transliterary dialogue can unarguably be claimed to exist between these texts, one of which Chopin's work should have always inevitably been a part of, but in which it was prevented to partake for decades. In this way, Ana Ozores, Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Nora Helmer, Effi Briest, and so on, participate in a transatlantic exchange to which Edna Pontellier unquestionably belongs.

The circumstances, the frustration and lack of satisfaction with their lives, and a fervent desire to attain freedom are mutual to these female protagonists. They all undergo personal crisis and awakening. Very much like Emma or Anna, Edna Pontellier wishes to free herself from an unfulfilling marriage. She feels unprepared for the task of being a mother; she craves independence, to become an artist, to be self-reliant. Her journey echoes and resembles that of these other women, and yet it was her that was single-handedly silenced for the better part of fifty years. Such exclusion begs the question: why Edna?

It could be argued that the censorship of Chopin's novel was the product of a profound crisis of values that predominated during the time of its publication. The last decade of the

nineteenth century was an increasingly turbulent time for the United States. The growing tensions surrounding social change, combined with recent scientific advances and a swelling sense of economical and cultural crisis, generated polemic and division—a division that likewise existed in the literary paradigm, where a transition was similarly taking place from Romanticism to Realism. Darwinian theories of evolution and natural selection, for instance, "had called into question established views concerning humankind's origins, urbanization and restoration of the country following the Civil War ushered men and women into a new social identity; and, perhaps most importantly, the women's rights movement had been gathering momentum since 1848, when the first woman's rights conference was held in Seneca Fall, New York" (Sprinkle, 1998).

It could also be argued that the novel was, perhaps, too blunt or too crude in the treatment of its main themes, for it was during this crisis of values that it emerged, propellant in its exploration of topics such as female sexuality and desire, and defiant in its interrogation of hierarchical institutions such as motherhood and marriage. *The Awakening* incorporates and anticipates in many ways the quest that many women would set out for in times to come, standing as one of the most representative pieces of The New Women movement. A feminist ideal that emerged in the late nineteenth century, this movement is representative of the growing number of feminist, educated and independent women who aimed to push the limits set by a male-dominated society. Such women rebelled against patriarchal conventions and transformed their prescribed social roles: essentially the same Edna attempts to do in her rejection of Victorian values of femininity and motherhood.

Contrary to what might have been anticipated by the author, the reception by critics was highly unfavorable. The novel was deemed as immoral and unholy, vulgar in its portrayal of individualism and independence, and challenging in its depiction of Edna's unconventional female role. However, this was not the first time that a novel that had adultery as its central theme was the cause of outrage. In January of 1857, Flaubert was subjected to trial on the subject of his novel, *Madame Bovary* —at the time published as a serial in the *Revue de Paris* —accused of disrespecting public morals and common decency:

> The prosecutor, one M. Ernest Pinard, representing the interests of the public censor, makes plain that the manager and printer of the *Revue* aren't truly to blame for this indecent book: "the principal culprit" is Flaubert himself. Flaubert's painstakingly chosen *mots justes* are an *outrage aux bonnes moeurs*, and it is precisely this contrast between

> the “true/just/right” and the “good” that is on trial: aesthetic clash manifest. The problem of Emma is the problem of desire. “*Is it natural for a little girl to invent small sins?* (Pen America. (Pen America, 2012)

In February of the same year he was absolved on the grounds that while the novel revealed an inkling of the author’s intentions, it could not be claimed to expose his character fully. Far from harmed, his reputation as a writer increased; far from being censored, *Madame Bovary* became a bestseller, earning an unquestionable place in the literary canon ever since.

Chopin’s novel was similarly judged by critics with regard to religious and moral conservatism. United and unbendable, they deemed Edna’s actions as shameful, condemning her infidelity and self-centered narcissism as abhorrent. However, Sprinkle argues, “what especially invoked their wrath was that Chopin seemed to approve of Edna's behavior” (1998). Her refusal to openly punish Edna’s actions was what truly caused critics’ outrage. In her depiction of the character’s open ending, the writer leaves room for speculation, even hope —seen by critics as an aggrandizement of the character’s ill-fated choices:

> In a literary sense, critics viewed Chopin as the responsible genitor of Edna. As author of *The Awakening* (originally titled "A Solitary Soul"), Chopin had the final say on what actions Edna did or did not take. Thus, critics relegated to Chopin the responsibility to "discipline" Edna as a mother would discipline a wayward child, the same way other authors of the same time period "disciplined" their froward and malcontent characters to assuage the moral and religious elements. When Chopin failed to effectively reprimand Edna according to the religious, moral, and literary conventions of the era, critics reacted. Had Chopin acquiesced to at least a few of the cultural and social mores still prevalent in the late nineteenth century, critics might have tolerated Edna's wanton ways with a sense of forgiveness and clemency. To their indignation, however, Chopin was willing to do no such thing. (Sprinkle, 1998)

While Flaubert’s novel did not fully reveal its writer’s essence, *The Awakening* presumably did. Such was the appalling nature of the text, that it was made to remain dormant for decades. Succeeding the novel’s reception, Chopin did not write another novel; she died five years later, in 1904. It wasn’t until 1969, when the social and cultural scene had progressed, that America was ready for the reception of *The Awakening*. The same lack of

morality that initially condemned the novel to remain hidden now rendered it a masterpiece worthy of a rightful place in the literary canon.

It is interesting then, to understand why, in spite of not being the first occasion in which a novel that allegedly attempted against decency was published, it was Kate Chopin's that was erased from the literary panorama. What is it that makes one novel so different from the other? Out of all the novels with which *The Awakening* can be claimed to sustain an ongoing literary dialogue, it is Flaubert's that best serves the purposes of this study[1]. It is precisely the social reception of both, as well as the likeness in plot, themes, characters and structures, that calls for a comparative analysis to be drawn between the two texts. Furthermore, both authors are, in their own terms, pioneers in the representation of the female subject as a central theme in their work.

Set in 1850s northern France, Rouen, *Madame Bovary* revolves around young protagonist Emma, an ambitious, beautiful woman whose profound dissatisfaction with her social status, wealth and married life, fueled by unrealistic expectations of romantic love, lead to adultery and her ultimate downfall. In a quest to escape provincial life, Emma finds herself doomed by her own choices. On the novel, Russian-American novelist Vladimir Nabokov wrote that "stylistically it is prose doing what poetry is supposed to do" (n.p.). By the same token, in the preface of his novel *The Joke* French writer Milan Kundera wrote: "not until the work of Flaubert did prose lose the stigma of aesthetic inferiority. Ever since Madame Bovary, the art of the novel has been considered equal to the art of poetry" (1967). Impersonal and detached, Flaubert insisted that for his work to be impeccable no lyricisms, comments or traces of the author's personality should be present; "nowhere in my book must the author express his emotions or his opinions" (De Man 311). Indeed, at no time does Flaubert break his flawless prose to admonish his character's behaviors, never does he comment on their actions, and yet, there is something to be said about the way the novel seems to reflect well established preconceptions concerning gender and sexuality in the author's time.

In *The Structure of Madame Bovary* (1958), Keith Rinehart states that in the novel "Flaubert has managed to express, impersonally, so much of himself" (300). The aesthetic greatness Flaubert refers to, which Nabokov and Kundera (among many others) praise, is unquestionably present, and while its style is undoubtedly one of the most notable qualities of

[1] An English translation of the original novel will be used in this research with the purpose of facilitating a comparative analysis of both primary texts.

the novel, it is not the only one. Thematically, Madame Bovary has been claimed to constitute a criticism of the mediocrity of bourgeois society and a satire of Romanticism and sentimentalism, towards which Flaubert was known to be both condescending and critical.

However, especially interesting is the author's take on the novel and its characters, particularly Emma, which provides a glimpse of her time's deeply rooted conceptualization of gender. His depiction of characters from both genders answers to—and occasionally attempts to challenge—the convention of the feminine woman and the masculine man. Those who transgress these stereotypes, despite being given a degree of individuality from which to explain their disparity, are ultimately presented as faulty, and to a certain extent, their ruin is justified; "Flaubert plays the role of fate himself, making fools of his dreamers and rewarding only those whose success is not worth the having" (Paris 213).

Charles, the feminine man, innocent, weak and too sweet for his own good, lacks the prototypical male virility and strength needed to keep his family in order. Emma, the rebellious young woman, is ambitious, selfish and proud; growing increasingly aware of her sexuality, her biggest transgression is perhaps her determination to pursue self-interest. In her selfishness, Emma too lacks the traditional feminine qualities that would make her a suitable wife and mother: she is unable to sacrifice her interests for those of her family.

The Awakening, stands precisely in opposition to this generalized conceptualization of characters. Similar in plot, Edna's story is that of a woman ahead of her own time whose sexual, emotional, artistic and transcendental awakenings render her free to break with determinism through this newly found awareness, leading to a holistic awakening of her inner dormant self. It is only after such awakening that she is able to question the institution of marriage, and her role both as a mother and a wife in relation to her own desires and needs as a woman and an individual. As a ground-breaking, turn-of-the-century novel, Chopin's work is nowadays regarded as an immense contribution to literary feminism, through which visibility was claimed for women who lacked the voice to express their own misfortunes.

In literature, female characters "inhabited a dichotomy of spiritual/good vs. material/ evil, defined by the way they served men" (Donovan 224). Such stereotypical categorization, Donovan claims, is one feminist writers aim to escape in their efforts to portray "women as authentic characters with a reflective critical consciousness, as moral agent[s], capable of self-determined action, and as a Self, not an Other". As a New Woman writer, Chopin explores feminist themes, and even more importantly, challenges the social construction of gender that

had until her time been fixed: “the new woman is one who has been sitting apart in contemplation all these years thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with the Home-is-the Woman’s Sphere, and prescribed the remedy” (Grand 660). Her treatment of infidelity, the perils of marriage and motherhood and female sexual emancipation opens up a debate about what was culturally understood in 19th and 20th century western culture, and how this translated into literature. In her treatment of gender, she unbolts the door to the reconciliation of fixed gender stereotypes and individuality.

The Awakening’s biggest achievement is, possibly, the creation of three-dimensional characters which, as opposed to Flaubert’s, display an array of complex, often conflictive, emotions and motives. Chopin’s three-dimensional characters are never apathetic or uncomplicated, and, in their complexity, they leave readers with a profound wish to understand their drives and empathize with their quest. Through Edna, for instance, Chopin creates a character so kaleidoscopic and heterogenous that readers find themselves willing to consider her purposes. By way of Edna, issues such as marriage and sexuality, independence and motherhood, are reconciled, riding the character of that two-dimensional quality that would have constrained her to be either/or, and establishing a middle ground between the binary opposition that existed regarding the Victorian woman: angel in the house or demon. Edna is both and neither. Where Flaubert’s text does not give Emma enough depth to construct a pragmatic female character, Chopin succeeds in creating a woman that truly embodies the existing conflict between social expectations and individual aspirations, one female readers may identify with.

Thus, the main difference between the two novels—the one that will be studied in this research—lies in the sex signature of both authors. The modes of writing (masculine and feminine) will be represented in this comparative analysis by Flaubert and Chopin, as both authors will be taken as paradigms of the masculine and the feminine. It should be noted, however, that the aim of this research is not to demonize the figure of the author, nor to accusatorially disclose an individual tendency to portray characters in certain ways because of a biased understanding of both genders. The object of this study is, rather, to adopt the work of both authors as representative of two different paradigms of writing in relation to issues that remain important in contemporary literature. In addition, this research will endeavor to shed light on authorial differences frequently taken for granted, with no desire to analyze both

texts in the spacial/temporal contexts in which they were initially written, but to focus on the differences and similitudes in portrayal of gender stereotypes as viewed from the perspective of the twenty-first century. The depiction and treatment of female and masculine characters in both novels cannot be analyzed from a modern perspective without the understanding that gender conception has greatly changed since the moment of their publication.

In trying to develop feminine writing, Hélène Cixous endeavored to produce close readings of texts "in which there is struggle. Warlike texts; rebellious texts" (Sorties 203). Following a similar line of argument, the selected readings are examples of rebellious, conflictive texts in which struggle is a dominant quality. Likewise, Cixous's interest in "an alternative canon of literary writers who challenge the dominant order of representation and of ethical values" (Schiach 3) has also influenced the choice of selected readings:

> Cixous's fictional texts involve the intense working-over, and reworking, of a series of philosophical and textual problems, the constant exploitation of an intertext that includes, but exceeds, many of the works discussed by her critical mode, a pushing of the limits of intelligibility to arrive at a style that is both dense and deceptively simple, a painful progression from an exploration of violent and divided unconscious towards the assertion of an alternative form of subjectivity, and an interest in the intersubjective relations that underline historical change. This move from exploration of the unconscious, towards an understanding of historical process which exceeds but does not exclude individual consciousness, is echoed in Cixous's work. (Schiach 3)

The following study will be divided into several sections. Following this introduction, section two will endeavor to offer a generalized view of the problematics that gender studies and different branches of feminism have encountered when appraising the female subject. In addition, an introduction will be provided to the main differences between Western Feminism and French Feminism in order to justify the use of the latter in the next segment. Thus, the third section will be concerned with providing readers with the pertinent theoretical background for the analysis. The research will be framed by French feminist Hélène Cixous's and Peter Schwenger's masculine mode, procuring an account of differences regarding male/ female modes of reading and writing. This will be done with the object of arguing for the existence of gender specificity in textuality, enriching the current debate concerning female subjectivity.

The fourth section aims to provide an individual, in-depth analysis of each primary selected reading, as well as a joined comparative analysis of the two novels in order to highlight their most distinguishable differences. In doing so, the ultimate purpose of this research would be to attempt to account for the texts' discrepancies in terms of authorial approach to characterization (particularly female) —the gendering qualities each author attributes to his characters—, their actions and drives —how these contribute to the character's conformity/divergence from the stereotype—, and the fate of the main characters (and whether there are any attached connotations to the way their endings are portrayed). The way the female character is presented aesthetically, politically and textually, as well as whether this representation is compliant or defiant of patriarchal thought will be central. Finally, the last section will purvey a summary of the previous section's main findings, in hopes that this research's aftermath will constitute an extension of the existing investigation regarding female subjectivity and its portrayal in literature.

II. What Do We Talk About when We Talk About Gender? The Problematics of The Masculine/Feminine Dichotomy

'Who

invisible, foreign, secret, hidden, mysterious, black, forbidden

Am I...

