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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Out of Place

Re-claiming the Self in Kate Chopin's The Awakening and
Latifa Al-Zayyat's The Open Door

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Comparative Literature

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

by

Mai Mohammad Abbas

Bachelor of Arts

(Spring 2011)

The American University in Cairo

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Re-claiming the Self in Kate Chopin's The Awakening and
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A Thesis Submitted by

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The degree of Master of Arts

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To my Dear Parents:

Thanks for being there for me throughout my awakenings
and thanks for being there until I opened the door to my identity.

Your beloved Daughter,

Mai Mohammad Abbas

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ABSTRACT

The American University in Cairo

Title: *Out of Place: Re-claiming the Self in Kate Chopin's The Awakening and Latifa Al-Zayyat's The Open Door*

Author: Mai Mohammad Abbas

Advisor: Dr. Vassiliki Kotini

This thesis aims at exploring the self-imposed marginalization as well as the reshaping of the self of two unique female figures in literature while discussing the nature, the reasons and the impact of their attitude. The two characters who are studied in their *out of place* experience are Edna Pontellier, a nineteenth-century American in Kate Chopin's The Awakening and Layla Sulayman from twentieth-century Egypt in Latifa Al-Zayyat's The Open Door. The two characters are not chosen randomly, for, although they live in different times and places, they share a similar dilemma. Both are driven by their coercive families to struggle against those traditions which continuously dictate a strict and limited life while molding them into pawns, void of personality and critical thinking. As a result, both heroines resort to a fictitious world which "promises" protection from the frustrations and liberation of the restrictions of real life. Each character dissolves in her own way within this fictitious world. Eventually both Edna and Layla need to make a choice: either lurk forever in their imaginary world or face reality and responsibility. While each heroine takes her own decision, they both attempt to claim a radically new and free "self".

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I-Introduction

*“Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite,
A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate,
A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,
A still Medusa with mild milky brows
All curdled and all clothed upon with snakes
Whose slime falls fast as sweat will; or anon
Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with swords
Where the Babe sucked; or Lamia in her first
Moonlighted pallor, ere she shrunk and blinked
And shuddering wriggled down to the unclean;
Or my own mother, leaving her last smile
In her last kiss upon the baby-mouth
My father pushed down on the bed for that,—
Or my dead mother, without smile or kiss,
Buried at Florence” (Browning 154-168).*

Angels and monsters: the classification of women under these two categories was rigidly established in Victorian literature and society (Gilbert and Gubar 812) and, unfortunately, it has continued to exist beyond Victorian Era. For women, to be angels means to pursue the impossible, to “‘kill’ themselves . . . [turning] into art objects: slim, pale, passive beings whose ‘charms’ eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead” (Gilbert and Gubar 817). Any behavior which does not comply with these standards is automatically received as “monstrous,” “unfeminine” and aggressive (Gilbert and Gubar 819). Any deviation from the “angelic” type infers social ostracism and an out-of-place existence.

Indeed, moving away from the established norm and clashing with the dominant social order, the *out of place* experience becomes a state of alienation and estrangement. Going against the hegemony of the majority which defines the norm, these members of society, who question and object to the traditional standards of behavior, are marginalized and rejected. Those members have no choice but to escape from the harsh rejection of their societies to new imaginary worlds which numb their senses and alienate them further from reality.

However, the out-of-place experience can also provide one with a sense of freedom. For a woman, to refuse the socially accepted role of an “angel” marks a conscious effort to approach and define her selfhood. It foregrounds the decision to explore her individuality, move well beyond stereotypes and shape her personality. Once she has realized and established her new identity, there is no way back to the “angel” model.

The present thesis will explore the out-of-place existence of two female figures in literature: Edna Pontellier in The Awakening by Kate Chopin and Layla Sulayman in The Open Door by Latifa Al-Zayyat. The thesis will demonstrate how the two characters, although living in different times and places (nineteenth-century America and twentieth-century Egypt), do share a

common dilemma of estrangement. In the thesis discussion, the outcome of this estrangement unravels to indicate whether the two characters are able to reach the new dimension of the liberated self, the dimension of freedom and individuality, or not.

Indeed, although Edna Pontellier's and Layla Sulayman's backgrounds are not the same as they belong to different societies, both female figures experience similar social pressure and choose to resist social expectations which impose the angel-model upon women. Their decisions defy traditions at a time when women enjoy little and limited rights.

In the United States, in early nineteenth-century America, women were secluded within the sphere of home; in this domestic sphere, a woman's existence revolved around cooking, cleaning and caring for children (Hymowitz and Weissman 64). While tending to these duties, women should be "delicate and timid" with "a sweet dependency" (Hymowitz and Weissman 67). If a woman stepped outside this sphere, she "was despised as an 'unsexed woman'" (Hymowitz and Weissman 67).

Nonetheless, historically dissenting voices resisted women's subjugation. The first voice was of a British woman, Mary Wollstonecraft, who, already at the time of the American Revolution, argued that "the much-discussed rights of man should be extended to include women" (qtd. in Hymowitz and Weissman 76). Wollstonecraft's essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was considered the "feminist bible" throughout the 1800s (Hymowitz and Weissman 76). Her essay was particularly popular with the women who participated in and led the antislavery movement (Hymowitz and Weissman 77). Inspired by the American Revolution and the struggle for the abolishment of slavery, women in America asked for their freedom (Hymowitz and Weissman 80) but their claim for emancipation was condemned as an "assault upon the social order" (Hymowitz and Weissman 83).

Chopin was born at a time when women openly discussed and claimed their rights to “own property and control wages; to exercise free speech; to obtain divorce; and to achieve equal opportunities in commerce, trade, the professions, and education” (Hymowitz and Weissman 95). Their demands shocked the society; the women’s movement was received with aggression by the majority of people who were unwilling to change themselves (Hymowitz and Weissman 102).

The Egyptian women, in the beginning of the twentieth century, were subject to more or less the same limitations as American women a century earlier. Women in Egypt lived in a rather stifling atmosphere, surrounded by ignorance that prevented them from all forms of knowledge and imprisoned them within the sphere of the house. At that time, colonialism was repressive, leading to the humiliation of men who in turn humiliated women (Subki 4).

Resisting women's subjugation, Qasim Amin’s work *The Liberation of Women* (Amin xi) was not less controversial or popular than *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It was heralded as a “key book” to the feminist Egyptian women in the 1900s (Amin xi).

The women’s rights movement in Egypt soon enough acquired political dimensions and attached itself to the movement against colonialism. In 1919, feminists Safeya Zaghloul and Huda Sharawi founded the first women's Wafdian committee to resist colonialism and offer medical assistance to those injured in the revolution against the British (Muhammad 58).

Shortly after, in 1923, Sharawi founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (Muhammad 58) to advocate the rights of women. A year later, Egyptian feminists presented their requests to the Egyptian Parliament regarding women’s right for education and vote. It was not until the 1952 revolution that women were announced as equal to men by government laws (Muhammad 65). Discrimination against women survived, however, within Egyptian people and every attempt to

address women's rights was met with hostility (Subki 5). This is the social reality of Chopin and Al-Zayyat when they sketch their heroines. It is through their female protagonists, Edna and Layla, that Chopin and Al-Zayyat comment on and criticize their own contemporary society, its standards and its expectations.

On a more personal level, Edna in The Awakening establishes her out-of-place existence as a response to her coercive father, cold sisters and distant friends: "At a very early period [Edna] had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin 26). Edna splits her reality between her "inward life" and the "outward existence". Real life, to which her "outward existence" responds, presents her with the obligation of the angel-model. Although she appears to conform to this life, Edna resorts to her "inward life" for comfort and the freedom she lacks in her real life. This imaginary world protects her from oppression and the pain of rejection, but also distorts her notion of reality. The thesis discusses Edna's relationship with Robert Lebrun and her sexual partner Alcée Arobin. By examining Edna's interaction with these men, the thesis argues that the heroine uses them to maintain her imaginary world, the world that distances her from reality and the pain it potentially entails. The thesis examines the nature of Edna's dual existence and aims to offer an interpretation of it; moreover, it explores the outcome of this imprisonment within the imaginary and whether it embodies the potential for a new dimension of an out-of-place existence of freedom.

As for Layla Sulayman in The Open Door, she also experiences disharmony in the family which results in alienation and an out-of-place state. With a patriarchic father, a submissive mother and a conservative brother, Layla, like Edna, resorts to an imaginary world which gives her the perfect love story she frantically searches for, but which, nonetheless,

marginalizes her and alienates her from reality. Layla's fictitious world distorts reality; in her understanding of life, Layla imposes her own perception of the personalities and the motives of the people around her, like Isam and Fouad Ramzi, to appropriate them to her imaginary world. However, unlike Edna, Layla has what disrupts her constructed reality: the reality of the national struggle that works as a catalyst for Layla's own "awakening." The outcome of this encounter between the personal and the national interest will be studied, exploring whether Layla is able to create a new meaning for the out-of-place existence.

The thesis focuses on the female characters and closely follows their withdrawal from the real world to their imaginary escape. This thesis shows the dichotomies of outer self and inner self: the outer self contains the real world which tries to mould each character into either being an angel-woman or a monster-woman; the inner self contains the imaginary world which protects each character from any painful realities, such as rejection and women alienation. The thesis explores the boundaries between the imaginary and the real and studies the exit from the state of alienation of the two characters and their negative experience. We follow Edna and Layla as they rebel against the standardized, socially accepted behavior of women and their different reactions towards their own imaginary "self" which numbs their senses. The thesis finally explores whether Edna and Layla are able to claim a new positive dimension of their existence, an experience which does not entail stereotypes of angels and monsters, nor does it entail an escape to the imaginary—an experience built upon freedom and individuality.

II-Chapter I: The Awakening: Discovering the “Self”

*There is a solitude of space,
A solitude of sea,
A solitude of death, but these
Society shall be,
Compared with that profounder site,
That polar privacy,
A Soul admitted to Itself:
Finite Infinity (Dickinson 272).*

Edna Pontellier, the twenty-nine year old heroine of Chopin’s The Awakening, lives in a world in which her inner self is detached from her outer, social identity; first, as a daughter, sister and friend, then, as a wife and mother, and, eventually, as a lover. In all these roles of her life, Edna’s major endeavor is to nourish her solitary soul. And between her inner self and socially admitted outer self is a constant conflict that dominates and a constant aspiration to have a voice.

The following argument traces this fissure between Edna’s inner and outer self to her childhood. One of Edna’s vivid reminiscences of her childhood is her walking through “a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean” (29)¹. She is “running away from prayers . . . read in a spirit of gloom by [her] father that chills [her] yet to think of” (30). Edna’s father is introduced as “a colonel in the Confederate army” (113) who believes that “[a]uthority, coercion are what is needed” to control a wife, being unaware that he himself “had coerced his own wife into her grave” (119). Thus, when Edna is running through the meadow grass, she is running away from her coercive patriarchic father. This father is the first one who defines the term “love” for Edna. He associates it with control and authority which establishes in Edna’s perception a link between

¹ The Roman numbers refer to the chapters of Kate Chopin’s novel The Awakening as published by Avon Books, New York 1972.

(her father's) love and pain of rejection. As a result, Edna as a child begins to harbor a conflict between a desire to submit to the social imperatives which, she assumes, will help her to be accepted by society and a desire to search for a kind of a liberating love which, she assumes, will help her develop her identity and voice. Eventually, her desire for attachment dominates, a kind of attachment that would not stifle her sense of self (Ryan 254); in other words, Edna searches for a new form of love, care, and affection that is free of pain of rejection.

But the question is to whom should the attachment be directed? According to Taylor and Fineman, the only human attachment that Edna searches for is an attachment to her lost mother (Taylor and Fineman 35-36). The lost mother is a symbol of a possibility that could have been fulfilling. Her absence romanticizes her memory and makes Edna continuously nostalgic to what her mother could have given her. Also, the missed mother, as a female, stands for love without coercion in contrast to the father, as a male, in a patriarchic society who gives her "conditional" love according to her submission to his orders. The lost mother's love is unconditional and infinite; this is why Edna is not only running through the meadow, she is also "swimming" (30), a symbol of her retreating to "the symbiosis of the 'oceanic stage'" (Taylor and Fineman 36), a period when the infant identifies with the mother (Taylor and Fineman 35).

One major characteristic of this "oceanic stage" existence is that it is silent and esoteric. Contemporary psychological studies note that "the authentic self becomes silent to protect the integrity of its own vision from judgment. What is paralyzing and leads to the sense of not being heard, not being recognized or loved for the self one 'really' is, and the belief that if one were heard, one would not be understood but rather be called immoral, selfish, and be abandoned" (Jack 178). In this light, we can assume that Edna has two choices: one is to declare her search for the unconditional, infinite love to her society; the other is to hide it. Edna, consciously or

unconsciously, realizes that if she declares her new agenda to the society she will be demonized. In other words, she will be labelled as “immoral” and “selfish” (Jack 178); Edna will be classified as immoral because she is aware that her new search should not be bound by “moral” or rather social restrictions and selfish because she is aware that her search should be conducted regardless of its consequences on people around her. After being demonized, Edna’s quest will be eliminated by her society and she will end up losing any prospects of a world of her own. As a result, Edna searches for a place where she can voice her emotions other than the real world. Thus, she invents her silent, imaginary, world because this is the only place where she feels accepted and this is the only place where she can have a voice of her own. According to this argument, it is Edna’s traumatic experience of linking her father’s love to the pain of rejection as a child that results in this fissure between her inner and outer self leading her to live a dual life between “the outward existence which conforms [and] the inward life which questions” (26).

Edna’s esoteric, fictitious, world comforts her and leads her to withdraw from the only possibilities of real interaction she could maintain as a young girl. One can argue that, like her coercive father, Edna’s distant sisters and friends leave her with no alternative of emotional attachment and communication and drive her to be self-contained, but the following paragraph gives us the insight that it could be the other way around:

She was not accustomed to an outward and spoken expression of affection, either in herself or in others. She and her younger sister, Janet, had quarreled a good deal through force of unfortunate habit. Her older sister, Margaret, was matronly and dignified, probably from having assumed matronly and housewifely responsibilities too early in life . . . Margaret was not effusive; she was practical. Edna had had an occasional girl friend, but whether accidentally or not, they seemed to have been all of one type—the self-

contained. She never realized that the reserve of her own character had much, perhaps everything, to do with this. (31)

Edna's inner fictitious world provides a substitute for real life relations. Her sisters and friends are indeed cold, and she herself does not know how to break that coldness. Indeed, her "reserve" has "everything to do with this" (31). Contemporary studies in psychology point out that "women vulnerable to depression . . . perceive two visions of relationships: either isolation or subordination" (Jack 175). Applying this argument to Edna's relation to her sisters and friends, one can see that Edna perceives her relationship with them in terms of isolation rather than subordination: her sisters are cold and practical whereas her friends are self-contained. Because of her father's coercive attitude, Edna identifies love with rigidity. She is, then, afraid that this equation will be repeated in all her interpersonal relationships causing her to be traumatized again with new forms of rejection; she, thus, resorts to isolation as a defense mechanism. Thus she runs or swims, never allowing herself to come out of her fictitious world and take a step towards a real relationship with all what it includes of pain and separation and coldness and quarrels.

When Edna runs away from her father, she is also running away from church. Discussing the relation of religion and American society in the 1870s and 1880s, Wolff notes that at that time "the Presbyterian church in America suffered a crisis over the role of women that might well be defined by the question, 'Shall Women Speak?'" Wolff continues, "[f]or both the Puritan Fathers and their late nineteenth-century Calvinist descendants, the specter of a woman speaking out was portentous: at best, it was unsettling to the male hierarchy; at worst, it augured chaos" ("Un-Utterable Longing" 6-8). Male domination and control defines the outer world Edna is running away from. Religion, with its traditions and customs, becomes another expression and

tool of patriarchy and female subordination. While referring to the presence of religion in her life, Edna admits ““a firm hold,”” but comments that she is ““just driven along by habit,”” and adds that ““sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again, idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided”” (30). Edna’s God takes the form of her father. Her whole universe is controlled by a rigid colonel with his “padded shoulders, his Bible reading, his ‘toddlies’ and ponderous oaths” (119). Edna feels that, God, like her father, offers her a form of stifling and conditional love exchanging His care and affection with her submission to masses and religious obligations. Again Edna applies her relationship with her father to God. She looks at Him as a part of patriarchy and resorts to isolation from Him as she does with her sisters and friends because she fears future rejection; she, thus, chooses to be “unguided” (30) in order to avoid pain. Only her solitude with its fictitious dreams can allow her to indulge in the unconditional love of a lost mother with its potentials of granting her voice and self-expression.

Edna continues nourishing her inner self, “travers[ing] the ocean of waving grass” (31) and looking for unconditional love by allowing three men into her fictitious world: a sad-eyed cavalry officer, a young engaged gentleman and a tragedian. With a language heavy with ironic overtones, Edna is described as unable to “leave [the] presence” of the sad-eyed cavalry officer, “nor remove her eyes from his face” (31); her realization that she was for the young gentleman “nothing, nothing, nothing . . . was a bitter affliction to her” (32). Then it was “the face and figure of a great tragedian [that] began to haunt her imagination and stir her senses. The persistence of the infatuation lent it an aspect of genuineness. The hopelessness of it colored it with the lofty tones of a great passion” (32). The common denominator between all the three one-sided love stories is that they are unrealizable and unrealistic with all the three men unaware of Edna’s feelings; yet, Edna deeply romanticizes the “relationships.” Edna’s imaginary

romances bear resemblance to schizoid personality traits. Describing the schizoid personality, Laing notes that:

The self, in order to develop and sustain its identity and autonomy, and in order to be safe from the persistent threat and danger from the world, has cut itself off from direct relatedness with others, and has endeavored to become its own object: to become, in fact, related directly only to itself. Its cardinal functions become phantasy and observation. Now, in so far as this is successful, one necessary consequence is that the self has difficulty sustaining any *sentiment du réel* for the very reason that it is not 'in touch' with reality, it never actually 'meets' reality. (137)

Laing's argument offers a sound explanation to Edna's ironic imaginary relation to the three men. Isolating herself from the real world, Edna employs her imagination and forms relationships where the actual focus is on herself and her feelings while lacking any touch with reality. Thus, the lock of the hair that she is infatuated by; her being tragically "nothing, nothing, nothing" to the engaged young man; the "face and figure" of the tragedian who "haunt[s] her imagination" (32); all these are imaginary mechanisms which secure for Edna idealized romances devoid of any reality. As she strives to protect herself from any painful relationships and traumas, Edna nourishes her inner self by introducing and developing one-sided love stories in her world of solitude. If she attempts real interaction with real men, her world of solitude will be disrupted; however, as long as these stories are only in her imagination, Edna feels safe in her solitude. Indeed, Edna recoils from the world to become her self's own object (Laing 137). Even if she feels hurt by the realization that she is "nothing" (32) to the three men, she is emotionally safe in the sense that she is the one who invents the three stories and she is the one who controls the threads of the play. However, in her third imaginary relationship, "[t]he persistence of the

infatuation lent it an aspect of genuineness” (32); at this point Edna feels that her inner self is threatened by this “aspect of genuineness.” The “phantasy and observation” (Laing 137) touch the real world and Edna, terrorized, starts to search for a sanctuary to hide.

The sanctuary is Léonce Pontellier. Wolff explains: “[Edna’s] marriage to such a man as Léonce was, then, a defensive maneuver designed to maintain the integrity of the two ‘selves’ that formed her character and to reinforce the distance between them. Her outer self was confirmed by the entirely conventional marriage while her inner self was safe” (“Thanatos and Eros” 452). Indeed, Edna finds in Léonce the perfect equation that suits her. First, she is flattered by his “absolute devotion” (32): she will finally have a man’s attention and care, a huge compensation for the lack of affection from a coercive father and a seemingly promising substitute for the lost mother’s unconditional love. In addition, marrying Léonce is a sort of a mild awakening in Edna’s life. Although her father and her sister violently oppose her marrying a Catholic (32), Edna’s hidden self, tired of sleeping, cannot express itself out loud, so it resorts to subtle rebellion. She rebels against her father and sister by marrying a Catholic; her act of defiance, though, is essentially an act of tradition and conformity since it is done through marriage. However, in her marriage to Léonce, Edna’s main concern is to protect her inner self that dwells in an imaginary world, and the only way to achieve this is to dissociate it from reality. Because it is imaginary, it grows in an imaginary setting and dies if exposed to the sun of reality due to the danger of the pain of rejection. Thus, Edna marries Léonce Pontellier and is soon satisfied to realize that “no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution” (33). Léonce will satisfy the façade of Edna’s existence, but will never threaten her inner world for she has no emotions towards him which will never get her into the pain of rejection of a real relationship.

Léonce Pontellier initially performs his role as a restitution for the lost mother: at first he uses “the female language of emotion and self-expression” (Berryman 197). He attracts Edna who mistakenly fancies “there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them” (32). However, once Léonce marries Edna, his tone changes and swings to the male language of money and business which “excludes women and reinforces a gender hierarchy” (Brightwell, n.p.). It is this language that we encounter when we first see Léonce rebuking his wife because she is “burnt beyond recognition” (7), looking at Edna “as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage” (7). Léonce does not favor sunburned skin since Edna is for him no more than a commodity which he continuously “consumes” and which, consequently, needs constant care and “polishing” rather than movement and action (Gray 59). Léonce stereotypes Edna in the role of a wife and a mother (Gray 59-60). In all the course of the novel, Léonce appears using language which reflects male domination; he asks Edna for certain chores either as his object of “conspicuous consumption” (Gray 59), for example, when he is asking her for sex (52), or as a “mother-woman,” for example, when he is asking her to attend to their children (13). Not one time does Léonce reverse to the female-dominated language of love. He, consequently, does not fulfil his role as a substitution for the mother figure.

A few years of marriage to Léonce leave Edna disappointed; the reality of her marriage does not provide her with the much desired liberating love, nor does it allow her to indulge in imaginary love stories. And at one moment after being rebuked by Léonce’s “monotonous, insistent” (13) tone for neglecting their children, Edna is heavily reminded of such an equation total loss, feeling “[a]n indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, fill[ing] her whole being with a vague anguish” (14). Indeed, Edna is in anguish because she is not able to sustain her outer world without coloring it with the freeing

motherly love she yearns for, nor is she able to sustain her inner world being unable to color it with love stories in her current status as a married woman.

Despite being overwhelmed with feelings of anguish and isolation, being entrapped in her marriage, Edna has managed until now to keep the balance between her inner self with its unvoiced emotions and her outer conformed self: “She had all her life long been accustomed to harbor thoughts and emotions which never voiced themselves. They had never taken the form of struggles. They belonged to her and were her own, and she entertained the conviction that she had a right to them and that they concerned no one but herself” (79). However, some element comes along to disrupt this equilibrium in that summer in Grand Isle: the Creole society. Within the Creole society, Edna is introduced to a new potential of freedom. Rather than silence and isolation, the Creole society tempts Edna with freedom of expression and openness. Wolff aptly discusses Edna’s first encounter with the Creole society: “What a temptation to that insistent inner being whose authenticity Edna so feverishly guards from attack! For this is a self which is starving—and Grand Isle offers nourishment in bounteous abundance” (“Thanatos and Eros” 457). The freedom of expression of the Creoles instigates the first embers of doubt within Edna who, now, for the first time, is encouraged to uncover her inner self and reveal its silenced emotions. Living in “literally and figuratively a female colony” (Gilbert 49), Edna is first met with the possibility that the inner self will flourish not in concealment but in exposure. The relaxed atmosphere of women casually discussing the details of the accouchement of a Creole woman or the open circulation of a liberal book (19), introduce a ground-breaking alternative in social behavior for Edna. However, there is a subtle yet significant difference between the Creole women and Edna which Edna fails to notice. The Creole women would talk about the most audacious things, but, by the end of the day, they will go on and wear the mantle of traditional

matrimonial duties and will not find it contradictory that their audacity does not suit their conventional life. Freedom of expression, however, totally transforms Edna; it “forces her inner questionings to the surface, and ideological conformity becomes a stifling force” (Gray 60).