Is this me, this no-body that is dressed up, wrapped up in veils, carefully kept distant, pushed to the side of History and change, nullified, kept out of the way, on the edge of the stage, on the kitchen side, the bedside?

For you?'

— Hélène Cixous, *Sorties* 69

Gender is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "the physical and/or social condition of being male or female" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). The Collins Dictionary briefly refers to the term as "the difference between sexes" (Collins Dictionary, n.d.), while the Oxford Dictionary describes it as "the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences, not differences in biology" (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). Grammatically speaking, the latter elaborates on the term as "each of the classes (masculine, feminine and sometimes neuter) into which nouns, pronouns and adjectives are divided"; "different genders may have different endings", it continues, and this much is certainly true.

Gender equality remains, as of today, a work in progress. Far from being a comprehensive theoretical overview of the history of gender studies, it should be clarified that the purpose of this section is to provide an assortment of certain theoretical and historical aspects of gender studies with the intent of facilitating substantial data for analysis. The following selection will aid in introducing, as well as justifying, my choice of theoretical background and later appraisal.

Whether they be understood as a grammatical class, a biological condition or a social construct, the notions of male and female, as perceived within our social structure, remain unequivocally disparate. A term, as American historian Joan W. Scott explains in her article *Gender: a useful category of historical analysis* (1985), can hardly attain full meaning by itself. To capture and fix meaning "free of the play of human invention and

imagination" (1053) is quite an unmanageable task. For meaning to be grasped one must take into account the implications of the word within the social frame it is used, and the notion of gender continues to find itself in a context that openly privileges one of the two constituents it has been made out to represent. Such partiality renders the concept dysfunctional.

New efforts to define (or rather, redefine) gender have made of it an increasingly brittle category. Its vulnerability is deemed as the result of a new understanding of the world that seeks to modify concepts previously established as absolute, when in fact, they should rather be considered imperfect and partial. At the root of this change lies feminism, a movement that has as its quintessential resolve the instigation of change. Divided in three waves, each stage of feminism attempted to prioritize and deal with different issues, from promoting legal equality for women to a re-examination of what was culturally understood as women's roles, with focus on the social perception of women's sexual and reproductive rights. Efforts to define female identity and to campaign for both legal and social equality merged with the desire to widen the scope of female representation, against oversimplification and lack of diversity.

However, as feminism continued to evolve, it could not be defined as a unified, consolidated movement. Throughout the different waves, different viewpoints, theories and approaches surfaced as a reaction to mainstream feminist discourse. Within the movement, there emerged two main schools of thought: Western/Anglo-American feminism and French feminism; it is the later that will be used to frame this research. While the two schools originated as a reaction against the traditional conceptualization of gender, and both questioned the constitution of masculine universality which placed women as the devalued constituent of the binary opposition masculine/feminine, the main difference between them lies in the approach they take to the resolution of this problem and the reconstruction of female subjectivity.

On the one hand, Western feminism—more adversarial in essence—seeks to defy patriarchal theories that dominate the inequitable allocation of gender spaces and to emphasize women's role as equal to men's, if necessary, by adapting traditional female roles to masculine. On the other hand, in their development of new gender theories, French feminism sought to reshape feminist thought and to tackle oppositional classification by challenging the very foundation of gender subjectivity: not by reallocating traditional idiosyncrasies from one gender to another, but by redefining what was understood as

masculine and feminine altogether. Women did not need to simply appropriate masculine spaces in order to gain an equal measure of power, but to redefine feminine subjectivity, if still different, as equally valuable to masculine.

French feminism's strength lies in the understanding that while men and women are indeed unequal, the problem does not reside in their differences but in the allocation of status and power to the masculine and of otherness to the feminine. In this movement there is a reconciliation of the inherent differences of gender while it is the threatening nature of this difference that is addressed. Women do not need to be masculinized in order to gain agency and power, but rather, rediscover and attain authority through their own femininity. An argument theorist and critic Morag Schiach reinforces in her claim that women "must steal what they need from the dominant culture, but then fly away with their cultural booty to the 'in between', where new images, new narratives, and new subjectivities can be created" (23). This school of thought is the result of an ongoing dialogue regarding the notions of equality and difference, where different—often contradictory—views and voices coexist. French feminist theory is, in other words:

> A multifaceted cultural phenomenon, varyingly implicated with both philosophical speculation and political activity. French feminism's diversity is documented with reference to two main sites of contention: the debate between the advocates of equality and the advocates of difference; the dissension between materialist, or social, positions and linguistic, or psychoanalytic, ones. (Cavarallo 18)

The 1970s was a time of particular division. The anger at the exclusion of women from political structures resulted in the emergence of radical groups and movements within French feminism with very different agendas. Amongst these groups Psych et Po (Psychanalyse et Politique) must be singled out. Psych et Po rose as a movement that "favored a certain overtly antifeminist political trend […] to the detriment of what is considered, by Anglo-American as well as French feminist historians, to be the core of the feminism movement" (Delphy 167-168). It had as central to their cause the notion of female difference and offered "different analyses to those of the rest of the Women's Liberation Movement (the Mouvement de Libération des Femmes)" (Leonard and Adkins 3) wishing to develop revolutionary theories regarding female oppression in relation to psychoanalytic theory. Their most revolutionary aim was to argue, not for the oppression of the feminine, but for the lack of existence of the

feminine altogether. They did so by attempting to take Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born a woman, one becomes one" even further, arguing that woman has never truly existed. Their desire was to "bring the feminine into existence", for as they claimed, "women have been repressed by patriarchy in such a way that we do not know what woman would be like if left to herself" (Leonard and Adkins 4).

Wishing to challenge the unconscious structures of patriarchal oppression, this group offered a positive attitude towards change and emphasized the role of writing in the process of bringing the feminine into existence. However, a great amount of debate existed during this period concerning feminism's true motives; within this debate, Psych et Po declared itself against feminism in the belief that it inadequately represented female interests. Similarly, many writers and critics chose to dissociate themselves from the term feminism arguing that it denied women's difference by promoting woman's search for power and equality in terms of integration into the masculine world. Acting against traditional masculine structures of power only serves the purpose of reproducing the same dominant structures over and over again; there was a strong need to reinvent, change and transcend.

Precedents of such transformation and transcendence, a group of three female writers emerger. Considered a "Holy Trinity" by many, Cixous, Kristeva, Irigaray became household names of French feminism in the Anglo-American world of Women's Studies (Delphy 169). The work of these writers in the theorization of masculinity and femininity in relation to literary production is to be highlighted as of special importance in the panorama of gender studies. Particularly central to the theoretical framework of this research is Helene Cixous's *écriture féminine*: a theorization of the feminine libidinal economy.

III. The Feminine and Masculine Modes: Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine* and Peter Schwenger's Masculine Mode as Opposing Paradigms of Writing

> 'Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in passing, that makes me live - that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? - a feminine one, a masculine one, some? - several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars.'
>
> — Hélène Cixous, *Sorties* 210

The concession that the sex-signature of an author matters will be central to this research. To be born a man and to be socialized as such in a society that encourages gender disparity and male supremacy, is to be born in a privileged position; an entitlement —feminist critics would argue— that was (and in many cases continues to be) taken for granted. As with any other bipartite structure the two sides of the male/female dichotomy are presented as opposites of one another: what the male is, the female isn't; where the male is plentiful, the female lacks. Modern views on gender continue to be strongly based on this binary system:

> Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend. (Bauman 8)

The idea of "otherness" is very relevant to the argument at hand. Historically, the feminine has been associated with absence, and it is around this notion of lack that woman's identity is constructed. Masculinity, socially established as the universal norm, left little choice for feminity to claim a space other than the particular. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir affirmed that "one is not born a woman, one becomes one" (14); the forging of female identity has always taken place in relation to man's. Similarly, Monique Wittig argues that men are not born with the ability for the universal; it is socially constructed, uniquely distributed, politically reinforced and, more importantly, it is "continually, at every moment, appropriated by men" (80). Not only is this universality taken for granted, but when the necessity arises for it to be acknowledged, it is frequently denied. In such cases, understanding gender experience —specifically female— can be a strenuous process. For a

woman, defining the female experience becomes a difficult task; the tools she has been given to do so are very limited. The same universality that is attributed to men as natural is the one women must resort to in order to express themselves, sometimes at great personal cost, making this search of female subjectivity strenuous and taxing.

In spite of having as its main purpose the challenging of social stereotypes regarding gender, feminist criticism initially focused on the analysis of male-dominated narratives within male-authorized texts. This, while emphasizing the dogmatization of male dominance in literary narratives, came to be seen as counter-productive since it continued to deny women their well overdue visibility. During the 1970s-1980s, feminist criticism took a turn towards a more woman-centered discipline, with the study of female subjects and female narratives as central. However, male-authorized texts —now studied from a female perspective and with focus on the female subject— continued to pose a major problem for feminist criticism. As a reaction to this problem, as well as to the need to place emphasis on the study of women writers and female productions, a theorization of female subjectivity arises. While the analysis of male texts continuously failed to provide an account of female specificity, such new theorization offers insight into a creativity that is gender specific.

The urgency many feminist critics feel to refer back to male practices in order to make a comparison that validates their side of the male/female binary opposition, does but strengthen the conviction that they are separate extremes opposite to one another, while emphasis continues to be placed on male practices. In other words, female subjectivity requires female textuality to be fully understood. Such a necessity for a textual independence that succeeded in truly encompassing and representing female experiences gave way to a new form of female writing (and reading); one that was wholly woman-centered. An essential question of difference arises with this movement, one that it is grounded on the belief that gender has a profound impact on the production and perception of literature; gender, that is to say, can be textualized. The existence of this textual specificity and the impact gender has on the production and perception of literature, is one that leads to the initial question: what is gender, and what is it to be feminine? It then leads to further questions, such as how this specification manifests itself in the act of writing, and how it is perceived through the act of reading.

i) Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*: Writing as a Safe Haven and Beacon of Hope for Women

'There has to be somewhere else, I tell myself. And everyone knows that to go somewhere else there are routes, signs, 'maps' - for an exploration, a trip. - That's what books are.'

— Hélène Cixous, *Sorties* 202

The issue of a socially constructed masculine subjectivity at the expense of its female counterpart is one Hélène Cixous invested in and enlarged upon in her commencement as a writer. In the best part of her early work, Cixous devoted herself to the understanding of the politics of sexual difference, and how these were materialized in relation to writing. She sought to explore feminine subjectivity and to inquire about how history had served to shape the notions of the masculine and feminine as they are currently conceived: competing economies. In an exhaustive analysis of Cixous's trajectory as a writer, Morag Schiach identifies the "development of her interests from a deconstructive commitment to the materiality of the signifier, though an exploration of subjectivity and sexuality, and towards the development of an alternative textual, political and ethical economy which she describes as 'feminine'" (3).

In two of her best known essays, *Sorties* (1975) and *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), Cixous elaborates on her ideas regarding writing and subjectivity, and sexual and social change. According to Schiach, in *Sorties* Cixous describes a set of hierarchical oppositions which have structured western thought and governed its political practice:

> She cites oppositions such as 'culture/nature'; 'head/heart'; 'form/matter'; 'speaking/ writing', and relates them to the opposition between 'man' and 'woman'. In each case, her critique of these rigid oppositions does not amount simply to an argument against dualism but rather to a political and philosophical rejection of the dialectical relation between each philosophical rejection of these 'couples', which privileges one term of the opposition. (6)

Indeed, the issue of socially constructed binary oppositions and the process of 'othering' that one of the two counterparts undergoes is very present in Cixous's analysis of the

theorization of politics. By the same token, she emphasizes the existence of a strong link in the bases of both politics and philosophy. For Cixous, the notions of man and woman have not only been made out to be opposites of one another, but have grown to become constraining representatives of well established notions. She opens her essay with an echoing question: "Who… Am I… For you?"; "a phantom doll"; a "no-body"; "the mother of the Eternal Male"; "Rebellion"; "violent and anguished direct refusal to accept what is happening on the stage on whose edge I find I am placed, as a result of the combined accidents of History" (200).

Who is, indeed, woman? Invisible, inhuman and belittled, for Cixous female existence has come to be a necessity, not for the sake of woman, but for the sake of validation of the male experience. Woman's sole purpose is to exist, only to the extent that her existence serves to reinforce her counterpart's: "the (unconscious?) stratagem and violence of masculine economy consists in making sexual difference hierarchical by valorizing one of the terms of the relationship" (205). In addition, she speaks of the master/slave dichotomy as one in which women are very much reflected: "there have to be two races - the masters and the slaves" (201). Women (the slaves) ironically become the embodiment of fear and necessity, of the appropriate and the inappropriate, as their existence is just as feared and necessary; "the world is divided in half, organized hierarchically, and that it maintains this distribution through violence […] the reduction of a 'person' to a 'nobody' to the position of 'other' - the inexorable plot of racism" (201). As a result, it is through violence that women are kept in check, reduced and displaced to the realm of 'the other.'

In a world where women are tolerated, merely as long as they remain repressed, fear and desire are determining factors. The fear of 'the other' (the feminine) goes hand in hand with the desire for it; the desire to own and subjugate it, to overcome and overpower it. This is a notion strongly ingrained in literature, where Schiach argues, "the socio-cultural construction of women characters intersects with the structure of desire", and where "to produce the figure of woman as confined to the marriage-bed, to childbirth, and to the death-bed" is very often the norm (Schiach 8). Thus, the construction of a female figure that represents masculine desire is certainly connected to Cixous's understanding of a society that leaves no room for the negotiation of female subjectivity; one in which this dialectical of opposition creates an enclosure to which gender subjectivities are immured.

In her questioning of what this 'other' truly is, Cixous assigns to the place which this 'other' inhabits liminal qualities of its own. Such place of existence, far from being a place of

loss and bereavement, becomes in her eyes a place of possibility. A place of hope, away form the rigid restrictions of the world in which, through patriarchal social and cultural education, male and female identities have come to be strongly identified with sexual difference. In this unknown realm masculine jurisdiction no longer applies, and it is in this space that woman must dwell and strive:

> Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds. And that is where I go. (Sorties 202)

In writing, Cixous identifies a place of opportunity for female subjectivity to develop, for desire to be overturned. If women succeed in escaping the space in which culture has thus far placed them, a negotiation of subjectivity may take place. It is this negotiation of subjectivity that dominates most of her work, for in writing, we may re-define female subjectivity, but also, sexual difference.