And here comes the first moment of transition in Edna’s life: the moment when she begins to act according to her “questionings” and against social conformity. It is by allowing herself to become attached to Robert Lebrun that Edna seemingly takes the first step against social approval to assert her independence. Is this true? Does Robert help Edna to assert her identity or does he only perform the role of an illusive opium that numbs her sense of reality? Despite his actual presence in Edna’s real world, Robert can be seen as acting the same role as the cavalry officer, the young engaged man and the tragedian: like his predecessors, Robert nourishes Edna’s inner self with fantasies. Running away from her father to imaginary one-sided love stories, Edna is convinced that such stories would entail pain and rejection should they exist in the real world. Impressed by the prospect of receiving unconditional love along with the emotional safety of never reciprocating such potentially painful feelings, Edna marries Léonce who fails, however, to perform his expected role. Now, Edna starts rejecting Léonce for the sake of a fantasy-like lover whose role is not much different from Edna’s past imaginary lovers except for the fact that he exists in her real world and that she should try this time to withhold her “infatuation” from reaching any “aspect of genuineness” (32). Robert is a fantasy-like lover because he is detached from the harsh reality of Mr. Pontellier’s world and stands closer to the world of women. Brightwell notes that “[w]hen the novel opens, Robert is visiting the female-dominated Grand Isle, flirting with the women and conversing with them about ‘female’ issues such as pregnancy. By spending his time with women and expressing himself predominantly in the trivialized, powerless language to which they are restricted, he distances himself from other men” (n.p.).

Robert appears with Edna in the opening scene of the novel; they both appear like mischievous children who are rebuked by their “father.” Their response, unspecific and rather immature, contrasts with Léonce’s commanding tone: ““What is it? asked Pontellier . . . It was some utter nonsense; some adventure out there in the water, and they both tried to relate it at once” (7). Robert initially appears “emasculated” at Grand Isle since he is allowed to escort married women without arousing any jealousy on the part of the Creole husbands. Edna is immediately attracted to Robert not only because his feminine aura nourishes her hunger for unconditional love, but also because Robert stirs up her emotions which had been silenced since her love for the tragedian and awakens her sensuality. This is the perfect equation for Edna. Before, Edna substitutes any emotional attachments that might be painful should they touch reality (her imaginary lovers) for the unconditional love of a husband. Now Edna finds a new equation that does not require her to sacrifice any of her desires: she will obtain unconditional love from Robert while, at the same time, attaching herself emotionally to him (unlike her approach to Léonce) but only as an imaginary companion; it is a relationship which never touches reality, hence, never entails pain of rejection. It is, in other words, a dream coming true or rather a fairy tale.

Indeed, a close examination of Robert’s language reveals a transcendental color appropriate only for fairy tales. Robert tells Edna:

a spirit that has haunted these shores for ages rises up from the Gulf. With its own penetrating vision the spirit seeks some one mortal worthy to hold him company, worthy of being exalted for a few hours into realms of the semicelestials. His search has always hitherto been fruitless, and he has sunk back, disheartened, into the sea. But tonight he found Mrs. Pontellier. Perhaps he will never wholly release her from the spell. (49-50)

Right after this fictitious “female language of emotion” (Berryman 197), Edna feels her first pangs of desire for Robert: “No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire” (51). His language captivates her; this is the language that unlocks her soul and nourishes her emotional hunger. Not fully conscious yet of the change in her life, Edna gradually surrenders in her dream-like love for Robert. Reviving her escape through the wavy grass, Edna sails “across the bay to the *Chênrière Caminada*, Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening” (58). The anchorage is Edna’s life, so far, as a wife and a mother. The chains are loosening because Edna’s emotions are unleashed while Robert’s presence in her life is promisingly liberating as a mother’s touch.

In the *Chênrière Caminada*, Edna is running away from church. Gilbert argues that Edna “has abandoned the suffocation of traditional Christian (that is, traditional patriarchal) theology for the rituals of an alternative, possibly matriarchal but certainly female religion” (54). A dominant feature of primitive, matriarchic religion has been the celebration of female sexuality and the liberation from shame and guilt. Thus, right after abandoning the church, Edna is for the first time aware of her body: “She ran her fingers through her loosened hair for a while. She looked at her round arms as she held them straight up and rubbed them one after the other, observing closely, as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh” (62). Edna’s discovery of her ability to release a sensuality that does not comply with social standards transports her to the fantasy world where everything is permissible and where she does not have to hide lest she should be labelled “immoral” or “selfish” (Jack 178). This is why when she wakes up, Edna feels she is completely detached from the real world: “‘How many years I have slept?’ she inquired. ‘The whole island seems changed. A new race of

being must have sprung up, leaving only you and me as past relics” Robert continues, “[y]ou have slept precisely one hundred years. I was left here to guard your slumbers; and for one hundred years I have been out under the shed reading a book” (63). Edna enters a fictitious world where mythical events are real and where reality is merely an imagination (Gilbert 54). Edna dreams of a liberating love relationship in a world of her own, a world isolated from reality. For Edna, then, Robert promises not only an offer of an unconditional love which is both reciprocated by her and ironically free of pain of rejection as it never touches reality, but also promises a world of an awakened sensuality with no shame or guilt, being detached from the actualizations of the real world.

The ideal love and freedom Robert offers Edna becomes the measure and the criterion for Edna’s options which she encounters at Grand Isle, options which potentially promise a reconciliation between her inner and her outer self. The first option is the role of “the mother-woman,” the epitome of which is Adèle Ratignolle. Ironically enough Edna is attracted to Adèle not because of the latter’s maternal role regarding her children, but due to the maternal role Adèle assumes towards Edna herself. Adèle appears to be the first figure in Edna’s life who takes up the role of the mother. First, the physical charm of Adèle attracts Edna. The Creole is a “faultless Madonna” (20), her “excessive physical charm” (26) magnetizes Edna who has “a sensuous susceptibility to beauty” (26). When Madame Ratignolle lays her hand over Edna’s hand, Edna clasps it “firmly and warmly” (30). Confronted with Adèle’s excessive expressiveness, Edna “put[s] her head down on Madame Ratignolle’s shoulder [feeling] flushed and . . . intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor. It muddled her like wine, or like a first breath of freedom” (33). The words “physical charm,” “sensuous,” the touching of the hands and the startled response to the physical contact introduce

to Edna a newly experienced feeling of intoxication. What can be simplistically seen as a homosexual desire actually marks Edna's emotional confusion at Grand Isle and her inability to discern and express her feelings. Edna's sweeping attraction to Adèle can be due to the Creole's prominent role as a mother who emotionally touches Edna and gives her a glimpse of the unconditional motherly love she so much longs for. In addition, Adèle's love and care for Edna bears the stamp of social approval while her Creole background encourages freedom of expression for the much restricted Edna (Wolff, "Thanatos and Eros" 457).

Initially, Adèle seems to provide a model for Edna; however, she soon fails her as Edna is discouraged by the exclusive role of the submissive wife which Adèle appears to promote. Adèle's sole existence rotates around her children and her husband. She is a typical example of the "mother-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" (16). Indeed, Adèle is either religiously focused on her husband, "interested in everything he said, laying down her fork the better to listen" (93) or sewing and making patterns for her children (17). She demands continuous attention to her "condition" as a pregnant woman persisting to make it "the subject of conversation" (18).

In their discussion of the angel woman, Gilbert and Gubar argue that women turned themselves into art objects (817). Edna sees Adèle exemplifying the "angel" woman, having annihilated her personality. For Edna, Adèle is selfless as the mother-role commands her to do; she is a woman who has effaced her identity for the sake of her husband and children. In her interaction with her husband, she resembles a vessel. She does not talk or express her opinion except in company of women. The success of her relation with her husband is based on the acceptance of her role as a subordinate with no personality. For Adèle, the only means to acquire

an identity and receive attention to herself is through childbearing; thus the “snowy,” immobile, dead-like “angel” woman is silent and the only way of self-expression for her is through the same tool that silences her. In other words, the submissive woman, devoid of autonomy, employs the means which oppresses her in order to assert herself. It is only through a socially approved act that a woman can build an “I” and acquire a voice for herself. Through child-bearing, not only does Adèle satisfy “the hegemonic ideal of women in her society” (Gray 57), she also perpetuates it.

Edna is repulsed by the model Adèle offers. She realizes that “a life of feminine submission, of ‘contemplative purity,’ is a life of silence, a life that has no pen and no story” (Gilbert and Gubar 824). For her “to be selfless is not to be noble, it is to be dead” (Gilbert and Gubar 817). Edna finds it hard to tolerate the institution of marriage of the nineteenth century. For one thing she is against the patriarchal ideology of a life of submission to a husband against which she has been helpless so far. For the first time, Edna realizes that she wants her “pen” and her “story.” Urged by the newly awoken feeling for Robert, Edna realizes that submission to a husband means eternal silence for her inner imaginary self which at this point conflicts with the traditional self to see light. Edna thus begins a series of initially mild and progressively more serious rebellions against her husband starting with refusing to have sex with him, “her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant” (53). Sex for the mother-woman is not for pleasure; it is “an act of passivity and procreation within marriage” (Gray 58). With the first throbs of desire for Robert, Edna refuses to have sex with Léonce and, for the first time, she dissociates herself and her body from a wife’s role. Even more, she refuses to satisfy her own erotic desire through submission to a social role; unlike Adèle, Edna is unwilling “to disguise her erotic drives in the mantle of ‘motherhood’ . . . [and] indulge the many delights of the body as Adèle patently does .

. . . such a capitulation would not allow her really to possess her own feelings . . . It would maim the 'self,' not unify and affirm it" (Wolff, "Un-Untterable Longing" 18). These feelings are now for Robert, the person who keeps Edna safe in terms of the fact that when she rejects the submission to a husband, there stands for her a potential lover whose love for her does not depend on her subordination but rather depends on her emotions for him.

Another reason why Edna is repulsed by Adèle is the former's inability to submit to the predominant institution of motherhood. Although a mother of two young children, Edna herself is still a child "travers[ing] the ocean of waving grass" (31). In search of unconditional, motherly love, Edna is looking for a loving, parenting figure, first in Léonce who is revealed to perpetuate her father's control and patriarchy, and then in Adèle who accepts her and generously offers her love but whose submissive mentality Edna finds impossible to identify with. Edna herself searches for a parent and deprived as she is of the care and affection of a mother, Edna is unable to offer the same emotions to her children. She has never been "nurtured" in order to "nurture" and, accordingly, "[s]he remains tied to an unsatisfied maternal longing that forces her either to subordinate herself to, or divorce herself from, her own children" (Fox-Genovese 284). In other words, Edna fails to be an affectionate and a loving mother. Relieved at their absence (26, 33,120) or impatient with her children (79), Edna is struggling between her duties as a mother and her desire to break free from their responsibility. Moreover, one can argue that Edna applies her own relationship with her father to her children. The parental love demanded her subordination and was marked with pain of rejection. As one may notice, it is the same dichotomy of subordination/ isolation (Jack 175) that started with her sisters and friends. Terrorized at being subordinated to her children, Edna chooses to isolate herself from them. Indeed, Edna sees her relationship with her children as based on her submission to their

continuous needs. And as she is “reproached” by her husband for neglecting their children (13), the latter become, albeit unknowingly, a source of a similar authority and coercion deepening her old, childhood trauma.