Through *The Laugh of the Medusa,* Cixous examines the potential of writing as a means of connection between sexuality and textuality. Woman, she demands, "must writer her self"; she "must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies…Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (875). Through writing, woman will succeed in liberating herself from the social, cultural, political and textual narratives that confine her. Through writing, woman can escape fixed categories and reestablish her identity. L'*écriture féminine,* Cixous proposes, provides a safe space for women to produce both individual and social change, where "the specificity of feminine writing is also described in terms of spatial metaphor" (Schiach 22).

Much like woman's own existence, feminine writing takes place in the in-between: a space of danger and uncertainty, a space which, Cixous claims, refuses to take sides or collaborate in the enhancement of one part's advancement at the expense of the other. In other words, writing constitutes a space of possibility, were the feminine may be negotiated in order "to carve out a new space of representation that will not fit into old grids" (Schiach 22).

Hence, writing becomes for Cixous a political tool for transgression and a space for transformation. Still, she argues, we are not heterogeneous but made up of various identities. For this purpose, Cixous highlights the importance of sexual difference as central to her findings. In attempting to redefine female subjectivity Cixous endeavors to separate gender roles from socially constructed sexuality. Detaching sexuality from gender allows for the destruction of the myth that it is gender that determines sexuality; in turn, this favors the dissolution of the belief that it is also gender that defines identity, since human desires are not gender specific.

In *The Mark of Gender* (1985), theorist Monique Wittig refers to gender as as a "lexical delegation," the "symbol" of natural beings, and to sexuality as "an ontological concept that deals with the nature of being" (1). The division of sexes, she concludes, takes place in the dimension of the person. Similarly, in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* she draws attention to the process through which politicizing gender and sexuality becomes an instrument for political discourse, a tool that "casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it" (43-44). Historicizing sexuality leads to the construction of sexuality's function as central to the individual's identity.

In Cixous's understanding of sexuality there is an acknowledgment to the psychic differences between the sexes, however, what she aims to re-examine is not the existence of such differences, but the claim that sexual difference is simply determined by anatomy. According to the theorist, sexual difference can be found on the level of *jouissance*—sexual pleasure: "How do I pleasure? What is it - feminine *jouissance* - where does it happen, how does it inscribe itself - on the level of her body or of her unconscious? And then, how does it write itself?" (*Sorties* 207). For Cixous not only is sexual difference defined by the level of *jouissance,* but the claim that it is gender specific has to be challenged.

There is, indeed, the presence of the masculine in the feminine and the presence of the feminine in the masculine. To this she refers as bisexuality: the concession that men and women are both made up of two genders (two halves within, rather than two wholes). Woman, she claims, may benefit further from this bisexuality; in her position of outsider she may pursue the benefits of the two halves, while men repeatedly reduce themselves to a single whole in their fear and refusal of the feminine. As a result, her *écriture féminine* becomes the embodiment of said possibility; a chance for the "production of a form of writing that would embody such bisexuality and operate in the interest of women" (*Medusa* 16) as it exemplifies

a “model of sexual difference not based on exclusion or hierarchy” but “on openness to the Other rather then obliteration of the Other” (*Medusa* 23).

For a woman the reproduction of the female experience becomes hindered by the understanding that her reality, in order to be fully expressed, must borrow from masculine sources. The transgressive power of feminine writing lies in the understanding that women, “when they begin to write, they must remain in a critical relation to the languages and the narratives they inherit: they must invent new beginnings, remove themselves from the fixed categories and identities they have inhabited, explore the ‘third body’: which is neither the inside nor the outside, but the space between”. In writing “women can explore other identifications, other images, can rediscover some of what has been unexpressed, actively repressed” […] “A new form of shared identity is possible for women, formed not in relation to ‘woman’, but rather in terms of shared unconscious patterns and forms which are the product of shared histories worked out across shared bodies” (*Medusa* 6); “Today, writing is woman’s”, she concludes.

ii) Peter Schwenger's Masculine Mode: Framing Masculine Universality in Literature

‘It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in a language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs.’

— Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd 390

A literary weapon of sorts, the process of deconstruction allows for the criticism of essentialism, the questioning of ahistorical essences and the possibility of unsettling the paradigm of sexual difference. The sex signature of an author does indeed matter, as does the awareness of privilege and hindrance. The same way that, Morag Schiach argues, feminine figures may be complicit with patriarchal thought, masculine authors contribute to its reinforcement and continuity by refusing to acknowledge the masculinization of universality: “the white male theorist who understands that the subject is not identical to itself has the relatively straightforward task of resisting the imaginary lures of the historically constructed fiction of full male presence” (Weed 41).

Said task, straightforward as it may be, is very often met with resistance. Such resistance is the result of comprehending that representation is, as critic Stephen Heath refers to it, transferential; representation includes the speakers position, his desires and “its vicissitudes” (11). To encapsulate and reproduce the female experience male writers, critics and theorists, must understand that as members of the universal class their initial impulse to deconstruct a less privileged member cannot be successful. Deconstruction, in other words, cannot be restricted to one gender as long as the other retains the qualities that make its universality self-proclaimed. The reassembling of what is understood of one gender cannot occur without the reconstruction of the other.

Efforts to only deconstruct one side of the binary opposition lead to fortification of the privileged party and to a reinforcement of this ‘othering’ the losing faction undergoes. In literature, the most common forms of deconstruction of women take place in terms of objectification of the female subject. The reduction of a female character to a mere body part, a symbol or a concept that is used as a means to illustrate a larger issue is customary:

> Most of these Anglo-American men tend only to speak of ‘women’ and ‘feminism’ in order to speak about ‘something else’—some ‘larger issue’—and then ‘women’ are either reduced to bodily parts, abstract wholes, or are spoken only in relation to other men. (Jardine 23)

In addition, through her essay *Men in Feminism: Odor Di Uomo or Companions de Route?,* Jardine recuperates several examples of this common male literary practice:

> Wayrie Booth emphasized bodily parts in order to talk about 'larger questions' of Interpretation, Bakhtin, and Rabelais. Neil Hertz, to talk about the iconics of revolution and war. Robert Scholes meditates on the clitoris to talk about Semiotics; Jonathan Culler, taking the more abstract route, needs 'woman' to talk about deconstruction and Terry Eagleton needs women to talk about Marxist theory. (23)

Historically, one of woman's most stereotypical uses is the emblematization of morality (and absence of). The diminishing of woman to a mere principle of virtue allows for her simplification into two variants: the angel and the monster. From this uncomplicated division a long list of male authors and critics borrow in their approach to the female subject. The employment of standardized plots for female characters in male-authorized fictions (the most common being the marriage plot and the motherhood plot) is very usual. The prosaic marriage story line —argued by many critics to reinforce female dependence and subordination— and the maternal plot reflect a paradigm that, Rackin claims, "governs the lives and defines the identities of Renaissance women." (30)

In contrast, plots involving female adultery and sexuality served to emphasize the destructive quality of female sexuality and to highlight the polarity that is drawn between female virtue and perversion. Chastity, marriage and motherhood are represented as the pillars of a positive female experience, while sexuality, adultery and lack of maternal instinct are reinforced as contradictory of this experience. As claimed by Ruthven, "chastity is the indispensable notion of female self-sufficiency, the patriarchal family should remain the nuclear unit of a stable society" (18). Breaking with this stability was portrayed in these plots as the ruin of the female protagonist, a deserving punishment that had as its only alternative for closure the character's death.

The marriage and motherhood plots are common to both of the selected readings; so is the theme of squandered womanhood. The approaches each author takes, however, differ greatly from one another. Flaubert's treatment of the Bovary's marriage, their experience as parents, and the subject of Emma's affair is handled from a perspective that seems to reinforce the notion of what Peter Schwenger (1989) deems as the masculine mode. Such mode is

referred to as the deficiency of a male author to neutralize himself (and the given implications of his gender) when attempting to adopt the vision of a masculine or feminine model. Such incapability by writers to "rather than neutralize, contradict, or simply ignore their male sexuality, take it as their explicit subject" (Schwenger 102), often implies a lack of acknowledgement of this previously mentioned masculine universality.

According to Schwenger, "the underlying fact of one's sexuality must affect the perception not only of oneself but of the world" (102). Very much connected to feminist critic's claims that a male author's depiction of the feminine mindset may be biased, the masculine mode defines the author's work. Among its main features are a masculine style and approach to the subject matter and the employment of received images of maleness, as writers "set out to validate those images or, through such images, to validate themselves"; "the masculine mode is above all an attempt to render a certain maleness of experience" (102). In the masculine mode:

> The body's paradoxes operate with unusual force. Some social or psychological expectation in the male seems to push him, insofar as he accedes to it, toward the idea of his body as *ensoi*, partaking of the solidity and confidence of pure object. Yet the will to become such an object is itself an act of the *pour-soi*, the force that is conscious of itself and strives to itself. (Schwenger 103)

In other words, the masculine mode additionally encompasses expectations of the male experience. For the male writer, the male body becomes an object of its own which combines both qualities: content and container, means and purpose while the female body remains a vessel, a means to an end. In male-authorized fictions representative of this masculine mode, women function either as a reflector of male sexuality or as a threat to it. The masculine subject can also become a victim of this mode. A lack of traditional masculinity —much like the one Charles Bovary displays— will be scrutinized as much as the female's failure to conform to traditional feminine standards. The inability for a character to adapt to prescribed gender behavior results in disaster: "those who feel emotion die; those who reject it are practical men" (Schwenger 105).

Literature, he claims, "provided experiences which, though artificial, may be the common property of millions, it contains insists which, though unsystematized, are still valid; it provides words for perceptions which, until named, may not even be

recognized" (Schwenger 101). Not only Emma's and Charles' experience, but more so the authorial approach taken to portray them, are illustrative of this point. Flaubert's take on these themes is representative of a common property, a common social perception regarding gender. Chopin's approach, on the other hand, is representative of a resistance to this gender systematization, this compartmentalization of characters into pigeonholes. It is a propellant of change:

> Portrayals of female protagonists that had long claimed to be realistic were revealed through careful and often scathing analyses to be largely stereotypical projections of the patriarchal psyche, a psyche ruled by linguistic and cultural codes and legitimated by the unequal distribution of power between men and women in the society at large. (Schor 265)

Thus, the sex signature of the author, as well as the approaches each writer takes in relation to his characters, may be taken as refractors of existing opposing social perceptions regarding the notion of gender roles. Feminine writing urges the re-evaluation of what is understood as the female experience (what it is to be a woman) within a socio-cultural context, as well as to clarify on the distinction between gender and sexuality. What is more, it recuperates and expands on the importance of sexual and textual specificity. Not only is it important to understand the differences between men and women, but it is also essential in order to provide safe spaces for women to redefine female subjectivity. Through writing, social expectations that confine women to remain a subversive part of the feminine/masculine dichotomy can be defied. It is the responsibility of writers and literary critics, to find new ways in which to understand, portray and redefine the female experience.

IV. A Comparative Analysis of Female Identity in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Chopin's *The Awakening*

'Art thou afeard to be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou are in desire?'
– William Shakespeare, Macbeth 15

Femininity and masculinity, sated with countless social prescriptions of gender compliance, have come to be understood as direct reflectors of the gender to which they are rigorously attached. Even presently, when the rigid lines that separate and delimit gender roles are beginning to bend, to be a man and a woman remains fundamentally linked to social expectancy of masculine and feminine behaviors.

Masculinity —traditionally associated with power, virility, culture, rationality, and emotional restraint— stands in direct opposition to femininity, conventionally linked to nature, passivity, tenderness and emotional outburst[2]. The interiorizing of these qualities as gender specific causes the rejection of those who set out to transgress them; a stationary truth repeatedly witnessed in literary projections of masculine and feminine mindsets. Similarly, the portrayal of characters who openly defy or conform to these gender stereotypes reveals a great deal about the texts's authorial voice.

To underly one's own personality, gender and sexuality in order to portray a different individual, however, is not always successfully achieved. An author's understanding of the world may be too deeply rooted to be fully evaded when stepping into a character's shoes. In other words, an author may fail to omit, consciously or unconsciously, some of the most defining traits of his character when attempting to replicate someone else's. This is what Peter Schwenger's, in his essay *The Masculine Mode,* refers to as 'androgynous minds': authors with the ability to self-efface in character portrayal.

Indeed, it could be argued that there are motives for a conscious failure to omit, just as "there are strategic reasons for some writers to approach the subject of maleness in a style apparently at complete odds with masculinity" (Schwenger 108) —not only maleness, but gender as a whole. This section is concerned with the implications of such omissions (both

[2] It is worth noting that throughout this analysis, the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' will make reference to what was stereotypically understood as representative of each gender.

conscious and unconscious) in the authorial approach to the text, its characters, the way they are conceptualized in regard to gender stereotypes and the repercussions of their conformity/ divergence to systematization. In addition, such implications will be presented as illustrative of the different authorial modes of writing and the effect these have in the development of female subjectivity.

i) The Masculine Woman and The Feminine Man. The Perils of an Unconventional Marriage in Flaubert's Madame Bovary

'She was the amoureuse of all the novels, the heroine of all the plays, the vague "she" of all the poetry books.'
— Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary 225

The initial choice to introduce readers to each member of the Bovary marriage separately serves several purposes. On the one hand, it allows the author to provide a specific background for each character, as well to assign them with particular qualities. In doing so, readers are compelled to form an opinion of the couple as separate entities, which paves the way for later understanding of the marriage as a unity. On the other hand, providing such background not only gives readers the freedom to compare and contrast Charles and Emma with one another, but to contrast earlier versions of each character with later progressions of the same, strengthening the effect of character development and establishing unity of effect throughout the text.

The first character to be introduced is Charles Bovary. In Charles' initial introduction he is described as timid but good-natured, socially awkward and unable to fit in:

> Standing in the corner behind the door so that he could hardly be seen, was a country lad of about fifteen, and taller than any of us. His hair was cut square on his forehead like a village chorister's; he looked reliable, but very ill at ease […] His legs, in blue stockings, looked out from beneath yellow trousers, drawn tight by braces. He wore stout, ill-cleaned, hob-nailed boots. (4)

His clothes —worn out and too small for him— as well as his lack of previous education and his inability to keep up with the class hint at a low social and economical status. He becomes the target of other children's jokes.