Renouncing the role of the mother-woman, and desperate to find ways to express her newly found self, Edna resorts to the role of the “artist-woman” as embodied by Mlle. Reisz. Still searching for the lost mother’s love, Edna is attracted to Mlle. Reisz, a female artist who promises affection and communication through music. Camastra underlines the importance of music in Edna’s change noting that music “encourages the epiphany that facilitates Edna’s awakening. Ultimately, the role of those plaintive strains on the piano proves integral to her illumination” (157). For instance, before even Mlle. Reisz plays the piano for Edna for the first time, Edna remembers a piece she herself had named “solitude”; when she listened to it “there came before her imagination the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him” (44). The naked man is an apt metaphor for Edna’s fragile emotions and her isolation as well as her vulnerability and fear that she might remain silenced forever. Freedom becomes a distant dream flying away from her like a bird. Edna’s vision represents the darkness of her inner world and its despondent solitude. Edna’s inner self needs to emerge after long concealment and this rise in her emotions is facilitated by Mlle. Reisz’s music: “the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body” (44-45). The effect of Mlle Reisz’s art is crucial for Edna as it helps her open the eyes of her soul. Mlle Reisz’s music arouses powerful emotions in Edna and touches her soul, making her aware for the first time of her “splendid body” (45) which for the first time is registered as “splendid”.

Soon after the first sparks of her awakening, Edna learns to swim in the sea; her experience comes suddenly and resembles a baptism and a mystical rebirth (Gilbert 51-52). The sea itself acquires a new significance after this moment. Engulfed by the sea, Edna feels empowered in its realm. The sea becomes a female entity which encloses her body in a sensuous and liberating way. Edna is overwhelmed by her desire to “swim far out, where no woman had swum before” (47). When she is able finally to control her body and swim, she becomes “intoxicated with her newly conquered power” (48). The word “intoxicated” has been previously used with regard to Adèle when Edna felt that “she was flushed and felt intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor” (33). The same word is used again to indicate the effect the touch of the waves has on Edna and the liberating nature of this experience for her. In the sea Edna finds “space and solitude . . . As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself” (48). The sea, like the mother, has “infinite” space of water/love that encloses Edna. And, indeed, Edna would lose herself in the infinite sea; in other words, she would let herself be enfolded by infinite emotions of a lost mother. What the sea does is what Mlle. Reisz’s music does to Edna: arousing her inner soul’s unvoiced emotions.

Since Mlle. Reisz’s music encourages Edna to voice her feelings and shakes her inner self from its slumber, the model of the “artist-woman” appears promising in that it can help Edna set her inner self free. Edna’s art is painting. And painting is infinite like the sea as it invites Edna to liberate her inner self. Wolff explains that “Edna’s painting might offer her an excellent and viable mood for coming to terms with the insistent demands of cosmic yearning. For one thing, it utilizes in an effective way her habit of transforming the act of observing the external world into an act of incorporation: to some extent the artist must use the world in this way,

incorporating it and transforming it in the act of artistic creation” (“Thanatos and Eros” 465). Indeed, Edna manages, to some extent, to voice her silenced emotions towards the outer world through art. Edna paints three characters: Adèle (22), her father (113-114), and her children (96). The act of painting is an act of control. When Edna draws Adèle, she “silences” her and rejects her submission (Schweitzer 173). When she draws her father, Edna takes the position of the subject being the artist, while he takes that of the object (Gray 65). Reversing the roles, she becomes the hegemonic force and he, the submissive; she becomes the authority, and he, the subordinate. In drawing her children, Edna tries to control the needs and demands of her children for her by stripping herself of her role as a mother and stressing her identity as an artist. Clearly Edna tries to exorcize the people who control her. However, Edna’s painting, as a way of liberating her inner self, seems to be feeble. It has already been noticed that Edna’s artistic work is “erratic and controlled by her moods” (Franklin 522). Eventually she fails to take the art as a way of salvation: “Art, for Edna, ultimately becomes not a defense against inner turmoil, merely a reflection of it” (Wolff, “Thanatos and Eros” 466). Indeed, Edna takes art as a defense mechanism and it becomes simply a mirror of her reality. When Edna draws Adèle or her father or her children she only attempts to control them in a way but she does not overcome them or what they stand for. The cultural hegemony expressed through Adèle, her father, and her children still exists and dominates her. The question, though, remains: why Edna renounces art as a way of salvation?

Mlle. Reisz who is the epitome of the “artist-woman” is described as “disagreeable little woman . . . who had quarreled with almost everyone, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others”; having “absolutely no taste in dress” (43). Edna is repulsed by the life style Mlle. Reisz offers because, as the “artist-woman,”

she has a sense of autonomy but lacks love which Edna frantically searches for (Gray 63). In return for her autonomy, the pianist has given up her “sexuality, love, and femininity,” and has obtained “a divorce from community” (Gray 63). A quick look at Mlle. Reisz’s “rusty black lace” and “artificial violets” (43) reveals how barren and flavorless such an existence seems to Edna and explains why she refuses to follow this path. The heroine’s rebellion against conformity in her life and her desperate attempts to disclose her inner imaginary world are built upon not only a sweeping desire for motherly/unconditional love, but also upon mutual emotional love, connection as well as femininity and sexuality, the values the artist-woman is deprived of and which Robert’s world, on the other hand, stands for and is seemingly ready to bestow upon her.

It is after she has met Robert that Edna’s conflict between her inner and her outer self reaches its peak. Before her visit to Grand Isle she seemed resolved to keep her inner self silent, even if she was disappointed at her life as a wife and a mother; now, merged into the Creole atmosphere, Edna is introduced to the liberating experience of self-expression. In this exhilarating setting, Robert appears as a fantasy-like lover who awakens her to the potential of a rebellion against her role as a wife and a mother and even against the role of an artist, offering her in return a more alluring imaginary world colored with possible freedom.

Since Robert nourishes Edna’s imaginary world rather than the real one, when he leaves for Mexico, Edna romanticizes their story and exaggerates its dimensions. Robert is then “magically present as a phantom, an object in her own imagination” (Wolff, “Thanatos and Eros” 455). Had Robert stayed, Edna would have been in danger of “fus[ing] the outer and the inner ‘selves’” (Wolff, “Thanatos and Eros” 455). That is to say, Edna longs for intimacy only as long as her inner world and outer facade are separated and as long as her inner self with its fictitious

world is safely remote from the real one. She does not want to bring these two worlds together because of her deep fear of rejection. The same fear of rejection drives Edna, first, to protect her hidden fictitious self by leaving her imaginary love stories and marrying Léonce. Upon realizing that Léonce is no more than a copy of her authoritative father, Edna is attracted to Robert and becomes involved in an “imaginary” love story. Her relationship with Robert follows the pattern of a fairy-tale and lives on fictitious language in a fictitious world governed by a holiday spirit. Although it happens in the real world, it is fictitious in the sense that it avoids any encounters with realities of pain and suffering of real life; again, Edna protects her fictitious world from such imperfections and as soon as Robert leaves she gets involved with a Léonce-like man: Alcée Arobin. Edna’s mind thinks the same way it did when she married Léonce; she can get intimate with Arobin since “no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution” (33).

It is crucial that Edna liaises herself with Arobin without being emotionally attached to him. First, as Wolff argues, for Edna “a significant attachment with a real man would involve relinquishing the fantasy of total fulfillment with some fantasy lover” (“Thanatos and Eros” 466). In other words, Edna strives to protect her fictitious self and her new imaginary love story with Robert. She is startled, however, to find that her fairy-tale is touching the reality of suffering and pain and even depression, for when Robert leaves “life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation” (97). Upon finding that the fairy-tale is starting to acquire an “aspect of genuineness” (32), Edna involves herself with Arobin, the same way in the past that she protected her imaginary one-sided love stories through marrying Léonce. Both work, at some point in Edna’s life, as narcotics that soothe her after an impending danger of touching reality

and experiencing pain and both offer to give her love while she is emotionally distant and safe. Moreover, Arobin establishes Edna in the society as a “free-woman” (Gray 56) opposing the cultural hegemony. By enjoying sexual gratification in a male-dominated world, Edna acquires a voice and self-expression through her body. This is why Edna is so voluptuous in her sex with Arobin, because she rebels through sex and speaks through sex; thus, we find Arobin “had detected the latent sensuality, which unfolded under his delicate sense of her nature’s requirements like a torpid, torrid, sensitive blossom” (173). Edna’s affair with Arobin transforms her potentials and possibilities. So far, Edna has silenced her emotions and has managed to hide her esoteric world. Now, Edna decides not *to meet the real world* (Laing 137) but to release her inner fictitious self in the real world. While Edna’s interaction with the Creole society establishes her mind and soul in the mode of rebellion, her affair with Arobin takes this rebellion to the “action” level. That is to say, an audacious act like forbidden sex gives Edna the potential of imposing (not fusing or confronting) her inner self with its imaginary romantic appeals on a world of harsh realities. Such a forbidden affair blazes up Edna’s will to voice her long hidden and silenced desire for an imaginary world that is free from pain.

When Robert returns to New Orleans, neither he nor Edna is on holiday any more. They do not share the flexible, alternative setting of the island any longer. Thus, he adopts the male-dominated language of the city and business world refusing to use the feminine language which marked his first encounter with Edna on the island. His language becomes dry, strict and “proper”: ““Mrs. Pontellier! How do you happen—oh! how well you look! Is Mademoiselle Reisz not here? I never expected to see you”” (162). Back to the “real world” of town and business, Robert respects social rules and order. Robert’s changed attitude jeopardizes Edna’s fantasy of her fairy tale love story with him; evidently, Robert “had seemed nearer to her off

there in Mexico” (170). He is near at Mexico because Edna is able to exaggerate his romantic nature through reminiscence. When Robert’s respect for the demands of the real world threatens Edna’s fairy tale, she attempts to regain his “feminine aura” along with the emotional, the unconditional, liberating love relationship she indulged in at Grand Isle. To do so, Edna resorts to a role reversal (Schweitzer 176): “Leaning over him, [Edna] asks if he is asleep and kisses him for the first time, completely inverting the gender roles of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale” (177). Edna now uses her body again (as she learned before through her liaison with Arobin) as a tool of self-expression. Then, finding a voice, she speaks up for the first time against the male-dominated culture accusing Robert of being a part of it: “I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into a habit of expressing myself” (175). When Robert explains that he hesitates because she is Léonce Pontellier’s wife, Edna asserts her independence declaring: “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose” (178). At this moment Edna renounces her social role and appears determined to impose the space of her inner world, the world where Robert sensuously encloses her as a feminine entity with his unconditional love, on the space of her outer real world.

However, this perfection grows only in her imagination. It grew with Robert because he nourished this fictive world with his feminine-like language and then with his absence which helped Edna to exaggerate her fantasy about him. But now Robert is here in New Orleans and a real chance for a real relationship opens in front of Edna. As Wolff puts it, Robert’s return “moves the static, imaginary ‘love affair’ into a new and crucial stage; it tests, once and for all, Edna’s capacity to transform her world of dreams into viable reality” (“Thanatos and Eros” 468). And Edna fears the reality; when she is summoned to Adèle’s accouchement, she leaves Robert and runs to Adèle despite his pleading: “Don’t go, don’t go! Oh! Edna, stay with me” (179).