His family background is particularly effective in providing an account of Charles's conflicted personality. Mr. Bovary Senior, a stereotypical paternal figure, blames Charles' mother for the child's calm and passive nature and seeks to develop his masculine side:

> As opposed to the maternal ideas, he had a certain virile idea of childhood on which he sought to mould his son, wishing him to be brought up hardily, like a Spartan, to give him a strong constitution. He sent him to bed without any fire, taught him to drink off large draughts of rum and to jeer at religious processions. But, peaceable by nature, the lad answered only poorly to his notions. (7)

Despite being nurturing and caring, Madame Bovary Senior seems to project her own lost hopes and dreams in her son. She is the perfect embodiment of an unhappy but obliging wife, one whose pride rebelled, but "keep quiet, swallowing her anger in a mute stoicism that stayed with her till her death" (8). Ill-tempered, grouchy and irritable, she finds only in Charles an outlet for her unhappiness. As a result, the suggestion is made that Mr. Bovary Senior's failure to nurture Charles' virility, paired with Madame Bovary Senior's success in self projection onto the child results in further development of his feminine side.

Charles' first arranged marriage does but strengthen this suggestion. Chosen by Madame Bovary Senior, Madame Dubuc is an old widow whose grotesque appearance is compensated by an income of twelve hundred francs a year. It is Charles' mother that pursues Madame Dubuc, performing the function of suitor in the name of her son. Thus, Madame Bovary Senior's agency to choose a wife for her son highlights Charles' passivity and inability to make a choice for himself. In addition, the absence of freedom to refuse (in spite of his lack of inclination for Madame Dubuc) makes of Charles a reflector of the female station regarding traditional marriage practices.

It is commonly the woman's role to enter a marriage (in most cases arranged by the father) without choice. Furthermore, it is a common assumption that marriage provides for the female counterpart a certain degree of freedom, something that is specifically stated as a means to persuade Charles. Madame Dubuc's older status and dominant behavior, as opposed

to Charles' inexperience and passivity, allow for the understanding of this relationship as one in which traditional gender roles are reversed.

Madame Dubuc's narrative role, despite brief, can be argued to be of considerable importance. Her preponderance and authoritative conduct becomes influential in the reader's predisposition towards both young protagonists: it highlights Charles' weakness and inexperience, while serving as a prolepsis of Emma's future actions. Madame Dubuc's overriding behavior of Charles challenges set standards of passive, compliant feminity, and her ending serves as an initial warning.

She wrongs him by lying and manipulating him. Her fortune is gone and they are greatly indebted: "the house at Dieppe was found to be eaten up with mortgages to its foundations; what she had placed with the notary God only knew, and her share in the boat did not exceed one thousand crowns. She had lied, the good lady!" (17). There is great symbolism in her passing; she dies coughing up blood. Despite her old age, in the lack of mention of an illness and the timing of her demise a connection is implied between her actions and her death. An action-reaction relationship can be inferred in which her lying becomes the propellant for her unpleasant parting. Similar symbolism will later be recycled by Flaubert as Emma's fate is not at all that different from Madame Dubuc's.

Within the first few chapters readers can't but find themselves sympathizing with young Charles as someone who struggles to overcome hardship; the same cannot be said for young Emma. From her initial depiction, her character is presented as "unfeminine" and over-sexualized. Her hands, "not beautiful, perhaps not white enough, and a little hard at the knuckles" (15), are too long and rough, lacking the softness characteristic of both femininity and status. She is dressed "like men did", as she has "like a man, thrust in between two buttons of her bodice a tortoise-shell eyeglass" (17).

She seems to lack the characteristic female modesty that women such as Madame Dubuc displayed, if not in terms of authoritarian behavior, at least in attire and demeanor. While Madame Dubuc turns to the wall "out of modesty" (13), Emma's neck stands out from a white turned-down collar and in her bare shoulders, droplets of perspiration appear. When she sews, she pricks her fingers and puts them in her mouth to suck them. She has a habit of biting her full and fleshy lips, and as she drinks, she lifts her glass to her mouth and tips her head back, "lips extended, neck craning. The tip of her tongue gently licked the bottom of her glass" (21).

Our first glimpse of Emma is fragmented. Her character is reduced to sexually charged body parts. She is hands, lips, eyes, neck, shoulders; her skin being kissed by the sun, her hair being caressed by the wind. She is a gesture; brushing her hip against Charles' breast, throwing her head back as she drinks, sucking her fingers. This initial introduction is done through a male character's eyes. The same way Charles is depicted from the very beginning in a manner that inspires sympathy in readers, Emma is depicted as inherently sexual, alienating her and drawing her apart from the rest of women in the narrative and assigning a masculine and sexual nature to her character that inevitable makes her image corrupted in the eyes of readers.

It is worth noting that this is young Charles' sexually charged view of Emma. While his view can indeed be argued to be biased, Emma's character continues to be scrutinized in a similar manner throughout the novel, if not through her husband, by means of other characters. The reliability of such biased perceptions remains an echoing question, but whether one is to trust others' views of Emma is not the matter of this study. Rather, this research is concerned with the way such scrutiny becomes, to a great extent, the premise of Flaubert's work. The perusal of characters, particularly Emma's, can be traced back to the author, whose use of free indirect discourse allows him to curtain judgement.

Emma is a fairly educated woman. She enjoys music, reading and drawing, and it is through some of these practices that her character is best developed. Her interest in culture, however, is from the very beginning condemned as an "ill-starred occupation" (16) by her father, and as a threat to Madame Dubuc, who saw this as "the last straw" and "detested her instinctively" (17). Her love for books, particularly, is depicted as detrimental. Her choice of reading revolves around texts whose main protagonists are "Madona-like women" (33).

The veneration of renowned ill-fated women such as Joan of Arc, Mary Stuart, Agnes Sorel and La Belle Ferronniere originates in Emma a deep fascination. These are women of importance, strong women who achieved fame, but also fallen women who had great affairs and whose endings were drastic. A strong parallelism is established between Emma's fate and these women's. Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788), in particular, records the journey of a child of nature corrupted by the artificial sentimentality of French upper classes in the late eighteenth century. A self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, Emma's admiration of these women foreshadows a similar ending for herself.

She strives for the unattainable both as a woman and as a lover. Her childish idealization of men and romantic love equally set her up for disappointment. “Shouldn’t a man know everything, excel at many different pursuits, introduce you to the power of passions, the niceties of life, to all its mysteries?” (37). Charles could never live up to these dreams of a “distant cavalier, galloping across the countryside on a back horse” (33); “he couldn’t fence or shoot a pistol, and one day he wasn’t able to explain an equestrian term that she had come across in a novel” (36).

Emma’s pursuits, paired with an absence of interest in the house and other more woman-centered activities, make her of little use to her father: “old man Rouault wouldn’t have been upset to get his daughter off his hands, as she was of little use to him around the house” (22). Charles’ idolatry for Emma seems to be equally superficial and prescribed. Far from understanding her, his perception is limited, solely based on sexual desire and deeply rooted in stereotypes of traditional female roles. To him she is young and beautiful, *ergo* sweet and innocent. Far from seeing beyond Emma’s physical appearance, Charles’s view of Emma is somewhat customized to fit into what he understands young women to be: “going home at night, Charles went over her words one by one, trying to recall them, to fill out their sense, that he might piece out the life she had lived before he knew her. But he never saw her in his thoughts other than he had seen her the first time, or as he had just left her” (20).

Thus, both characters lack realistic expectations of each other but for completely different reasons. Charles’ understanding of Emma is merely based on a traditional reduction of the female mindset to a systematic set of common traits. Emma’s understanding of Charles’ is as much influenced by her reading background as it is by her inability to fit into this pigeonholed stereotype. She wishes to transgress such expectations.

Their wedding night is one of the clearest examples of their deviation. It is the groom who, in spite of this not being his first marriage, assumes the role of the nervous and inexperienced party. He “was one who would have been taken for a virgin, while the bride gave nothing away” (27). Emma is confident and self-assured —as if she were the one sexually experienced— while Charles, in his role as fictitious virgin, is again attributed traditional feminine qualities of innocence, chastity and inexperience. Likewise, in the days following the wedding, Charles continues to be feminized and infantilized (two actions that very often go hand in hand) by Emma, who pushes him away “bored and half smiling, like you do with a child who hangs around your neck” (27).

Such gender reversal becomes more evident as their relationship evolves. Contrary to her initial belief, it is her who introduces him to life's niceties, mysteries and passions. It is also her that takes charge as she runs both the house and his work affairs. "She sent out patient's accounts in well-phrased letters that didn't sound like a demand", "all this reflected well on Bovary" (37-38). She becomes the active, dominant member of their relationship, while she despairs at Charles' passivity and lack of initiative.

Both of their approaches to parenthood serve to strengthen the initial argument. Emma's inability to neither feel nor act as a mother towards little Berthe is never justified by Flaubert as anything other than an inherent lack of maternal instinct and an ongoing desire to pursue self interest. She is neither caring, nor nurturing, and she continuously puts her own needs ahead of her daughter's. The moment she learns she is pregnant she is sporadically amazed, wondering what being a mother will be like. But this amazement is only fleeting and she soon grows tired of the preparations "that motherly love has such a taste for, and from the beginning her feelings of affection were perhaps in some way lessened" (76). Her lack of maternal interest is worsened by her discovery that she has given birth to a girl. "She wanted a son; he would be strong and dark-haired; she would call him Georges; and in her hopes this idea of a male child was revenge for all her past helplessness" (76).

Flaubert's inclusion of this passage is expository of Emma's quandary. Her vision of the world is one in which the division of sexes is very clear. Her association of men with strength and freedom and women with weakness and restrain displays an awareness of the restrains of both feminity and masculinity:

> A man is free; he can travel the length and breadth of lands and passions, cross obstacles, drink deeply of the most distant delights. But a woman is constantly frustrated. Passive and malleable at once, she has the weakness of her flesh against her as well as her subservience under the law. (76)

Emma understands female limitations, and in her desire to transgress them she recognizes in the masculine a greater degree of autonomy. In addition, she sees women as unreliable creatures, subject to desire, unable to resist it: "her will is at the mercy of each and every wind, there is always some desire that beckons, some propriety to hold her back" (76). Her view of women is one in which they have no agency, a lack she attributes to their very own nature. Such assessment of her own sex makes her quest pointless and redundant, since

the male autonomy that she seeks to emulate for herself can never be achieved by a woman in her eyes. Furthermore, a desire to actively transgress stereotypes is never expressed by Emma; her quest is both short-sighted and superficial, as she is rather concerned with the fulfillment of her own desires very rarely stopping to examine the course of her actions.

On the other hand, Charles' treatment of little Berthe displays a very maternal attitude. "He would get up, kiss her, stoke her face, call her little Madam, wanted to dance with her, and, half-laughing half-crying, he would come out with all manner of doting little pleasantries which just came into his head" (76). Whenever he is able, he performs duties that are traditionally assigned to the mother, and his regard with her education and future is highlighted by Emma's absence of concern: "he wanted Berthe to be well brought up, to have talents, play the piano" (164).

Emma's lack of interest towards the child is further accentuated by the realization that she does indeed have the ability to display a maternal instinct of sorts in her relationships with her lovers. At this point it is important to distinguish between her approach to Rodolphe and her approach to Léon (sometimes Charles too). Flaubert's inclusion of such different lovers may be interpreted as a means to provide a wide range of male gender stereotypes through which to explain Emma's varying behavior in relation to each assortment, as well as a device to reinforce deviance from masculine gender stereotypes."Generally the male gauges his own masculinity not by women but by other men. Masculinity becomes reflexive, both perceiver and perceived" (Schwenger 109).

Rodolphe is presented to readers as a virile, masculine man: a dandy. He stands in direct opposition to Charles, he is experienced and dominant, taking charge of his relationship with Emma. Indeed, he can be classified in the category of what Schwenger identifies as the super-male, an example of heightened virility:

> The dandy is above all a man striking an existential posture, a species of Camus's rebel. He disengages himself from all that is not his own designing. He scorns even the society which is his milieu and which he manipulates with consummate skill. For society's adulation he returns only an arrogant disdain, itself the mark of his eminence. (Schwenger 109)

As such, Rodolphe masculinity is reinforced in a way that displays a series of traits sustained by society as pertaining of the masculine gender: "a heightened version of

characteristics which society favors. But carried to such an extreme, these characteristics rebound with almost apocalyptic force on the society which encouraged them" (109). Charles, on the other hand, stands as Rodolphe's inverse: the effeminate. The suggestion exists that towards him Emma takes on a role very similar to Rodolphe's.

Emma's treatment of Léon is, out of all, particularly interesting. Léon's view of Emma is childish and naive. The way he adoringly regards her as a "the lover from every novel, the heroine from every play, the mysterious *she* from every book of verse" (225) echoes the way she herself thought of men and romantic love when she was younger. To him, she has managed to become the book heroine she longed to be in her childhood. The dynamics of their relationship become deeply unbalanced by the mother-goddess status that he attributes to her. In their interactions, Léon is nervous and unskilled. He reads fashion magazines, nervously polishes his shoes, sprinkles exaggerated amounts of cologne over his handkerchief and attends to his clothes and his hair. In his nervousness he bites his lip, reverberating Emma's own lip biting at the beginning of the novel. His concern with his appearance— arguably feminine demeanor— again mimics Emma's preoccupation towards her own in her relationship with Rodolphe.

He takes on the role of the inexperienced, as it is strongly suggested that his first encounter with Emma is also his first sexual experience. "For the first time he enjoyed the indescribable subtlety of feminine graces to the full […] He marveled at the transports of her soul and the lace of her skirts. For wasn't she *a woman of the world*, a married woman—in fact a true mistress!" (225). While Léon's innocence is emphasized, Emma's description as a true mistress reinforces her status as a sexually experienced lover. This allocates her with power. His trembling hands and shy caresses are contrasted with her preoccupation with the delights of seduction. "His whole manner exuded innocence. He lowered his long, delicately curved lashes. His velvet cheeks reddened with lust" (202). Emphasis remains on Léon's beauty rather than Emma's. His long, curved, delicate lashes and red cheeks stand are traditional indicators of feminine beauty.

Throughout their relationship she infantilizes him to such an extent that she refers to him as "child." The maternalistic treatment she was never able to give little Berthe she unconsciously enforces on Léon. She takes his head in her hands, kisses his forehead and has a persistent need to lavish "attention on him, from exquisite food to a coquettish appearance, to giving him long, smoldering looks" […] "in order to hold on to him even tighter, hung a

locket with an image of the Virgin round his neck in the hope that Heaven might intervene. Like a good mother she made enquiries about his friends" (240) .