Indeed, to stay with Robert for Edna at this moment means the transformation of the relationship from the level of the imaginary to a new level of the real. Edna risks losing Robert and yet she leaves. The reason why she does so is that the “real” Robert may prove unfulfilling at the end. Moreover, the “real” Robert would kill the more tempting “imaginary” one who is more related to her search for the fusion with the infinite (Wolff, “Thanatos and Eros” 468). Indeed, the infinite is not related to real; it is related to the imaginary; that is to say, Edna’s search for infinite love is logically more affiliated with an “imaginary” lover rather than “a flesh and blood” lover” (Wolff, “Thanatos and Eros” 468). Although Robert exists in the real world, Edna perceives only his silhouette as a lover whose relation dwells in a fantasy world, using a language that is totally devoid of what real life language entails of suffering, rejection and pain.

The scene of Adèle’s accouchement is a completion rather than a suspension of the last scene with Robert. Edna runs away from Robert because she believes that real relations end in separation and because she is after a larger union, a union between her and the “unlimited” (48). Once this unlimited were the silhouettes of a cavalry officer, an engaged young man and a tragedian. Their quality of being unrealizable painted them with colors of infinity. Robert was another unlimited silhouette using the fantasy-like feminine language to nourish her fictive world. Edna now must escape the “real” Robert as he, indeed, may “prove an imperfect, unsatisfactory substitute for the ‘beloved’ of her dreams” (Wolff, “Thanatos and Eros” 468), thus, ruining her fictitious world.

Adèle’s accouchement with its “ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go” (181-182) gives Edna insight to the futility of union with a lover. Wolff explains that: “if pregnancy offers a

state of total union, then birth is the initial separation: for the child it is the archetypal separation trauma; for the mother, too, it is a significant psychic trauma. It is the ritual reenactment of her own birth and a brutal reawakening to the world of isolated ego". Wolff continues that Edna's awakening "is an awakening to separation, to individual existence, to the hopelessness of ever satisfying the dream of total fusion" ("Thanatos and Eros" 470). Edna goes through a second transition at this moment. The first was when she fantasized a form of liberation in falling in love with Robert. The one that she goes through at this point is a transition from the imaginary world of the union with the beloved to the real world which begins, when it does, with separation and rejection of "a little new life" (182) to remain fused in the womb. With the cutting of the umbilical cord not only the "little new life" is separated from the mother forever, but also all the imaginary, dream-like relationships somehow end in the same separation with the same pain of rejection.

Consequently Edna starts to open her eyes, first, to the fact that her fusion fantasy with a lover is subjected to annihilation because of the inevitable separation that permeates human existence. Edna starts doubting whether Robert who is flesh and blood can be subjected to the same rules that direct imaginary characters. Moreover, Edna realizes that being a mother herself, she can no longer resist the reality of motherhood which is a reality of painful separation. Adèle urges her to "[t]hink of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children!" (182). Edna thinks of herself as a child: the motherly love she is after her whole life ends in separation. As Adèle implores Edna to take her own children into consideration, the latter thinks that such a separation results in "a little new life" (182). Edna realizes that if she renounces her role as a mother, her children will re-live her own life, a life of searching for a state of imaginary union with the

motherly unconditional love and she also realizes her complete psychological paralysis to do anything towards that.

Nonetheless, Edna has still a thread of hope to cling to: Robert waits for her at home. And she promised that she will “come back” (179). Indeed she will come back but not to Robert as a “real” experience but to a fictitious idealization of a future relationship with him (especially that she left him at the moment of their relationship consummation and her promise of coming back to him does not necessarily mean that she will come back to a “consummation” of a real rather than an imaginary relationship): “All the tearing emotion of the last few hours seemed to fall away from her like a somber, uncomfortable garment, which she had but to loosen to be rid of. . . . When she thought that he was there at hand, waiting for her, she grew numb with the intoxication of expectancy” (185). Indeed, Robert has been another “intoxicant” for Edna, the one who alleviates the harshness of the outer world realities. When Edna finds that Robert has left—as he feels it is an impossible affair, given that Edna is a married woman—Edna realizes that she has to admit what she has learned tonight: the imaginary world she has created for herself is precarious and Robert, who represents an intoxicant that nourishes her inner fantasy world, is gone forever, leaving her with no alternatives.

Walking down the beach, Edna experiences her ultimate awakening, the awakening to the reality of separation and her never-ending responsibility for her children. Edna thinks that “[t]here was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone” (188-189). Edna realizes that Robert is not significant in himself but in what he represents and she sees now that “all her lovers have really been of but fleeting significance” (Wolff, “Thanatos and Eros” 468). Therefore, “[Edna’s] devastation . . . is removed from the

realm of romantic disappointment; and we must see Edna's final suicide as originating in a sense of inner emptiness, not in some finite failure of love" (Wolff, "Thanatos and Eros" 469). That is to say, Edna's devastation is not a result of a frustrated love story, but due to the psychological makeup of Edna herself who is terrorized by rejection; thus by real relationships throughout her life with people around her. Among these people are her children who "appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her, who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days" (189). Gray explains that "[b]ecause of her strong interpellation as a mother, a role dictated for married women by hegemonic ideology in her society, [Edna] finds that she cannot exist in an alternative or oppositional female role" (54). Edna is not able to sustain real relationships and at the same time is obliged to maintain them. Unable to find a way out of her dilemma, Edna escapes to a memory in her childhood.

Edna thinks of "the bluegrass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end" (190). When she was traversing the meadow Edna was running away from the real world to the imaginary world. Awakening to the fact that the imaginary fantasy-like world cannot dominate the real life which encloses limitations and separations and restrictions, Edna searches for a substitute for the meadow, or the imaginary world. Edna once linked the meadow to the ocean: "a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water" (29-30). May be then if she gives herself to the sea, she will achieve that union that she cannot find in life. Edna's suicide is a refusal to accept "the limitations of reality" (Gilbert 57). Not only does she refuse reality but also she questions it through her suicide: the reality of a patriarchal society; the reality of submission to rules, the reality of children who pose restrictions, and even the

reality of separation that is woven in the threads of life. Edna lived her life afraid to touch reality, to be in real relationships or accept the obligations of real relationships because she knows that reality is full of rejection; and throughout her whole life she tries in every possible way to evade that pain. The only way out is to run/swim through the waves of the meadow grass/ sea: “The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude” (189). Like the ideal mother Edna has been looking for, the sea receives her unconditionally. And Edna does fuse with the sea. Dyer expresses the view that “the ambiguous sea supports the puzzling but wonderful possibility that we are to view Edna not as dead but, rather, as yet unborn” (114). Indeed Edna hides in the womb of the sea, naked and despondent like the man in the vision, waiting for the right moment, when the reality is more alluring, to be reborn, a young free woman.

III-Chapter II: The Open Door: Shaping Identity

“In the space of the ‘I’ you have been living, miserable, because deep down you do believe in liberation, in letting go, in sacrificing your selfish desires for the larger whole, in love, in an ever-renewing fertile life” (Al-Zayyat, The Open Door 218/210).²

Layla Sulayman, the heroine of Al-Zayyat’s The Open Door, lives alienated from her father, mother and brother who try to imprison her within the boundaries of tradition and social rules. Layla’s relationship with her father is introduced when Layla, as a child, tries to get outside of the closed door of her home to search for her brother Mahmud who joins the demonstrations of 1946:

[Layla] reached for the sliding bolt. Her father’s lips trembled, his face going even whiter as he raised eyes so faded they might have been gazing from a corpse rather than from Sulayman Effendi. He stared at his daughter. “Where’re you going?” he asked in low, edgy tones. “To look for Mahmud.” At her words and the hint of defiance in her voice, his dreary eyes flashed. He closed them. “Get back inside.” (6/3)

The short conversation between the father and the daughter foreshadows a future tension of defiance against power, struggle against parental authority and desire for free choice against the threat of subjugation. The girl wants to unlock herself free while the father subjugates her with his authoritative gaze ordering her to “[g]et back inside,” as if the normal place for a girl is

² All references to pagination are based on Al-Bab al-Maftuh (1960) and its translation, The Open Door (2002). The first number in parenthetical notes refer to the English translation, the second following the slash to the Arabic.

inside the closed entity of the traditional sphere. The father is not willing to discuss and convince Layla but only issues orders; his behavior not only anticipates the austerity and patriarchal authority he will exercise on Layla when she enters adulthood but also represents social boundaries and expectations.

Then comes a new stage of Layla's development; she is no more the child who wants to reach for the sliding bolt; rather, she now enters the world of womanhood, a turning point in her life. Zeidan argues that when Layla reaches the age of menstruation, "[t]he beginning of this age is marked by a bloodstain that appears on Layla's skirt and is removed with a knife by her cousin in the school's bathroom (not surprisingly, symbols of violence are associated with the process of sexual maturity)" (166). This violence is echoed hours later in the novel when the father grieves because of his daughter's sexual development, giving orders that mainly aim at confining her within the boundaries of the house. The father tries to control his daughter's developing body. A woman with potential sexual desires, Layla must be imprisoned within controlled boundaries. Ironically, the father himself is bound by fear of his daughter's possible desire to cross these boundaries. According to Naji, a patriarch draws his strength from his position as someone else's master. He treats people under his control as his slaves and gives them material possessions on condition that they do not leave his prison. If the slave cannot acknowledge his position and authority, the possessive patriarch falls into deep fear which translates into more rules to strengthen his position by imposing an even stricter sexist policy (Surat Al-Rajul 41). Under this light, one can see Layla's father as the master in the patriarchal setting of his home. He loves Layla as his property and keeps her secluded in the house, imprisoned like a slave. When Layla attempts to defy him, this increases his fear of losing control of her. Layla, however, realizes, early enough, that her relation with her father is based on her subjugation as well as on

their mutual fear: “She grew to the realization that to reach womanhood was to enter a prison where the confines of one’s life were clearly and decisively fixed . . . Prison life, she discovered, is painful for both the warden and the woman he imprisons. The warden cannot sleep at night, fearful that the prisoner will fly, anxious lest that prisoner escape the confines” (24/21). Layla feels alienated from and entrapped by her father, the first warden who stands at the closed door of her home.

The second warden is Layla’s mother who, reproducing the patriarchal values, tries to teach them to the confined Layla. The mother herself has surrendered to the patriarchal ruler and knows nothing but to walk in “a hushed tiptoe as she turn[s] this way and that, peering everywhere with anxious eyes to reassure herself that all was properly prepared . . . vigilant not to commit any act that might draw censure” (29/25). Layla’s mother is herself entrapped and oppressed, but she is a stern believer in the restricted and socially accepted role of women and, therefore, blind to her own subordination, she tries to teach her daughter how to be like her. When Layla enters adolescence, her mother introduces her to the rules of propriety which are governed by the logic of the marriage market with an emphasis on what would make a girl a good sell and what would make her undesirable (25/22). In this sexist market, Layla’s value is determined by the value of her body. Layla bitterly comments that “[w]henver a girl was born, they smiled in resignation. When she began to grow up, they imprisoned her, and trained her in the art—yes, the art of—life! They taught her to smile, to yield to others, to wear perfume, to exude sympathy. And to lie—to wear a corset that would pull in her middle and lift her chest so her price would go up in the market and she could marry” (41/36).³

³ Al-Zayyat echoes this form of parenting talking about her own mother: “My mother, the oppressed female, oppressed me in order to fit into an oppressive society which accepts only oppressed females. My mother taught me not to do, not to say, not to express; she would silence my voice before it rose. She blessed my negativity, and classified my positivity as aggression; she taught me how to smile, how to bow; she would

Layla objects to the mother's conformism and her diligent attention to appearances. Her objection alienates her even more from her family, driving her to feel entrapped in the house and the social circle it represents. Layla realizes that she cannot easily "open the door" and break free from the surveillance of her mother and the marriage market which controls and objectifies her. In this restricting domestic space, Layla "walked as if bound in heavy chains, dragging her body behind her, shoulders hunched and head pitched forward as if determined to get where she was going with the utmost haste before she could possibly attract the glances of others" (27/24). Unwilling to blindly follow the traditional world, Layla feels estranged from her immediate environment.

To escape the pressures of her reality, Layla creates a fictitious world. From the comfort of her room, the young teenager daydreams and transforms her small world:

Here in her room she found her own world, too, the realm into which she could withdraw whenever she wanted; her world, in which she stood alone, at a distance from everyone else in the house . . . All she wanted was to be left alone in her room, as far away as she could be from others. That was why she was constantly conciliating everyone around her. She wanted no voice invading her hidden world. If she were to show the slightest rebelliousness or excitability, her mother would scold her by the hour. Her father would yank her from bed to deliver a lesson in morals. No, she wanted no silly business from outside to distract her from this marvelous private world. (32-33/28)

In order to escape the mundane preaching of her parents, Layla distances herself from them and invests in a dual personality: an outer conformist façade and an inner rebellious mind. The inner rebellious self seeks refuge in a fictitious world where she can daydream of an ideal love

always subdue my anger. My mother tamed me and removed my nails" ("Al-Katib wa Al-Hurriah" 14; my translation).

relationship (36-38/32-33) that transports her from the closed entity of her home to an ethereal space where “[t]he light of the moon would shimmer through the tree branches, throwing golden patches onto the garden path; the fragrance of narcissus would encase them” (37/32). Layla escapes her alienation and entrapment to an imaginary world where she is loved and desired and consequently free of her wardens and her prison.

However, if Layla is fighting marginalization and confinement at her home, one might wonder what gives her imagination the material to weave such imaginary scenarios? Restricted as she is into a closed and controlled space, how can she dream of a free world and know its features? What causes and maintains Layla’s “split” personality, oscillating between the outer conformist self and the inner rebellious mind? The answer can possibly be traced in the dichotomy of Layla’s contemporary world. While Layla is encouraged to be educated and therefore step out of the house, at the same time, she is required to submit to her father, husband and society. As a result, women are at a loss, caught between modern social requests and traditional social expectations (Naji, Al-Mar’ah 43). Had Layla been raised solely by her mother and father in a traditional manner with no external influences, she would have probably unquestionably adopted the “fundamentals” (44/39). However, Layla is exposed to the world outside home, to the new ideas, circulating freely at school and in the company of her friends. Layla’s friend, Adila, explains the dilemma of their generation:

we’re lost. We don’t understand—are we the harem or not? We don’t know whether love is *haram*, prohibited by our religion, or permitted, *halal*. Our families say it’s *haram* while the state radio day and night sings love love love, and books tell a girl, ‘Go on, you’re free and independent,’ and if a girl believes *that* she’s got a disaster on her hands and her reputation will go to hell. (79/71)

The world outside the confinement of Layla's home is stimulating and intriguing and its diversity provides her with the necessary material to build her fictitious world. However, this outer world does not only inspire Layla with imaginary love stories, it also awakens her to the social reality of the national struggle. Unlike her imaginary love stories, the national struggle is a real rebellion, tangible and feasible, taking place outside her doorstep. The revolution requires active participants and Layla's early involvement into it reveals to her what it means to be a determined and decisive individual. In the love story she is weaving in her imagination, the Prince Charming "take[s] her into his arms and tri[es] to kiss her" (38/33); however and realistically, Layla is loved and desired but still plays the role of the object, the trophy of the prince. Now, in the national struggle she is the subject and she can discover her individuality. Layla's escape into her imaginary world is dwarfed by the real world of the national struggle. Moreover, the national struggle presents Layla with a real (rather than imaginary) conflict between her as a young, oppressed woman on the one hand and her parents and society in the role of the subjugating force on the other. This conflict takes place in the form of the opposition of two social modes: the first mode is structured by the authoritative father and submissive mother who work on taming their daughter inside defined boundaries. The second mode is created by Layla who begins to be conscious of the importance of an action towards herself and the nation at the same time (Othman 127). In other words, Layla becomes conscious of her ability to find a voice and a *place* through the national struggle.

The form of social struggle that is available to Layla is very simple, yet liberating: joining a demonstration. It is at the demonstration, Zeidan argues, that Layla perceives a shift of her body from being a sexual entity and a property to an active and individual entity: "she is shy and self-conscious about her 'full body' and feels that she is a sex object. When she blends into

the crowd at the demonstration, she is overwhelmed by a state of exultation” (Zeidan 167). By rebelling against colonizing forces, Layla also rebels against the social rules. She feels liberated from the confined domestic space and lives for a few moments with “the crowd of thousands, and herself melting into the whole. Everything around her was propelling her forward, everything, everyone, surrounding her, embracing her, protecting her. She began all of a sudden to shout again, in that voice that belonged to someone else, a voice that joined her whole self to them all” (51/45). Instead of feeling threatened and “exposed” in the crowd, Layla feels protected. Joining forces with the people, Layla acquires a new voice, a new identity which is not dependent on any man or any “imaginary” love story and which also objects to the “forced submission to rules and traditions, which, [she] discovers, have no real value, but have been transformed into masks for social hypocrisy” (Elsadda 121). She, rather, explores a new self which draws its strength from the people and their common cause, the people who were “surrounding her, embracing her [and] protecting her” (51/45), and who give her a *place* and a sense of belonging.

Layla emerges from this experience with a high sense of dignity; she feels that for the first time she is an individual who can voice her views and express herself. When her father, outraged at her behavior, beats her after the demonstration, she feels dehumanized, treated as if she were nothing more than “[a] doormat for shoes” (55/49). Comparing between her newly—albeit briefly—experienced freedom and identity and her father’s despotic behavior, Layla feels exasperated, alienated from her own family, and trapped into the paternal home. She feels rejected and, behind the closed door of her room, her estrangement from her family reaches its climax: ““Where can I go? I could close a hundred doors but they still wouldn’t go away. They won’t leave me alone, they’re always there, even right now with the door shut tight. Always

there, my father, my mother, always there, bearing down on me, pressing down on my chest to squeeze my lungs to nothing” (52/46). Feeling isolated, Layla is left with no allies and support: “No one loved her; there was not even anyone there to treat her like a human being” (53/47). Even Layla’s brother, Mahmud, criticizes her behavior severely and considers her joining the demonstration unacceptable for a young woman (55/49). As Zeidan notes, “Mahmud is portrayed as a progressive and committed person, politically and socially, but his attitude vis-à-vis the role of women is obviously reactionary” (Zeidan 168). This response results in the appearance of a third and unexpected warden behind the closed door: Mahmud whom Layla loves lets her down through his stagnant and backward thinking.

Layla’s traumatic experience brings her back to the solitude of her self. She doubts her newly found courage that urged her to participate in the demonstration; and because of her deep sense of inability, Layla adopts the rules of society which dictate an inherently weak female existence: “After all—and first of all—she was a girl, and a girl was not really a person. Even if she had been a man she would not be able to go, for she was weak, and the honor of struggling for the sake of Egypt was not the destiny of the weak!” (65/57). Clearly, Layla escapes the confrontation with a frightful hegemonic power by which she feels dwarfed.

Forced back into the confinement of the family home and deprived of any freedom of choice, Layla is suffocating; in this moment of despair, Isam’s interest appears as a sign of the perfect love in which she is appreciated, accepted for who she is and free to experience and express her feelings. An ideal world is formed in Layla’s mind based upon the classical and conventional method of rebellion: the rebellion through a man. At the first touch of Isam (58/52), who, in her imagination, is elevated to the status of the ideal lover, Layla is inspired by the passion of the experience which energizes her. She not only reclaims her confidence that she can

be loved and accepted, but also maintains a belief that she is rebelling against those social norms that forbid such love. Indeed, Layla is dreaming of “a world of freedom in which she could love, and love without fear or anxiety, censure or regret . . . Her world was one in which she could show her feelings and express herself, like a bird flying unconstrained, in the full confidence that she was loved and desired, and yet was respectable too, and that everything she did was reasonable and acceptable” (61/55). Layla believes that since Isam is real, in contrast to the abstract ideal lover (36-38/32-33), then their love story must be real too. However, the fantasy-like world of a love relationship with Isam can be seen as equally “imaginary” as the previous ones which Layla has invented in her small room. Unaware of the futility of the classical idea of a male savior, Layla trusts Isam as the sole means of salvation in her life. However, Isam cannot provide Layla with the freedom and respect she longs for because he himself is part and product of the patriarchal society and the sexist way of thinking of the hegemonic system (Naji, Surat Al-Rajul 68). Imbued with the social credo regarding women’s value, Isam classifies women either as angels or as dissolute creatures (72/63). The first he can marry, the second he can desire. Perpetuating the established order, Isam claims Layla’s body as his “property” (135/130). When Layla defends her body from his authoritative claim, he resorts to violence (136/131). Isam thinks of sex as an act of aggression, conquest and victory because he reproduces the social stereotype that a man’s worth lies in his ability to subordinate a female. He creates for himself imaginary battles in which he achieves imaginary victories that make up for his inferiority complex (Al-Zayyat, Min Suwar Al-Mar’ah 80). Indeed, Isam has been taught to believe that his sexual desire is a proof of his masculinity ((Naji, Surat Al-Rajul 75). Being part of the patriarchal system, Isam is not interested in responding or even acknowledging women’s needs or emotions. Instead he uses his physical strength to conquer the female body maintaining his role as “the

powerful male” who harbors an insatiable need to dominate and control (Naji, Surat Al-Rajul 69).

Under this light, Isam’s affair with the maid acquires new dimensions as it is the result of the indirect oppression of the patriarchal society upon its male members. The latter suffer as much as the women, obliged as they are to prove themselves sufficiently domineering and powerful. However, Layla cannot see the complexity of Isam’s character as a product of patriarchy. Initially, she thinks of him as her savior, the compassionate lover who will offer her the freedom she longs for. When she discovers Isam’s betrayal, Layla realizes that she cannot trust him because he, who is associated with her rebellion and defiance, is revealed as worse than the patriarchal society she has been trying to escape; Isam is no more than a “caged animal” (88/81) himself, trapped in a corrupt “modern” social order.

When Layla finds out about Isam’s affair with the maid, Cairo is burning (151/145). The flames engulf the city and Layla’s mind. Looking at the mirror (152/147), Layla cannot see anything but her own image and Isam’s betrayal. Overwhelmed with bitterness and frustration and withdrawing into herself, Layla becomes indifferent to the political tragedy of Egypt and the importance of national struggle.

While earlier Isam’s love seemed real enough to come to her rescue from a world of constraints and limitations, it now fails her. In the wreck of the flames Layla feels abandoned, defeated, and more importantly, she has lost faith in resistance and rebellion altogether:

Everything inside of her was defeated, as if she had hefted a load that was really far too heavy for her capacity, and it had fractured her spine. Wasn’t that what she had done, in fact? For she had challenged her father and posed a threat to her mother. She had flown in the face of their accustomed practices, had rejected their most fundamental beliefs. She

had fallen in love. And then, she had been so determined to abandon their narrow world for a world that was alive, a world vast and wide and full! She had wanted—had willed—that she and Isam would build a world of light. In their world all would be beautifully transparent, authentic and basic, so unlike the world she knew. Theirs would be a world of love; it would be the beautiful world of truth. And then what had been the result of it all? Coffee spilt on the carpet; a darkened kitchen; a defeated body; earth, mud—nothing but the soiled surface of that world she had tried to flee. (155-156/150)

Deeply hurt by Isam's behavior, Layla hurries to the conclusion that her parents' morals and orders have been right in the first place. Having identified Isam with the ideal love, she now rejects both Isam and her dream world. She accepts instead the family's "fundamentals" (44/39) and compromises so as not to inflict more pain upon herself. For Layla, Isam is not only a lover; he is a world, a world of rebellion and the world in which she can assert her independence and free choice. However, her free choice leads her not to a beautiful truthful world, but rather to betrayal which she now associates not with an "individual" but with the whole world of rebellion and free choice.