Emma's ending of her relationship with Léon is yet another parallelism of her own relationship with Rodolphe: she writes him a letter to cancel their meeting and end the affair; "for the sake of their happiness they should never see each other again" (203). For Emma to carry out such a similar procedure to Rodolphe's illustrates her evolution as a character, her acculturation into a prescribed role of male dominance and her acquisition of power and experience.

Emma's understanding of the futility of her gender in a world where male supremacy is ever-present would be a convincing argument for her necessity to masculinize herself, were it not for the fact that this is not a conscious choice her character makes. It is presented as intrinsic to her nature from the very first moment she is introduced to the reader. In addition, her perception of the limitations of her sex are greatly restrained by her knowledge of the female condition. She is the first to belittle her gender and to condemn it. Her character can only be claimed to be a victim of social norms to a certain extent, as she constantly chooses to perpetuate, rather than defy, this very same stereotype that inhibits her. She channels her development through social class and status, strictly adhering herself to propriety at the expense of her happiness.

Furthermore, she is unable to conceive another life, a fuller, better, more fulfilled life, where this betterment is not inherently linked to a man. When she attempts to leave Charles, for instance, she never imagines a life by herself, nor the possibility of making changes on her own. Similarly, when she revisits her wedding day, she assesses her own behavior and reproaches herself: "why hadn't she stood her ground, implored like this woman was doing?; she wishes she could "put her life into the hands of some strong heart" (188). Her association of standing one's ground with pleading and imploring reveals a deep misconception of the notions of power, strength and autonomy, which she views as inherently linked to men. The strong heart she refers to is masculine indeed. A hint of self-awareness is displayed in her consciousness regarding her inability to be happy, and yet, such awareness comes to be obscured by a deep evasion of responsibility, as she fails to understand the notion of sacrifice and continues to allocate answerability to the males that surround her instead of herself.

The main conflict surrounding Emma is quite possibly the lack of depth that is assigned to the character. Her over-sexualization and masculinization, her defiance and her suffering,

are very much purposeless. Her transgression of stereotypes is futile when she is unable to create a space of her own in which such conventions no longer restrain her. While she sets out to overcome these restrictions, she imposes on herself some of her own. It is a lack of ability to reflect on herself as separate from some of the most solid conventions concerning the female gender that unable her to resolve this internal conflict. Not only does she not understand that for her transgression to be successful she must reinvent what she understands as feminine, she very rarely attempts to consciously understand the underlying motive of her quest. To Emma, life's realization can only be achieved through romantic love, and this is the root of her unhappiness. She fails to truly understands the source of her misery and so she is conflicted by an issue that can never be resolved.

Her unusual opinions, "disagreeing with what other people approved of and approving of things that were depraved or immoral" (57), are justified as a mere instrument for her to show "disdain for everything and anyone" (57). While it may be argued that she does indeed suffer an awakening of sorts —it may only be sexual or related to her materialistic wants, but it symbolizes an understanding of her own needs and desires— the fact that this awakening is plainly motivated by her wish to pester others takes away its purpose. Emma's exposition to male scrutiny and her rebellion and deviation from public opinion is only taken lightly by the authorial voice and reduced to a simple and basic desire to anger those around her.

In addition, it could be argued that Charles' feminization serves as yet another instrument to incite Emma's transgression. His weakness, lack of virility and inability to execute his role as "man of the house" somewhat justifies Emma's entitlement. Emma dreams of what life might have been like if had had a different life. Ironically, the only way in which she envisions such a life is through another lover. The true oxymoron here lies in the realization that while Flaubert does indeed masculinize Emma to a certain extent, she continues to retain some of the feminine qualities that make her gender grounded. She is still very much a woman and a product of the society of her time, "Always carrying a trace, however slight, of the rough paternal hand deep down inside" (57). The allocation of responsibility by the author to a rough paternal hand serves as yet another reminder that Emma is only responsible of her actions to a certain extent, taking away agency and freedom from her character.

Flaubert's attribution of gender specific qualities to both protagonists allows him to illustrate the ruinous consequences of their actions, as well as the destructive effect of their

digressing nature. Gender reversal in *Madame Bovary* seems to be a shrewd device through which to diffuse moral judgement. What is more, Emma and Charles' disparity with their respective genders seems only partial. The inability to fully disengage Emma from the restrains of her gender, as well as the failure to provide her with enough wisdom and acuity for enough self-awareness hints at a generalized perception of woman's inability to do the same. Her masculinization serves as a device through which her sexuality, indecency and misconduct can be made an example of, revealing social intake on gender conception. Emma's ending is particularly illustrative of this point.

The text's display of Emma's death is detailed and grotesque. From the moment she eats the white powder and the first time she suffers its effects, until the end, her passing is divulged in a way that lacks decency, privacy and which leaves no room for atonement. Her death is dissected explicitly, and taunted with. Initially, Emma does not feel any pain and for a moment she rejoices in the easiness of dying: "there's nothing to it, dying!" / "I'll just fall asleep and it'll all be over!" (268). But suddenly, she wakes up with a hard and bitter taste in her mouth and starts to feel sick as she feels "an icy-cold sensation moving up from her feet towards her heart" (268). From then on, the symptoms are carefully described to the reader: the vomiting, the shuddering and sweating, the moaning and the crying, the chattering of her teeth, and finally, the screams and the violent convulsions that take over her body.

Her death is slow and painful, gruesome and vindictive. Her suffering brings back memories of "her adultery and her ordeals" and she "turns her head away, as if it were a worse poison that the one in her stomach" (270). The relationship established between her death and her promiscuity echoes Madame Dubuc's transgression and demise, as it is implied that in both cases the misdeed is somehow responsible for both of their endings:

> The priest dipped his right hand in the oil and began the unction: first on the eyes, which had coveted worldly opulence; then the nostrils, hungry for warm breezes and the fragrance of love; then he mouth, which had opened to tell lies, cooed with pride and cried out with lust; then the hands, which had luxuriated in the touch of soft, sweet things; and finally the soles of her feet, which had once run to satisfy her desires but which walked no more. (275)

Emma's weakened and deteriorated body is laid bare for everyone to see. In the worst of her states, she is fully exposed. The lack of privacy and the humiliating nature of this chapter

make of Emma's death an example for everyone in the village and for readers too. However, her punishment continues after she is gone.

The examination goes on once she is dead. Her body hasn't been cleaned and black vomit is oozing out of her distorted mouth. The depiction of the dead is usually one of stillness and calm. But Emma's body, tilted to one side, indicates motion and lacks the characteristic cleanness of peacefulness. Her lovers —fast asleep— do not give any thought to her, and it is only Charles that remains awake and thinking of her. Progressively, the point is made that everyone forgets her except for her husband, whom she continues to affect negatively: "she was corrupting him from beyond the grave" (291). Charles' death —of sorrow— and little Berthe's ruin, are all presented as the direct result of Emma's actions. Emma is portrayed as the ultimate villain, whose selfish nature continues to be reinforced long after her death.

The problematics of Emma's depiction —as biased as it may be— reveal greater predicaments about the text's authorial voice. Emma's masculinization and over-sexualization may be argued to be both a conscious and unconscious decision by the author. Conscious if it is understood that for Emma's actions to be justified a certain degree of masculinity must be attributed to her character, one that would supports the decision to have several affairs, her lack of feminine decorum and the absence of that maternal instinct characteristic of the female gender. Unconscious if, indeed, a masculine author —one that does not belong within the category of Schwenger's androgynous minds— is unable to neutralize himself and the given implications of his gender universality. If Flaubert is taken as such an author (thus a member of said masculine mode), his inability to portray Emma's character as free from the social conventions surrounding gender stereotypes urges him to justify her unfeminine behavior unconsciously. The unconscious justification of her sexuality is the designation of masculine qualities to her character as a means to account for her behavior.

The question then arises of what the purpose of creating divergent characters truly is for the author and the text. Flaubert's treatment of his characters, especially Emma, is a paradox of its own. On the one hand, *Madame Bovary* is indeed pioneer in its placement of value on the female subject and its treatment of feminine subjectivity. On the other hand, to provide characters with a set of particular qualities with what seems the sole purpose of later making an example of them seems contradictory. His judgement of character behavior may be argued to be a means through which to punish their actions accordingly. The characters' divergence is

not only set out to fail from the very beginning, but it is harshly condemned throughout the use of other characters, free indirect style, foreshadowings and symbolism.

The nature of the text as a satire may help in untangling this query. Arguably, Flaubert's mistreatment of characters such as Emma may have constituted a system through which to provide social criticism. If so, his caviling could be argued to comprise an example of authorial awareness of gender stratification. Even so, this analysis of the text aims to neither provide the grounds for individual criticism nor disentangle the author's intentions, but to disclose an authorial tendency characteristic of a particular paradigm of writing (whether the author would have considered himself as pertaining to the mode or unrelated to it).

Whether a satire or a conscious decision to scrutinize, Flaubert's work reflects a common tendency of the masculine mode to depict the female experience as faulty and biased. A generalized failure to fully understand and individualize characters as separate from the stereotypical social roles of the time. Emma's character, in particular, is an embodiment of a social lack of compromise to truly grasp feminine drives: "s hown to be foolish, derivative, and destructive", Emma is, according to Paris, "the primary object of Flaubert's satire" (Paris 212). This failure to portray a character such as Emma with further endeavor to justify her divergence as anything other than childishness and selfishness is arguably representative of a much greater one: a generalized inability, and lack of disposition, to question and disentangle the female mindset as a literary subject.

In addition, it hints at a lack of commitment and irresponsibility by many male authors to delve into the issue of female subjectivity, past the objectification, simplification or, ultimately, the masculinization of female characters as a means to explain characteristics that could not have possibly been understood as feminine. It provides a glimpse of the solidity of gender stereotypes and how, transgressing them, could not have been conceivable for a female subject unless her actions were justified as masculine.

ii) Paving the Way for Future Literary Heroines: A Reshaping of Female Subjectivity through Edna's Transgressing New Woman

> 'The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice
> must have strong wings.'
> — Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* 138

The Awakening opens with an image of Madame Lebrun's parrot. The bird —"which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over" (43)— is considered by many as a metaphor of the protagonist, whose journey starts in a similar position: caged. The fact that it is arguably Edna who is first introduced to readers (although indirectly) is of importance to this research, as it could be argued to place special importance on her. Similarly, bird imagery will be of considerable significance in order to gain greater insight into Edna's character.

The introduction that follows is Mr. Pontellier's. He is in his forties, "of medium height and rather slender build" (43), wear glasses and stoops a little. His hair was "brown and straight, parted to one side. His beard was neatly and closely trimmed" (44). His physical description is that of a mature, distinguished man of good status. The specification of his reading —"he was already acquainted with the market reports, and he glanced relentlessly over the editorials and bits of news" (43)— suggests he is educated and of adamant nature.

His attempts to read the newspaper see themselves constantly frustrated by the bird's rambling. He protests against the parrot's disturbance, acting against his own discomfort, and allowing for the impression that he is a man of strong character. However, his stooping, paired with Madame Lebrun's remark that, as her property, the bird has the right to make all the noise it wishes and an invitation for Mr. Pontellier to quit their society whenever he chooses, suggest that in spite of his strong character, his authority is somewhat limited.

Similarly to Charles' filtered view of Emma, Edna's physical attributes are first distilled to readers through Mr. Pontellier's eyes: "you are burnt beyond recognition", he notices, "looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (44). Mr. Pontellier's understanding of his wife as a possession is no accident, her status as a valuable piece of property reinforces her husband's dehumanization of Edna. Mr. Pontellier's assessment, however, is brief and imprecise. His general understanding of his

wife does not become the grounds for our own perception of her as readers. The analysis of her character happens, rather, from the perspective of the authorial voice—sometimes in Edna's own remarks—taking away the possibility of Mr. Pontellier's biased observations greatly influencing the reader, as well as setting apart the reader's understanding of the dynamics of Edna and Léonce's relationship from that of the Bovary marriage.

Edna's hands, very much like Emma's, are given an important place in her description; they are "strong, shapely hands" that she surveys "critically, drawing up her sleeves above the wrists" (44-45). She is presented to readers as aware of the strength in her hands, which in spite of sturdy, remain shapely. The conciliation of both of these qualities is germane: Edna's hands may be strong, but they are also delicate—hence feminine—in their shape; there is harmony in her. Her eyes are of a "yellowish brown, about the color of her hair" and she has "a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought" (45-46). Edna's expression is to be contrasted with Emma's absent-minded eyes, "shrouded with annui" (21). While Edna, too, has a wondering mind, her eyes are depicted as quick and bright. She is not beautiful, but handsome, with a captivating frankness in her face that already predisposes readers' approbation towards her. While the first glimpse we get of her is through Mr. Pontellier, her eyes, her face, and even more so her hands, reflect Edna's own perception of herself.

Similarly, there is a certain harmony in Edna's relationship with her husband, which may be claimed to be much more egalitarian, at least in terms of interaction. There seems to be an understanding between them as they silently look at one another and comprehend each other's needs: "she silently reached out to him, and he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm" […] he did not say this, but she understood it, and laughed, nodding good-by to him" (45). There is mutual affection in their relationship, and a level of intimacy displayed by their interaction that was never present in the Bovary marriage.

The Pontellier marriage is introduced to us as a unity from the very beginning. We are not given the past of its two constituents as separate entities: this is, arguably, one of the novel's greatest strengths. The severance of the two counterparts from the start leads to reader's predisposition towards husband or wife and obscures the understanding of the marriage's homogeneity. Instead, when the dissolution of such unity takes place progressively, the reader's role in the forging of the characters' paths and identities is inclusive, and his

perception of the two characters is unbiased. Furthermore, the reasons for each character to drift away from their commitment are better understood; as witnesses, we are encouraged to focus on their developing reasons for breaking apart.

There is no demonization of either counterpart. Unlike Charles, Léonce does not incite pity. He is never overly feminized as a means to vindicate Edna's lack of passion or love for him. In fact, to the rest of women in his society, he is quite the desirable husband: "Mr. Pontellier was a great favorite, and the ladies, men, children, even nurses, were always on hand to say good-bye to him" (50). Edna's awareness of her husband's geniality and her admission that "she knew of none better" (50), is very significant; it serves as a means to illustrate her appreciation and respect for him, something Emma invariably lacks towards Charles. This adds to the general understanding that her quest is fueled only by a personal desire to find herself, rather than an instrument to escape an unhappy marriage.