At this turning point of pain and frustration appears Husayn Amir. Husayn realizes that Layla's dilemma is her imprisonment within the boundaries of the "I" (186/176) which drives her to draw her sense of identity from men around her leading her to be as fragile as a "crystal" (184-185/175). Husayn realizes that the only way out for Layla to find a voice and find strength is to draw her faith, not from men, but from the action of unifying with people and their concerns (186/176). He offers Layla a new opportunity to rebel not through a love relationship in which she depends upon him, but through a new faith in her ability to traverse a road all by herself and to eventually find something more important than a man, her identity and sense of self (191/183).

However, Layla turns Husayn's initiation down for she has been deeply traumatized and, bereft of her dream world, she has resorted to the secure traditions of her family and society. Layla rejects Husayn because she is afraid to invest her feelings in anything non-traditional and, therefore, risky. She did so with Isam and the result was betrayal and a "[c]offee spilt on the carpet" (156/150). Layla's society imposes a false identity upon her which is strictly defined by the fundamentals. These, in turn, deprive her of any prospects of an individual action (Al-Zayyat, Min Suwar Al-Mar'ah 38). Layla has accepted this fake identity hoping that, in this way, she protects herself from painful traumas like those she has already suffered in the past because of her rebellious acts.

Upon turning Husayn's ideas down, Layla meets professor Fouad Ramzi. She immediately registers "his pale, sober face empty of all expression, his frosty eyes ahead" (215/206); he wants her to "parrot his opinions" (230/221). Although "[h]is presence filled her with a fear that paralyzed her senses," he managed to attract her so that "[s]he could not take her eyes from him" (231/222). The description of the expressionless Dr. Ramzi conjures up images of Layla's father: "her father's taciturn, expressionless demeanor would appear, to impose his deathly stillness on everyone in the apartment" (29/25). Like Dr. Ramzi, Layla's father expects his daughter to parrot his opinion and his presence fills her with fear.

From the very beginning, Layla sees in Dr. Ramzi the image of her father. Having now endorsed the paternal views and having denounced her former rebellious ideas, Layla finds the father-figure professor attractive and yields to the traditional pattern of marriage: in her contemporary Egyptian society, the girl is transferred as a property from the father to the husband in order to perform the child-bearing role ascribed to her by society; it is a process in which all her instincts, emotions and aspirations are negated (Al-Zayyat, Min Suwar Al-Mar'ah

25). Layla now endorses these values which her generation is raised on. Having rebelled against them twice and got hurt, Layla now adopts these reactionary, yet familiar, ideas as a defense mechanism. To suppress her emotions, ignore her dreams, and consent to becoming a man's property is humiliating yet safe. As an example, Layla can see her mother, having lived all her life in the shadow of her husband, satisfying his sexual needs and bearing him children. This subordinate and dependent life of the mother has always been supported by the great power of tradition which has acknowledged the priority of man's need. Whoever abides by the fundamentals, says the mother, "[c]annot go wrong, and cannot weaken, and will not lose any confidence in her self" (44/39). By obeying the family rules, Layla hopes to regain her confidence, security and love, for indeed "the family has its plan already sketched out. And one has to follow through. If you do, you enjoy the love, affection, and accord of the family. But if you do not, thought Layla . . . the family will strike you down, as her father had done when she joined that demonstration. The family would withhold its love" (125/117-118). Thus, when Layla looks at Dr. Ramzi's expressionless face, she sees in him the perspective of her parents' marital life. In this predictable setting, Layla chooses to ignore the subordination, fear and deprivation; she rather focuses on the seeming confidence, security and lack of pain and this is exactly what attracts her to Dr. Ramzi.

Despite the security that Dr. Ramzi promises, the spark of rebellion against subordination is still alive in Layla. It is kept alive mainly through Layla's correspondence with Husayn who, although absent for years, manages to inspire Layla with his own struggle for the people, presenting her with the potential to look beyond "the space of the 'I'" (218/210) in order to acquire freedom and independence. This is why Layla experiences an esoteric struggle with Dr. Ramzi. She is attracted to him, yet "something within her warned her not to yield" because

“some sort of danger threatened from the direction of Dr. Ramzi, a danger she could not pinpoint at present” (231/222). Indeed, Husayn’s letter ignites Layla’s old rebellious self and she is able to detect a subtle danger in Dr. Ramzi. However, Dr. Ramzi proves stronger in this struggle. “[A] sculptor plying his chisel” (232/223), Dr. Ramzi knows how to manipulate Layla psychologically. Like a hypnotist, “his icy gaze” (240/234) tames and gradually subdues her. In her encounter with him, Layla is weak because her experience with Isam shattered her dream world and deemed her resistance and aspiration of freedom useless and futile. Having identified rebellion with the love of a man, Layla has dangerously limited her scope and has been a prisoner within the boundaries of her own self. Since her love for Isam ended in unpredictable frustration, she now invests in tradition which promises love secured by moral excellence and virtue. In this promising setting, Layla’s resistance is soon broken as Dr. Ramzi appears capable of providing her with emotional safety. His eyes are stiff promising consistency and protection of any future trauma as well as “gentle” (240/234), anticipating love based on traditions, truth, and purity.

Once Layla succumbs, Dr. Ramzi starts to delude her in order to convince her of his “perfect” world and principles. He fervently defends traditions and the fundamentals claiming that “[w]ithout them we would be like a tree without roots—the slightest breeze could sway it, and even knock it to the ground” (241/235). Layla is carried away by the metaphor because she had been knocked down to the ground in the past when she attempted to resist traditions. The image of a huge tree standing secure fascinates Layla because this is exactly what she longs for: stability, security and protection from pain.

Dr. Ramzi proves to be a complex character. The sophisticated extension of the patriarchal leader, Dr. Ramzi has developed a sense of duality in his personality (Naji, Surat Al-

Rajul 123). While he appears to be the defender of morals and traditions, Dr. Ramzi is actually driven by his sexual desires and degrades women by classifying them as clean or dirty, exclusive to him or “borrowed” by many (235/226). Dr. Ramzi’s intellectuality legitimizes and solidifies tradition when he presents it as the undeniable truth, preventing Layla from questioning it (‘Eid 160). Unaware of Dr. Ramzi’s double standards, Layla does not examine the inflexibility of the roots that would bind her to the ground, nor does she realize that these roots that Dr. Ramzi advocates are not hers but his and that it will rather enable him to reduce her to be his subordinate.

Layla is deceived and believes that she will receive not only security but also genuine love from Dr. Ramzi. She gradually stops objecting and intellectually surrenders to him. Tired of resisting and “drained of energy” (243/236), Layla is looking for support; Dr. Ramzi emerges in front of her as the steady wall she can lean on (243/236). Having identified traditions with morality and self-control, Layla now adopts Dr. Ramzi’s values: she goes along with what he denounces and becomes convinced of his likes and dislikes (244/237).

Despite the comfort and the promise of safety, Layla’s lethargic state is interrupted by a call which reminds her that there is more beyond her own self: “the door was now open for female students who might want to volunteer for the National Guard” (246/239). The “open door” image can be related to other alluring “doors” in Layla’s life: the door of the family house which she tried to open to join the demonstration, the door of her room where she retreated and dreamed of a perfect love in a perfect world with Isam; the door of a new world that Layla believes she is about to enter now that she has accepted and succumbed to Dr. Ramzi’s traditions. This call, now, however, is independent of Layla’s desires, needs, and associations. It is the real world of the people of Egypt, the same world Husayn urges her to join in and merge

with. In the lecture hall, the commander of the National Guard talks about the “value of women” and “the true equality being given to them for the first time” as if “the door to a strange world had opened before them” (247/240); meanwhile Layla notices:

A girl . . . declar[ing] to all in the vicinity that she had accepted the hand of that young man who had been courting her just to stop his pestering. A plump young woman complained to her classmate that her hair had dried out all of a sudden so that it now felt like straw; the classmate advised her to take a steambath, adding oil to the water. (246-247/239)

These two worlds clash in front of Layla’s eyes: the open door which promises freedom and equality and a world of superficiality. Once Layla joins the National Guard, “[t]he feelings that had abandoned her flooded back. She was capable and strong after all” (249/242). Layla collides, however, with Dr. Ramzi who claims that the national struggle is for the masses, not for the intellectuals (250/243). Dr. Ramzi tries to take Layla away from the reality of the national struggle offering her his own version of the world instead. Layla is presently lured to the conventional life presented to her by Dr. Ramzi: she agrees to marry him and even enjoys a surge of pride springing from “the looks of envy and curiosity that came her way” (252/246) by her colleagues now that she has become “Dr. Ramzi’s fiancée” (252/246). Layla prefers Dr. Ramzi’s world to her participation in the national struggle because she is confident that this marriage will restore and sustain her pride. She has already become the center of attention while preparing for a marriage that is socially approved and envied by her friends, and she rests assured that a safe personal and social setting is laying ahead of her.

With the perspective of her marriage to Dr. Ramzi, Layla has so far enjoyed pride, emotional security and social blessings. She is still, however, looking for love and hopes to

discover Dr. Ramzi's warmth and affection beneath the strict morality and rigid traditions. It is the latter, though, which promises protection from an act of betrayal (256/250). Growing anxious for a sign of his love, Layla asks Dr. Ramzi, on their engagement day, why he chose her to be his wife; his answer is revealing of his ethos: "Because you are compliant and quiet, and you listen to me, and you do what I say" (272/266). Dr. Ramzi accepts Layla only as a subdued creature who effaces any thoughts and feelings while being submissive and forgiving (Al-Zayyat, Min Suwar Al-Mar'ah 40). Layla is expected to gradually transform into a character-less being deprived of her personal features and shaped within a mould characterized by obedience (Al-Zayyat, Min Suwar Al-Mar'ah 40). Fatma Mahmoud describes Dr. Ramzi as "the incarnation of middle class hypocrisy and male arrogance, the new type of oriental husband, as despotic and self centered as the old die-hards but in modern European dress" (96). Infatuated by Dr. Ramzi, Layla is aware that he is part of the patriarchal society and that he wants a wife in a traditional mantle. However, she fancies that even though Dr. Ramzi follows tradition and looks for a conservative spouse, the main reason behind their marriage is his genuine love and respect for her. It is at the engagement party that Layla begins to realize that Dr. Ramzi hides his actual desire to annihilate her personality (Al-Zayyat, Min Suwar Al-Mar'ah 40) by his indifference and even disrespect for her individuality.

The coup de grâce for Layla comes with Dr. Ramzi shattering her illusion by denouncing love altogether: "There's no such thing as love. It is just the word that a civilized person uses to tame his instincts. What you see in front of you is mere impulsiveness, like an animal pouncing to satiate his instinctual appetite" (274/268). The world of tradition, Layla finds out, does not feature love. On the other hand, love is manifest in front of her eyes in the relationship of her brother Mahmud and Sanaa. There are "invisible threads" (273/267) that draw Layla to their

experience and potential. The young couple moves against tradition, yet enjoys pure love that is devoid of moral imperfections. Mahmud and Sanaa's love relationship reveals to Layla that defiance of tradition and love can happen together; it is a tangible proof that love exists despite Dr. Ramzi's claims. Layla's dreams of a loving relationship coupled with conformity come to an end. Along with it, the first half of Dr. Ramzi's dangerous spell is over.