Nevertheless, the Pontellier marriage is far from perfect. The source of the couple's issues seems to be placed on Edna's role as mother and wife. For instance, criticism is presented through Mr. Pontellier's eyes: "he thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation" (48). The fact that Mr. Pontellier is not simply given the ability to praise Edna but also the capacity to judge her is to be singled out. Unlike Emma's husband, Léonce is very much able to see Edna's faults; she is far from perfect in his eyes, and paradoxically, more human to him than Emma ever was to Charles. In addition, it serves to reinforce Mr. Pontellier's marital authority. His judgement of Edna's functions as mother and wife reflect a clear assignation of gender roles. Worth noting is the fact that what Edna desires is something Léonce unquestionably possesses: an alternative lifestyle —outside of the private sphere— reflected in his repeated attendance to the club while she stays at home to care for the children. However, while her yearnings are mistaken for neglectfulness towards her family, his are only taken as a natural condition of his sex and payed very little attention.

Edna's treatment of their offspring is equally questioned by her husband. He refers to "her habitual neglect of the children" and reproaches her inattention, arguing that "if it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" (48). Both parental roles in *The Awakening* are significantly different to the ones found in *Madame Bovary.* While Edna's handling of the children is scrutinized by her husband, his paternal role continues to be restricted to sporadically indulging his children. In his eyes, the responsibility to attend to the

children is exclusively hers; whether she is performing such role correctly, he does not weigh in if not to reprimand her. In such sense, great dissimilarity exists between Léonce and Charles, who cannot help but to assume a maternal role in the face of his wife's failure.

Edna's crying and reflection on married life exhibits a mutual agreement on these assigned roles, whereby she is failing to accomplish hers. So far, this is a convention she had not ventured to question, nor understand, reflected in her inability to comprehend why she is weeping. However, she does begin to reflect on the sadness she experiences. At this point, the contract or common understanding of each other's roles seems no longer mutual. In the word 'oppression' a disparity is implied that inherently places Edna at a disadvantage:

> She could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. They seemed never before to have weighed much against the abundance of her husband's kindness and uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood. An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. (49)

It is very important that Edna does not presume to know what she feels just yet. This feeling being something that proceeds from the very depths of her soul and mind—something incomprehensible—gives her a chance to speculate about herself, her life and her own feelings, to identify her emotions and unravel her own needs and wants. Her unhappiness is, so far, something strange and unfamiliar. What is more, whatever the instigator of these feelings, she is able to identify herself as the source of her unhappiness, as opposed to blaming her husband for it. In doing so, Edna starts paving the way for a true, honest, deconstruction and re-understanding of the self; a character progression that sets both Edna and Emma completely apart from one another, despite developments in their plot lines closely resembling each other.

Edna's story is one of self-discovery. A search towards understanding what she wants, towards identifying these feelings that stop her from settling, and a search towards changing that which stops her from finding happiness. Far from victimizing herself, there is agency in her journey. Emma's, on the other hand, is a story of failed adaptation, as her search for happiness is one incomplete in her superficial attempts to identify the true source of her

discontent. Edna is, from the very first moment, setting herself apart from Emma, as she searches within herself what Emma tries to find in others.

In this process of self-discovery, Edna's relationships play a major role. Her difficulties in marriage and motherhood are accentuated by her connection with surrounding female models with whom she fails to identify:

> In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer in Grande Isle […] They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. (51)

Among these women, Edna's friend Adele Ratignolle must be singled out. She stands as the personification of the perfect wife, devoted to her husband, driven by her desire of a home-centered life, and thus, unable to understand Edna's wish to pursue her goals outside the domestic sphere. In addition, she also stands as the embodiment of the perfect mother-woman figure, who places her children before herself. She does so to the extent that her identity is no longer that of woman, but of mother and wife: "if ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union" (107), observes Edna making reference to Adele and her husband. Such union, far from desired, seems depressing to Edna, who views it as a realization of "blind contentment" and "colorless experience" (107).

From the beginning, a contrast is established between the two friends. Edna wears a cool, white muslin, Adele is dressed "in pure white" (58). One removes her collar and opens her dress at the throat while the other only removes her veil (59), hinting at Adele's purity, and virtue and at Edna's over-exposition in comparison. The protagonist defines her occasional girl friends as "of one type—the self-contained", and begins to acknowledge her disparity with them: "she never realized that the reverse of her own character had much, perhaps everything, to do with this" (61). Physically, Adele's hands are very descriptive of this contrast: "never were hands more exquisite than hers, and it was a joy to look at them when she threaded her needle or adjusted her gold thimble" (51). Her perfect hands symbolize the idealization of feminity and her personification of role of the perfect mother-woman.

Edna's love for the children does not suit society's standards of motherhood. In Chopin's era "childbirth was considered a woman's noblest act; to write of it otherwise was

unacceptable" (Stone 23). While she cares for her children, they do not overtake her existence. She continues to find joy in herself and to pursue the construction of individual identity, something that Adele can't possibly do, while she identifies solely as wife and mother. In Bogard's words, Adele simply "has no way of conceiving of herself as a separate person—indeed, she rarely is a separate person because she is always pregnant" (19). Edna's love for her children is described as follows:

> She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them (…) Felling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense longing. Their absence was sort of a relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her. (63)

For her children, Edna "would give up the unessential" (97); commodity, money, even life, but not herself. While she would die for her children, she begins to understand that no form of love—romantic or maternal—is enough to make one lose oneself. As controversial as this claim may continue to be (even by today's social standards), Chopin takes the time to explain Edna's relationship with her children with enough depth so that one may venture to understand. In doing do, readers are presented with two complex sides of motherhood.

Chopin offers moments in the novel in which there is intimate interaction between Edna and her children. She takes them in her arms, calls them "all manner of tender names" and soothes them to sleep (87). In doing so, rather than dismissing Edna's motherly instincts completely, readers are offered insight—and to a great degree conciliation—regarding Edna's behavior. She only disregards her children when she feels her identity as an individual being compromised. This is particularly important to the issue of gender systematization; while Emma's lack of maternal instinct is regarded as unwomanly, Edna's becomes a mixture of traditional feminine and masculine roles. Her love for her offspring is feminine still, while there is a certain sense of masculinity in her rebelling against traditional hierarchical structures of motherhood.

In complete clash with Adele Ratignolle mother-woman role is Mademoiselle Reisz, who stands at the completely opposite side of the spectrum. As an artist and a working woman, she is —according to the social prescriptions of her time— unsuitable to find a

partner. Her lack of suitability is translated to her distorted personal appearance: she has "ungraceful curves and angles" that give her body "an appearance of deformity" (114). Similarly, her cold "strong wiry fingers" symbolize an absence of femininity. She is described as "a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assured and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others" (70). Her assertiveness and lack of compromise, also traditionally deemed unfeminine, are provided as further justification for her undesirability.

Furthermore, as a woman who has devoted her entire life to her music, she embodies all of the existing myths about art and artists, "myths which have excluded women or forced them to choose between art and connection with others" (Bogard 19). Mlle. Reisz personifies the female refusal of patriarchal ideology at the expense of choosing the alternative female role, leaving music as the only way to channel her feminity and to connect with others. Thus, neither of these women provides a suitable model for Edna to follow. For, as Bogard claims, "she is in the midst of a total awakening" and "cannot accept a view of art or self as isolating and consuming […] She needs to be both whole and connected with others" (19).

From an early period Edna has enough self awareness to conceive the existence of a dual life, where she may care for her children but she may also care for herself. Though she only understands it instinctively, Edna's apprehension of this duality is indeed very significant: it may be claimed to be representative of Cixous's understanding of human bisexuality. Edna socially assigned counterpart of the male/female dichotomy is one she does not accept. In all facets of her life she encounters this duality: romantic relationships, friendships, art, motherhood and so on, against which she wishes to rebel by attaining a middle ground; a combination of both halves through which to achieve unity and freedom. She is, whether conscious of it or not, attempting to deconstruct herself as she is initially perceived, and reconstruct herself as a free woman.

However, as Bogard puts it, "she remains unsatisfied because all of the choices available to her are destructive" (20). Indeed, this is reinforced by her inability to find validation when she turns to each of her friends, in whom she can't see herself fully reflected without compromising this search. As such, Edna adopts the position of a free woman who chooses to stand at neither side of the spectrum, and in doing so, she is refusing to let others' choices and restrictions define her. This choice, however, comes at the price of loneliness and isolation, since there is no one yet in a similar position that can truly understand her. This is

the same loneliness she experiences as she experiments with the dichotomy of love and sex in her different relationships with the male characters in the novel.

Firstly, in her relationship with Léonce, Edna reflects on the issue of marriage: "her marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate" (62). He fell in love with her, and she felt flattered and pleased by his devotion. However, from the very beginning Edna is aware that there is no love in their union: "as the devoted wife of a man who worshiped her, she 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" (63). While she is fond of her husband, there is deep consciousness of a lack of romance and passion in her marriage. Similarly, she is cognizant of the fact that such "excessive and fictitious warmth" may be threatening to the unity's dissolution, as marriage symbolizes a transaction where feelings are not —or rather, should not— be involved. As a result, Edna is shown to readers as someone who displays the capacity to differentiate between the notions of love, passion and marriage. This cannot be said for young Emma, whose naive understanding of marriage becomes frustrated by the realization that she can only feel rejection and contempt towards Charles.

Secondly, in her relationship with Alcée Arobin, Edna reflects on the issue of sex. Although unconsciously, Arobin is the first to perceive Edna's change in character: "he admired Edna extravagantly, after meeting her at the races with her father. He had met her before on other occasions, but she had seemed to him unapproachable until that day" (128). Unreachable until this day, Edna slowly grows confident, familiar and confidential. With Arobin, she experiences sexual drives she does not yet comprehend:

> A quick impulse that was somewhat spasmodic impelled her fingers to close in a sort of clutch upon his hand […] He stood close to her, and the effrontery in his eyes repelled the old, vanishing self in her, yet drew all her awakening sensuousness. (130-131)

This change, however, comes accompanied by an implied loss of traditional lady-like attributes when she feels her words lacking dignity and sincerity: "she felt somewhat like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity, and realizes the significance of the act without being wholly awakened from its glamour" (132).

As they become intimate and friendly, Edna refers to Alcée's appeal "to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her" (133); a clear reference to the unfamiliar sexual desire she

begins to experience through this new relationship. His words bring "the crimson to her face" (133), his touch makes her "close her eyes sensitively" (137). Their first kiss is particularly illustrative of this newly found sexual awakening:

> His eyes were very near. He leaned upon the lounge with an arm extender across her, while the other hand still rested upon her hair. They continued to silently look into each other's eyes. When he leaned forward and kissed her, she clasped his head, holding his lips to her. It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire. (139)

However, Edna's passionate encounter does not cloud her judgement. She remains aware of the disparity of her feelings for all three men in her life: for Léonce she doesn't feel love nor passion, he has only "provided for her external experience" (139). For Alcée she feels only sexual desire:

> She was thinking of Robert Lebrun. Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse […] Alcée Arobin was absolutely nothing to her. Yet his presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her. (132)

Once desire is gone Edna is left with an overwhelming sense of irresponsibility and betrayal for Robert. In her relationship with him she reflects on the issue of love, now stronger because she is able to conceive the possibility of it: "there was a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips" (139). Through this last relationship Edna experiences an emotional awakening. Robert is described as very young, innocent and lighthearted, "no shadow of care upon his open countenance" (46). With no worries or responsibilities, there is great parallelism between him and *Madame Bovary's* Léon. Robert too is described as childish and exaggerated in his mannerisms, when he plies the fan with unnecessary vigor, for instance. Towards Edna, he bestows attentions traditionally characteristic of the female gender, as he serves her coffee, she is "childishly gratified to discover her appetite, and to see the relish with which she ate the food which he had produced for her" (86).

In this case, however, Robert's childish nature does not act as a means through which Edna wishes to assert dominance or power. Instead, her relationship with Robert's carefree

nature provides an outlet for Edna to explore herself outside of social constrains. Remarkably, it is with him that Mrs. Pontellier is for the first time referred to as Edna in the text, signifying individuality and marking a step forward in this search towards self-discovery. Her first conscious act of rebellion occurs when they are together, as she chooses to go to the beach in spite of her better judgement:

> Edna Pontellier could not have told why, wishing to go to the beach with Robert, she should in the first place have declined, an in the second place have followed in obedience to one of the two contradictory impulses which impelled her. (56)

Their trip to the beach constitutes a landmark for Edna in terms of character development. Where others have failed, Robert succeeds in teaching her to swim. In learning to do so Edna is symbolically overcoming fear, restrain and difficulty, marking her most important awakening of all. All summer she has been afraid of the water; "a certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand near by that might reach out and reassure her"; her fear of letting go and of being alone stops her from testing her limits and pursuing her wishes. Suddenly feeling empowered to step into the water and swim out alone, she feels like a child learning to fend for herself for the very first time: "that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence" (73). A strong parallelism can be singled out between Edna's awakening through swimming and the effect that Cixous's claims, in *The Laugh of the Medusa,* writing will have on women:

> Write! and your self-seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood, rising, insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous, perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying colors, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we feed. "Ah, there's her sea," he will say as he holds out to me a basin full of water from the little phallic mother from whom he's inseparable. But look, our seas are what we make of them, full of fish or not, opaque or transparent, red or black, high or smooth, narrow or bankless; and we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, seaweed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves .... More or less wavily sea, earth, sky – what matter would rebuff us? We know how to speak them all. Heterogeneous, yes. For her joyous benefit she is erogenous; she is the erotogeneity of the heterogeneous: airborne swimmer, in flight, she does not cling to herself; she is dispersible, prodigious, stunning, desirous and capable of others, of the other woman that she will be, of the other woman she isn't, of him, of you. (889-90)

It is through swimming that Edna learns to reevaluate her position in the world and initiates a process of deconstruction that will last until the very end of the novel. The swim , Walker argues, "dramatizes the birth of Edna's ego" (35). Such newly found confidence gives her a sense of autonomy and independence, of control over herself—body and soul. She is, for the first time, empowered; "intoxicated with her newly conquered power, she swam out alone" (74). This empowerment makes her act recklessly; overtaken by exultation she wants "to swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (74). Already, there is a predominant sense of isolation in this discovery, where the water—the other—becomes a space representative of solitude and of the unknown. On her way back to the shore she chooses to walk alone, fully emerged in herself and no longer preoccupied with those who surround her. Waving "a dissenting hand" and "paying no further heed to their renewed cries which sought to detain her" (74); "no multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbing of desire" (77). After swimming, Edna again reflects on feminine passivity and her relationship with her husband. How, before, she would have run to satisfy his desires in the face of impatience and irritation, and how, she would have done so unthinkingly, out of custom and habit:

> She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did. (78)

She attributes her past behavior to a lack of previous consideration of her actions and an inherent acceptance of life's circumstances without debate. To question this passivity signals the effect of Edna's encounter with the sea and a newly assumed position of defiance in marriage and life:

> In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to realize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her […] perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman. (57)

A connection is drawn between swimming and art, as Edna surveys the depths of her mind and wonders whether she will ever be as moved by anything as she was by Mademoiselle Reisz's music. "I wonder if I shall ever be stirred again as Mademoiselle

Reisz's playing moved me to-night. I wonder if any night on earth will ever be like this one. It is like a night in a dream" (75). Music provides in *The Awakening* the first instance in which Edna displays true emotion:

> 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. She waited for the material pictures (…) 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. (71-72)

Edna's inability to obtain validation through her friendships is the same she encounters in her romantic relationships. Art, on the other hand, becomes a method of catharsis for her through which she can freely and safely explore her awakening. She had always liked to paint, "in it satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her" (55). Through music and painting, Edna develops a sensorial awakening, one that allows her to find new forms of articulation. "Edna lacks the language necessary for even conceiving of what she wants" (Walker 93). When language —masculine language— does not suffice for the protagonist to reflect her experience, she turns to art. When Edna becomes the performer of her own music, she is symbolically mastering a form of creation of the self that allows her to gain power over her body and her mind. She becomes the writer of her own language, language through which her conflict is verbalized.

Her quest for artistic achievement is parallel to her quest for individuality, they complement each other; it is through one, that the other is achieved. Thus, music acts "as the pleasure cognitive channel through which her characters awaken to strongly felt emotions that inspire a range of responses such as love, friendship, motherhood, artistic inspiration, or the quest for independence or personal fulfillment" (Piñero 84). Art comes to constitute a pathway through which to rediscover the self away from the restrictions of society. In other words, music in *The Awakening* becomes a channel for female subjectivity to be expressed, where "the emotional power of music as a synesthetic channel through which other senses and arts […] enable the protagonist's holistic transformation" (Piñero 88).

As Edna progressively undergoes this awakening there is a parallel process of isolation. No longer willing to settle, she leaves Léonce and moves out of their house: "whatever she had acquired aside from her husband's bounty, she caused to be transported to the house, supplying simple and meager deficiencies from her own resources" (140). She no longer wishes to have anything that is not her own, seeking complete independence—material and external as much as emotional and internal. In her new home, Edna is presented to readers in a position of empowerment, resembling in her attitude and appearance "the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" (145).

This challenging of the hierarchical structure of marriage, however, is not without consequences. Edna shows full awareness of her descent in the social scale resulting from this newly attained individuality. Social rejection seems for her equated with spiritual acceptance: "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" (151). For Mr. Pontellier, his wife's defiance is as disconcerting as it is appalling:

> Mr. Pontellier had been a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward. (108)

Edna's refusal to recoil upsets the dominant/submissive dynamic. When she does not carry her prescribed obligations as wife her husband grows angry and rude. In return, she grows impudent and daring. Unlike in *Madame Bovary*, however, there is no chance for such dynamic to simply be reversed. In both of their refusals to step back, the dichotomy of master/ slave is stranded: left in a state of endgame. Edna's claim of authority and dominance of herself makes this conflict remain unresolved, as she wishes to neither return to her position as slave nor become the master. What she aims is, rather, to create a new space of her own in which this dichotomy no longer applies.

As the text unfolds the possibility to do so becomes intricate. Edna's wish to attain full independence is compared by Mlle. Reisz to that of a bird wishing to soar above the level of tradition and prejudice, for which, she claims, it must have strong wings: "it is a sad spectacle

to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth" (138). To be successful, she continues, "the artist must possess the courageous soul (…) The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies" (115). The naturalistic image of wounded birds returning to the earth becomes a metaphor for the failed attempts of women to defy and to rise above the social constraints that confine them. To go against nature and social convention one must be dauntless and strong, for freedom in a time of restrain comes at a price. This is something Cixous again reflects on in her essay:

> Flying is woman's gesture – flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden cross- overs. It's no accident that *voler* has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense. It's no accident: women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. (*The Laugh of the Medusa* 888)

Edna's ending becomes illustrative of this point. Her realization of the impossibility to find reconciliation of individuality and love in the figure of Robert constitutes Edna's final awakening. His inability to see her individuality as she herself perceives it marks a point of inflection in their relationship. For Robert, she is "Léonce Pontellier's wife" (166), and only when she is set free by her husband can they be together, regardless of Edna's wishes: "I realized what a cur I was to dream of such a thing, even if you had been willing" (167). Robert's assertion of Léonce's ownership of Edna indicates his compliance with the very same master/slave dichotomy she is attempting to free herself of. In Robert's words, she recognizes an inequity of thought that makes it impossible for them to be together:

> You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both. (167)

Robert's incapability of grasping Edna's words reaffirm her position; if she wishes to be free she must do it alone: "Edna's quest for freedom hinders her relationships, thereby alienating her to a point that ultimately proves unbearable" (Walker 39). Contrary to Emma,

Edna's conception of a better life is not one that centres around a masculine figure, but one in which she is able to assert her individuality and her right to self-ownership. Edna's understanding that she is not her husband's possession and that she belongs to no one but herself is what breaks with the existing association of masculinity and power. Similarly, while Emma attributes her unhappiness to her condition of woman (and perceives there is no remedy for it), Edna does so to society's —not her own— inability to see beyond prescribed social gender roles. In this light, Edna represents Cixous' claim that women, while remaining women, may still claim some of the masculine qualities inherently linked to power and make them their own. Women can be powerful, while still remaining women. Power is not masculine, power is changeable, it is fluid. Edna represents the core notion that in order for women to no longer be slaves, they must not simply reverse their status from slaves to masters, but shake and rebuild the foundations of such division.

The inability to connect with the people around her without renouncing to her autonomy renders Edna completely alone. Through her character, Chopin highlights the feeling of loneliness that stems from a lack of social acceptance, whereby Edna's relations are still unable to understand her quest. She struggles to find a middle ground in which to reconcile isolation and autonomy. The novel's ending, complex and ambiguous, further illustrates this issue. There are those who would argue that Edna's return to the sea and her swimming away into her death symbolize her inability make a choice between the two: "preserving what she had come to regard as the unessential, the property she has in herself, would, in fact, require her death […] Suicide was practically the only way for Edna to live out liberal individualism" (Walker 41).

As a result, suicide becomes the only available option for the character. According to Walker, "Edna, too, might have thrived had she been able to find a viable third path beyond the dichotomy of love and death endorsed by that parrot of tradition" (41). However, this "parrot of tradition", too strong for Edna to overcome, would have resulted in her death all the same. Edna's inability to define a third space in which to reconcile her wishes in life does but reinforce the autonomy of her choice in death. As she walks into the water for the last time she removes her clothes, casting away the remaining grip that society had over her. Her removal of the "unpleasant, pricking garments" (175) symbolizes her final break through as she stands by the sea, "naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun" for the first time in her life.

Like “some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known” (175) Edna gets into the water and starts swimming. Chopin creates a parallelism between this scene and that of the first time she learns to swim, this time highlighting the evidence which shows Edna’s ultimate evolution as a character: she no longer stops and she does not look back. For a second, she becomes afraid, but this fear sinks as she continues to swim, out of her own accord: “she will not relinquish the core of her vision, which is not finally romance, but rather her own autonomous being ... so she freely goes to the sea, losing her life. But she does not lose her self” (Stone 26).

Edna becomes whole in the only way she can, “by immersion in the universal sea of love” (Stone 26). Thus, her return to the sea is challenging, symbolizing Edna’s last rebellion for her femininity. Her death becomes, according to many, a celebration of the Darwinian self, feminism, sexuality and freedom. It is a revolutionary act against nature’s constraints, against society and the restrictions it imposes, and it gives way to the reassertion of Edna’s self through the feminist and matriarchal myth of Aphrodite:

> The novel’s ending reaffirms Edna’s predominant belonging to the pleasurable realm of music and sounds […] Her watery rebirth is a sort of sensual celebration and discovery of her naked body with the sea […] In her final encounter with the natural rhythmic sounds of the sea, the scent and colors of pinks or Dianthus flowers (from the Greek “dios”, god, and “anthos”, flower) that were used in Greece to crown heroes clearly symbolize Edna’s fearless and cathartic bath in the ocean with the allusive pagan divine image of “Venus rising from the foam”, of despair, solitude, and spiritual nakedness. (Piñero 96-97)

According to Stone, Edna's final moment is one of autonomous sexuality, as “the world of her imagination resonates with fertility” (26). This fertility is depicted in Chopin’s mention of “the hum of bees” and “the musky odor of pinks” (176) and it is further realized in the implication of the character’s resurrection, which Gilbert argues, is further associated not with:

> The refusal to accommodate the limitations of reality but a subversive questioning of the limitations of both reality and realism […] Her ceremonial nakedness, the paradoxically unknown familiarity of the world she is entering, and the ‘foamy wavelets [that curl and coil] like serpents about her ankles’ tell us that she is journeying not just toward rebirth but toward a regenerative and revisionary genre, a genre that intends to propose new

> realities for women by providing new mythic paradigms through which women's lives can be understood. (Gilbert 58)

In other words, the appearance of sexual and feminine symbols in her final moments is imperative. While the masculine mode is one in which women are repeatedly presented as victims of their own gender, Edna represents the promise that exists in Cixous' feminine writing as a means to reshape female identity. Her ending renders her representative of Cixous's vision of the woman who does not stand still, the woman who is everywhere, who embodies this desire-that-gives. Fearless and limitless, her final decision to swim away constitutes her manifesto: a final act of rebellion —a refusal of compromise— as she represents the woman that "cuts through defensive loves, motherages, and devourations: beyond selfish narcissism, in the moving, open, transitional space", the woman willing to "run her risks" (*The Laugh of the Medusa* 893).

iii) Flaubert's Emma Bovary and Chopin's Edna Pontellier: A Comparison

'The woman arriving over and over again does not stand still; she's everywhere, she exchanges, she is the desire-that- gives.'
— Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* 893

The individual analyses provided in the previous sections center on the construction of characters in the two novels, particularly the female protagonist and her relationships with marriage, motherhood, friendship, adultery and art. The focus of both analyses has been on the way the evolution of these relationships affects the main characters' progression and their attempts to deal with newly found self-awareness. How, in other words, their understanding of their own social reality sees itself reinforced and/or challenged by their social relationships and their social condition. Emma and Edna, similar in their initial circumstances, slowly drift apart from one another as they explore their individual identities. While it could be argued that the tools through which this exploration takes place are also quite similar—love, music, painting—the discoveries they make through their quests are very different.

Our first encounter as readers with both protagonists is very representative of this disparity. Emma's introduction as a young, unmarried woman of good position and the given insight into her untroubled existence at the convent, provides for readers a mental picture of her childish nature, as well as of the fact that in contrast with her husband Charles, she has so far not encountered (nor overcome) complication nor conflict in her life. What is more, she is presented as partaking in the formation of her marriage. The evolution of her relationship with Charles is quick and superficial; while he is shown not to comprehend Emma all that well, she, too, lacks the drive to understand her husband. There is no disposition on her part to get to know Charles once she discovers he does not fit into her preconceived view of men. On the other hand, Edna is, from her first appearance, introduced to readers as a married woman and a mother. No background is provided for her childhood nor her relationship with Léonce previous to marriage. Unlike Emma she is content in her marriage and, while she never claims to be in love, she is able to recognize good qualities in her husband and a certain level of intimacy between the two. Edna's and Léonce's relationship, in contrast with Emma's and Charles', works on the grounds of a mutual understanding of each other's roles and expectations. Edna's failure to meet these expectations is not fortuitous. It is, rather, the result of her realization that she no longer wishes to maintain this arrangement.

The male-filtered views of both Emma and Edna seem to also start on the same note. We are first acquainted with the two women through their husbands' eyes, causing this vision to be biased and unreliable. Charles's hyper-sexualization of Emma and Léonce's dehumanization of Edna can be said to resemble each other in purpose. However, Edna's introduction to readers does not restrict itself to her husband's representation. Greater insight into Edna's character is provided, sometimes through the authorial voice, sometimes through the character's own commentary. The same cannot be said for Emma, whose image is constructed unilaterally, in such a way that predisposes readers to take on a certain attitude towards her.

Such views are reinforced by easily identifiable figures of authority in both texts. In *Madame Bovary,* is it Monsieur Homais, the apothecary whose view of female characters in the novel further reinforces the rigid categorization to which women were constrained. For Homais, Emma's life has "everything that makes married life agreeable: a laundry, a kitchen with a pantry, a family room, a fruit store, etc." (71), there is simply no justification for her unhappiness. An agreeable feminine experience is, according to the apothecary, reduced to elements that strongly identify with the angel-in-the-house variant. Women who question this prescribed role are deemed as oversensitive and unhealthy, with an excessive imagination:

> Where Madame is concerned, I have to admit she's always seemed oversensitive to me. So, my dear chap, I wouldn't recommend any of those so-called remedies that claim to attack the symptoms but which really attack the health. No, none of those pointless medications! A proper diet, that's the answer! Sedatives, emollients, calmatives. And don't you think we should perhaps do something about her imagination? (176)

In this way, Homais embodies the male approach to women of his time. They are to be categorized, objectified and reduced to their appealing qualities for their male counterpart, as he illustrates in his reduction of women to a single, simplistic defining attribute: "German women were ethereal, French women licentious, Italians hot-blooded. (Negresses) They appeal to artists" (237). In other words, Homais is the ultimate representative of Schwenger's Masculine Mode.

On the contrary, Doctor Mandelet—presented as the maximum figure of authority in *The Awakening*—is able to recognize disparity in the feminine gender. For him, women are

not all alike; in fact, woman is described by Doctor Mandelet as "a very peculiar and delicate organism" among which he perceives Edna as particularly unusual:

> A sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. I would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife. (119)

Woman in this text is presented as complex; she is not to be reduced to this either/or principle, she is of intricate nature. Desire for individuality, however, continues to be mistaken for impulsiveness and whim, still placing women as opposed to men in the dichotomy of rationality/irrationality. Even if so, Mandelet proves himself able to acknowledge heterogeneity in women. His ability to acknowledge complexity in Edna is of great importance to this analysis, as by placing such understanding in the main figure of authority in the text, *The Awakening* opens the door to a remodeling of the social perception of women and sets a precedent for change.

Along with Emma's readily constructed image is her character's masculinization, clear from the very beginning. The use of masculine attributes throughout the novel to characterize her (her hands, her gestures, her clothes, her attitude to her child and to her lovers) reinforces a journey of empowerment through the acquirement of dominant traits. In this way, Emma's masculinization is presented as an unconscious process through which to place herself in a position of dominance in her relationships. Nowhere in the novel is there an instance in which Emma displays awareness of her masculinization, nor justifies the masculine nature of her actions. Nevertheless, while Emma herself may not be aware of her own masculinization she is indeed observant of the social implications of each gender. In her disposition to have a boy rather than a girl, in her exchanges with Rodolphe where she envies him his freedom and in her reflections on the constrains of being a woman, Emma recognizes that to be a woman is to be oppressed. The issue with this line of thought is that she does not set out to challenge this notion, but rather participates in its reinforcement: her view of women is that they are weak, flimsy creatures. To be strong for Emma continues to equate to being a man.

While Emma's reproduction of masculine structures cannot be claimed to be a conscious process, Edna does consciously choose to distance herself from a female sociability she does not identify with:

> She abandons this scene of "female sociability—a visual representation of the intense bonding that suffuses the idealized woman's sphere—in favor of a more solitary, stereotypically more masculine exercise. While these women tranquilly knit away, symbolizing the intertwinement of their lives, Edna extracts herself from the communal web of love and ritual to paint. (Walker 34).

Edna's masculinization is presented as conscious, partial and balanced. Her femininity is never dislodged in the process. Rather than Chopin attempting to masculinize Edna in order to assert her individuality—something that could be claimed to be the case of Emma Bovary —Edna's masculinization takes place only as a means of reconciliation of this bisexuality Cixous spoke of in *The Laugh of the Medusa.* In her masculine traits Edna does not reject her femininity but embarks in a process of reconstruction of the self as one in which both masculine and feminine qualities may harmonize:

> When Chopin describes her heroine in these masculine ways, she is metaphorically demonstrating that the liberal privileges of self-possession of which Edna is increasingly trying to avail herself are essentially male privileges. (Walker 34)

As opposed to Emma, however, Edna is able to attribute power to her gender. While she remains conscious of the social restrictions imposed on women, she commences as a process of identification of different types of women: mother-women, artist women, independent women. In doing so, Edna displays a deep understanding of the social implications of being a woman without reducing them to a simplistic unified collective where there is no variation. Thus, there is difference and strength in the women of *The Awakening*.

The issue of desire is very relevant to the discussion at hand. Cixous distinguishes between masculine and feminine desire; the first being the desire to posses and control, to subjugate and overpower. Emma's desire is presented as masculine in essence:

> The *sexual* difference with a *equality* of force, therefore, does not produce the movement of desire. It is inequality that triggers desire, as a desire - for appropriation. Without *inequality*, without struggle, there is inertia - death. (*Sorties* 204)

In her relationships the dynamic of master/slave is constantly reinforced, and through her character progression Emma moves from the second to the first, reproducing masculine structures of power in her relationships with her lovers. After her relationship with Rodolphe (where she had assumed the role of slave) Emma acquires a similar role of dominance to his, where desire stems from this position of inequality that she establishes with the rest of men in her life. Conversely, Edna's desire can be claimed to be essentially feminine: she seeks only the power to posses herself. Hers is the desire for individualism, emancipation, self-indulgence, freedom, wholeness, oneness. Through Edna, Chopin analyses the transformative power of desire, what occurs when a woman embarks in a quest for self-possession and what the social implications of such a journey are:

> In this novel Chopin speculates more daringly than ever before on the consequences for middle-class women of society's authorization of female desire (…) "attributes the erosion of the nineteenth century ideal of womanhood and domesticity to the unleashing of female desire. (Walker 32)

Indeed, Edna's search is perpetually frustrated by the lack of understanding and support of those closer to her. Even Mlle. Reisz—who represents for Edna the model of the independent, individual woman—has come to accept that the price to pay for self-authorization is the loss of femininity and social repudiation. Nonetheless, Edna's unwillingness to settle constitutes another point of inflection in the novel. Both Edna and Chopin stand as representatives of Cixous's exceptions to the norm. Through Edna, Chopin becomes the thinker, the inventor, the artist. The wrecker of concept and form. The deconstructor of female identity as passive and quiescent, a blacksmith beginning to forge a new female subjectivity:

> There are some exceptions. There have always been those uncertain, poetic persons who have not let themselves be reduced to dummies programmed by pitiless repression of the homosexual element. Men or women: beings who are complex, mobile, open. Accepting the other sex as a component makes them much richer, more various, stronger, and - to the extent that they are mobile - very fragile. It is only in this condition that we invent. Thinkers, artists, those who create new values, 'philosophers' in the mad Nietzschean manner, inventors and wreckers of concepts and forms, those who change life cannot help but be stirred by anomalies - complementary or contradictory. (*Sorties* 209)

The two female protagonists further differ in their approach to art. Art constitutes a medium for self-expression, a channel for character progression; as each protagonist moves forward, their evolution is reflected in their attachment to art. For Emma, reading initially constitutes a safe heaven where to evade herself and fantasize about the future. In the convent, books and music are few of the available pastimes and she spends great amounts of time reading novels that help shape her expectations of the outside world, men, women, and relationships. Music, in particular, is not presented as a tool for Emma to explore her identity but as a means through which to hide her deceiving self. The effect that reading has on Emma eventually proves to be equally counteractive, and yet, for the best part of the first section of the novel, it is reading that helps her establish a connection to the feminine gender. Emma finds role models in the women she reads about. Her progressive masculinization and her drifting apart from the feminine gender is symbolized by her decreasing interest in reading.

Music, painting, reading, all belong to the realm of the sensorial, traditionally feminine; Emma's distancing from this realm further accentuates this change. In *Madame Bovary* music is perceived as a means through which to obtain other's attention, never as a means to express oneself: "She gave up music. Why play? Who was going to listen to her?" (55). Edna's progression as a character, on the other hand, is intrinsically linked to her relationship with music and painting. "Music not only works as a liberating, inspiring, and creative force for Chopin's characters, but it becomes a sort of holistic connector that enhances interaction between different arts" (Piñero 92). Through music Edna discovers new parts of her awakened self, and in painting, she finds the strength to reclaim her independence. All in all, in art she finds a bridge through which to connect her personal experience with the outside world, a way through which to express female subjectivity.

Symbolism is yet another main difference between the two women. The contraposition of fire and the sea becomes quite illustrative. Throughout the novel, Emma is repeatedly associated with fire; many of her moments of contemplation take place by the fireplace, where she reflects on her lovers, for instance: "watching the fire blazing from her bed, she could still see Léon standing there" (87). When emotions take over Emma she best describes her feelings making reference to fire and light: "Suddenly it was as if fiery balls were exploding in the air like bullets, spinning furiously round and round raging, smashing, landing on the snow between the trees then melting" (274). Likewise, references to death are also associated with

fire: “Her unburdened flesh no longer weighed on her, a new life was beginning; and as her whole being rose towards God it seemed as if it would be absorbed into this love, like grains of inches turn to smoke and vanish as they burn” (179).

Fire—which conventionally symbolizes passion, strength and activity—is traditionally associated with the masculine. Water, on the contrary, is the element traditionally associated with femininity; it symbolizes emotion, unconsciousness and passivity. Emma’s masculinization can be claimed to be reinforced by this association with fire. In turn, Chopin’s choice of water may be regarded as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, her choice of a feminine element may be attributed to her desire to reinforce Edna’s femininity. On the other, water in *The Awakening* arguably incorporates customary qualities of the fire: it is not a passive force, but an active cooperator in Edna’s awakening:

> The felicity of swimming as a figure for Edna’s awakening into desire for full autonomy lies in the way that submersion in water envelopes the entire body in a uniform sensation, thereby generating a feeling of the body’s wholeness. Moreover, the act of swimming places the swimmer’s survival completely into her own hands. (Walker 36)

Thus, water comes to symbolize power and strength for the protagonist while remaining representative of the emotional and the unconscious. Much like the character herself, the sea merges qualities of the masculine and the femininity to enhance Edna’s synthesis of traditional qualities of both genders to create her individuality.

Emma’s death, repeatedly foreshadowed throughout the novel, leaves little room for speculation. After ingesting the arsenic her demise is grotesque, painful and lengthy. Specific and thorough in its prose, the implications of shame, culpability and pain permeate the last pages of Emma’s existence until her fire finally extinguishes: “nonetheless the fire died down, either because her supplied of fuel ran out, or because she had heaped too much on it” (105). The suggestion that Emma’s fire has been suffocated as a result of her heaping too much fuel on it can be taken as a direct allusion to her life’s excesses: “hearing his nam, which brought back memories of her adultery and her ordeals, Madame Bovary turned her head away, as if it were a worse poison that the one in her stomach” (270).

Emma’s last moments are agonic, reprimanding of her mistakes. In *Madame Bovary* there are only two choices for the ill-fated young woman: “either she passed away in a state of grace […] or she died unrepentant” (279). Not only is her death presented as the result of her

wrong doings, but in her last moments whatever individual progress could have been claimed to have been made by the character is nullified by her final admission that her actions have been "a worse poison that the one in her stomach" (280). What is more, she is buried in her wedding dress. This signifies the character's circular journey back to her origins, emphasizing the futility of it. Emma traces her misfortunes to the moment she married Charles and in being buried in her wedding dress she is ironically forced, for all eternity, to be trapped in that specific moment that she herself recognizes as the singlehandedly worse choice she ever made.

On the contrary, Edna's death is presented as lineal: a continuation of her life's journey. The lack of closure ends the novel on a positive note, as Edna's future is left in the hands of readers to interpret. The implications of her death, nevertheless, are never destructive of Edna's progress as a character. Her search for autonomy does not see itself hindered but reinforced by her last moments in the novel. Paradoxically, there is certain circularity in her journey too. Her return to the sea marks a return to the place where her awakening first begun, but her surpassing of previous limitations—she no longer returns to the shore—signify outgrowth and self-improvement. Not only is there no judgement in her actions but, despite the uncertainty, a chance is provided to envision continuity in Edna's character progression. Thus, both ends are indicative of two characters whose paths, in many ways similar, bifurcate into completely different dénouements. Such differences can be traced back to differences in masculine and feminine modes of writing.

V. Conclusions

‘New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings.’
— Lao Tzu, Proverb

As previously mentioned in this research, there exists a tendency to portray characters in a distinctive manner which can be claimed to belong to distinct paradigms of writing. The sex signature of an author plays a defining role in the process of writing. Emma Bovary and Edna Pontellier share closeness in their circumstances and in their transgressive nature, but the evolution of each character, their response to conflict and their development of female subjectivity become points of difference between the two women.

Emma Bovary’s adoption of masculine traits in order to assert her individuality discloses a generalized tendency of the masculine mode to reduce characters to a condition of either/or, as well as to the justification of female transgression from dominated to dominant only in terms of adoption of the traditional possessor of such qualities of power and strength. The impossibility of representing a female character’s betterment as feminine reveals a clear association of the feminine/masculine dichotomy as parallel to that of the master/slave, reinforcing the nature of qualities such as power, transcendence and superiority as masculine still. Textuality in the masculine mode remains a medium of reproduction of masculine structures of power.

Edna’s representation breaks with this two-party system, as it explores the possibilities of creating female subjectivity as separate from its traditional representation. Her embodiment of Cixous’s notion of bisexuality is one that allows for the creation of a form of writing in which there is no exclusion or hierarchy based on sexual difference. Edna’s wish to assert her individuality is not restrained by the condition of her gender; there is no need to masculinize her in order to justify her actions. She may be strong and rational while she remains feminine and emotional. Her identity is indeed heterogeneous as she is both water and fire. *The Awakening*’s open ending places the novel in this realm of ‘the other’ Cixous describes in her essays: a place of transformative power. By not specifying Edna’s death, Chopin is again choosing not to conform to the previously mentioned bipartite system of either/or:

> Chopin does makes it clear that, though women's desires were beginning to exceed the narrow scope usually afforded them in nineteenth-century fiction, their lives would not

> conform to the shape of liberal individualism. Indeed, they would not follow the path long imagined for men. Although she does not present a version of what form of female subjectivity might more viably take in this age of awakened desire, her work constitutes an important step in reimagining women in fiction at a moment when gender relations were rapidly changing in the real world. (Walker 43)

By not providing a resolution to Edna's dilemma, Chopin refuses to insert her in a similar path to that followed by men. It is not enough to move from one side to the other, to appropriate the masculine space and make it her own, for the creation of a new female subjectivity to be successful a new space needs to be produced, one where identity is re-shaped and understood as miscellaneous and kaleidoscopic, gender unbiased.

Unlike Flaubert, there is no judgement of characters on Chopin's part; her characters can never be claimed to be mistreated. Gender stratification in The Awakening is always treated as an obstacle to be condemned. In this sense, The Awakening arguably lacks the duality that exists in Flaubert's work, where both admonition and laudation may be argued for. In Chopin's work, the issue of gender difference and conceptualization is undoubtedly made an issue of from the beginning of the novel. Authorial awareness cannot be denied. In addition, Chopin's efforts to make of Edna a realistic, human character, no less estimable in spite of her flaws, leave a clear sense of where the author's sympathies lie.

The Awakening is no satire. It is a conscious acknowledgement of the difficulties of being a woman in 1899 New Orleans. What is more, it is an admission of the perils women underwent in the search for individuality. Social criticism lies at the heart of the novel. It is representative of this rising paradigm of writing that sought to empower women, to relocate strength to a so long depleted, undermined gender. It reflects this new feminine tendency to exalt female search for freedom and expression, to individualize characters and depict them as separate from the stereotypical social roles of their time. To redeem the female experience in literature. Contrary to the masculine mode, this new paradigm aims to counteract this lack of social compromise to grasp and portray feminine drives and to depict the female experience as faulty and biased. It is a successful attempt to question and disentangle the female mindset as a literary subject.

It remains to say that while *The Awakening* faced harsh criticism, it ultimately came to fulfill its potential. In doing so, the legacy it has left behind is one of optimism and hope for women's writings. By the same token, Cixous' *écriture féminine* opened the door to a

reexamining of the importance of writing in this process of female empowerment, vindication of the self and reconstruction of female subjectivity at the turn of the century.

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