The tight psychological grip of Dr. Ramzi on Layla will be completely lifted shortly after his hypocritical morality is uncovered. For when Dr. Ramzi's eyes are "fixed avidly on the shadowy line between Gamila's breasts, his lips rounded in a smile that [Layla] found disgusting, reminding her of the grimace of a predatory animal" (275/269), the veil is removed from her eyes and she realizes that Dr. Ramzi's world of tradition and fundamentals lacks exactly what it propagates: morality. Dr. Ramzi, the "predatory animal," brings to her mind Isam, the "caged animal" (88/81). Turning out to be like Isam, Dr. Ramzi also classifies women under the polarity of angel or devil. Ramzi, like Isam, employs this dichotomy to make peace with his erotic desire. Thus, Layla discovers that in the world of Dr. Ramzi she has a "pure exchange value" (Irigaray 807), the virgin who only needs to be violated in order to become a mother and then be removed from the market (Irigaray 808). On the other hand, Gamila represents for him the "prostitute" who is permanently in the market; she can be defiled because she is no more than a body transferred among men for pleasure (Irigaray 808).

Layla realizes the whole truth: the illusion of love coupled with traditions—that guarantee security, morality and protection from pain—dissolve in front of her eyes. Layla's awakening to the harsh reality of the world of tradition is accompanied by the realization of her entrapment and her sheer helplessness towards it: "Layla lowered her head and stared at the blurred table surface. In a half-finished cup of tea she noticed a drowning fly, trying desperately but hopelessly to free

itself” (272/266). Like the fly, Layla is drowning, a prisoner to the falsehood of Dr. Ramzi’s world. Overhearing Ramzi talking to Mahmud about his scandalous behavior (287-292/281-285), she musters her courage and attempts to talk to her father, but he receives her with “a murderous look in his eyes” (293/287). Layla realizes that she is fully entrapped, and abandons herself in what seems to be her fate. Fully aware of her tragic position, Layla denounces her principles and consents to present her body to Dr. Ramzi to defile it with his immoral behavior and his sexual desire (al-Ra’i 81).

And what is the end of such a union between Layla and Dr. Ramzi? The scene in which Layla is trying her engagement party dress foreshadows and reveals Layla’s future life as Dr. Ramzi’s wife. Her dress is “[l]ike Gamila’s wedding dress, except this one has a closed bodice and hers was low cut. Exactly, though—same cut, same lines, same material” (262/257). Dr. Ramzi is as patriarchal as Gamila’s husband; however, Dr. Ramzi hides his dissolute character; his fantasies and desires are still carefully hidden like Layla’s figure in her bodice. Gamila’s married reality anticipates Layla’s imminent marriage. Gamila’s marriage started with her objectification in a society which allows infinite privileges to the father, the brother and the husband while demanding women to be submissive mothers, sisters and wives (Al-Zayyat, Min Suwar Al-Mar’ah 38-39). The whole society drives Gamila to marry her rich, arrogant, and aged husband. The result of the infelicitous union is a state of physical and emotional deprivation which initially leads Gamila to separate her soul from her body and live as a “doll wife” with a rebellious head and a defeated body that is used by a man as a commodity (Qutb et al. 111). Gamila shows to the outer world the submissive wife model and, with deep frustration, hides her rebellion underneath (Al-Zayyat, Min Suwar Al-Mar’ah 87). The rebellion is against her being a property or a body used in exchange for money.

Eventually, Gamila realizes that her entrapment within the institution of marriage is condoned by society. A divorce is ruled out because it destabilizes traditional order and deprives the woman of all value without a man (Naji, Al-Mar'ah 119). Unsatisfied with the limited space of the revolution within her head and in a social dead end, Gamila rebels in the way society has taught her to do: by maintaining appearances while embarking on illicit love affairs. Gamila's liaison with Sidqi, then, is the outcome of the social pressure exerted on her. Thus, when Layla sees her with Sidqi in the bedroom during the engagement party, she envisions herself in Gamila's situation and realizes that her marriage "would inevitably come to the same end" (279/275).

Although awoken now to the disastrous perspective of her union with Dr. Ramzi and with Husayn's words ringing deep down her soul and offering her a substitute, Layla does not have the courage to openly defy her family and her fiancé. Instead, she attempts to flee her oppression and social pressure and travels to Port Said for her work (325/314). In Port Said lies the happy family of Mahmud and Sanaa. Mahmud rebels against traditions to marry "[o]ne of those girls who let down their hair and do whatever they please" (285/278); their life together takes place in a new distant setting away from the family and in the heart of the national struggle. When Layla chooses to go to Port Said, it is the experience of Mahmud and Sanaa that haunts her and works as a living proof of Husayn's words that love happens not with an individual rebellion against social traditions but with the rebellion against "the space of the 'I'" (218/210). Layla's escape is initially not heroic, but rather "coincidental" (321/310). Nevertheless, when a flock of airplanes bomb the city, Layla emerges as a new person feeling:

All the voices, all calling her, all trying to get her to stand up, all preventing her from giving in. Something inside her was responding, too, something vast springing from deep

within, something new and powerful that would not leave her be, something stronger than the fire that burned in her chest, than the iciness that shuddered in her limbs, stronger than the overwhelming desire to let go, than the dirt, than death. (339/327-328)

Layla is finally able to open the door to reality; empowered by the national struggle, she steps out of the conformity of her life to a blend of national and personal liberation. Layla now compares between two worlds: a restricted one, characterized by subordination, both of women and the nation. Layla knows this world well as she has been coerced to submission to her parents, Isam and Dr. Ramzi who silenced her voice and attempted to efface her personality. The other world is a world of personal and national freedom, an open door of countless possibilities. Within the national struggle, Layla's feelings of deprivation and oppression are cured for she feels, for the first time, that she is loved, accepted and respected by a whole nation. It is the same road that Husayn Amir offered her one day, promising that by the end of which she will find, not a man, but her identity. When Layla fights the British troops, she feels that she is not an object, a sex tool for Isam or a child-bearing tool for Ramzi; she is rather a decisive subject and an active individual. She is no more a "blank page" written by the male," but rather, she reverses her position from being the "the statue" to being "the sculptor," and from being "the portrait" to being "the artist" (Al-Zayyat, "On Political Commitment" 247).

Like the woman who is giving birth during the fight against the British troops, Layla is giving birth to her new self who too "wanted to come out, into life" (349/338). The result is a new self, indeed, that lies within a new, real world of freedom. Layla eventually "stretch[es] her hands around her shoulders, hugging herself, quieting the surge of love and pride and confidence that swept over her body" (352/341). At this moment, Layla ceases to be marginalized and manages to create a new meaning for the *out of place* existence. By merging her newly found

freedom in a whole that is larger and more important than her own needs and desires (Al-Zayyat, “Al-Katib wa Al-Hurriah” 16), Layla finds herself and finally stands on her own feet. Only then she meets Husayn, the instigator of her rebellion, the spark that illuminated the dark road for her, the potential of a new perspective in the creation of one’s identity, whose words lingered within her thoughts from the moment she met him and whose letters awoke her mind (217-219, 280-281/209-211, 275-276). Once it made her doubt and fight Ramzi, then they inspired her to join the National Guard and eventually encouraged her to travel and fight in Port Said. Despite his physical absence, Husayn has always been present in Layla’s mind as a questioning conscience but never as an aim.

Lalya will tread the road of national struggle but before she begins, the statue of De Lesseps must fall down. The statue stands there as a symbol of traditions and fundamentals (362/349), the same traditions and fundamentals that enslaved Layla and deprived her of a sense of identity. Now that she has achieved her independence and has acquired her voice, the delusional hypocritical fundamentals must be shattered in order to be replaced by progressive rules suitable for the new, changing world. Opening the door, Layla walks out in the open area surrounded by people who are fighting along with her; what moves her is the pain of a young woman who lost her legs, or the mother in braids who lost her son (341/330). Merging with the fighting nation, Layla shapes her identity and liberates herself from the confined space of the “I”.

IV-Final Remarks

“These people really expect the passion of love to fill and gratify every need of life, whereas nature only intended that it should meet one of many demands. They insist upon making it stand for all the emotional pleasures of life and art, expecting an individual and self-limited passion to yield infinite variety, pleasure and distraction, to contribute to their lives what the arts and the pleasurable exercise of the intellect gives to less limited and less intense idealists. So this passion, when set up against Shakespeare, Balzac, Wagner, Raphael, fails them. They have staked everything on one hand, and they lose” (Cather 293).

Between the two moulds of angel and monster is no man’s land. This unmapped place can present an escape of the flowing currents of the imaginary; it can also be a reconstruction of the “self” based on the pillars of individuality and freedom. This thesis attempted to explore these different spaces and potentials.

Edna is not able to change her *out of place* existence, turning an imaginary escape into a world of independence and freedom. For her the imaginary escape is built upon perfect love which is free from pain. Edna is then the victim of “the over-idealization of love,” “the spoil of the poets [and] the Iphigenias of sentiment” (Cather 292); since no such ideal love relationship exists in real life, Edna falls backward in time to the womb of the sea to be reborn again may be with the realization that life is woven from threads of pain and it is this pain that creates autonomic free individuals who transform *out of place* status to a journey worth traversing. Layla, on the other hand, is able to exit the imaginary, to adjust her dream and to realize that a love relationship with a man can work merely as an instigator to the new form of *out of place* existence, a form that strengthens her individuality in a union of personal and national liberation.

Edna’s journey is an “evolution from romantic fantasies of fusion with another person to self-definition and self-reliance” (Showalter 169). She realizes that her main quest throughout her life is to search for unconditional love tied with both emotional and sensual pleasures in a

relationship that, feeding on the imaginary, is devoid of pain. That is to say, for Edna, this fusion is only conceived in the form of a male savior who constructs for her such fantasy world of mutual love that is free from pain and who grants life to her deadened sexuality. Edna searches for an escape from a phallogocentric society, but, ironically, does so by clinging to a phallogocentric dream.

Throughout her life, this urge to find such a male savior controls her decisions which waver from being the most audacious to the most subversive. While searching for a male savior, Edna as a teenager involves herself in one-sided love stories. The stories, being unrealistic, not only fail to fulfill her myth, but also prove to be potentially painful for her. It is the fear that Edna wants to escape the most. In order to protect herself from such pain, Edna decides to marry Léonce in no more than a “bargain”: he saves her through nourishing her solitary self with unconditional love while exempting her from being emotionally involved and consequently pained (Showalter 183). In this bargain Edna substitutes her dream of a perfect mutual love relationship with mere satisfaction of receiving love without reciprocating it. However, Léonce fails to grant Edna such love. Edna, resorting back to the unbreakable myth of a male savior, attaches herself to Robert who awakens “her fantasy of rhapsodic oneness with a perfect lover” (Showalter 183). Even her sexual connection with Arobin not only keeps safe her myth about this union, but also creates more love for Robert (Showalter 184). But Robert, like the three lovers, fails to fulfill her myth about a male savior. And throughout a confrontation with biological separation realities of birth, Edna realizes that her myth of a male savior is no more than a “narcotic” (Showalter 184) which has managed to keep her safe throughout her life and “which ha[s] also kept her from becoming an adult” (Showalter 184).

With the myth of a male savior deconstructed, Edna is not able to relate to any other substitutes, like the model of a mother-woman or artist-woman; both identities prove to be restricting for her as presenting either submissive or asexual identities she rejects and denounces. Edna does not know any other road of salvation except for her already deconstructed myth. She is left in a state of solitude with only one option: to attach herself to the sea. The sea seduces Edna with a relationship that can never be tainted with separation. It promises her a changeless motherly, unconditional love for it has already been “the unlimited in which to lose herself” (Chopin 48). The sea, also, promises Edna infinite sensuality for it has already given her before “the first-felt throbbings of desire” (Chopin 51). In front of the sea then, Edna is “like a somnambulist, mesmerized by her ultimate seducer” (Malzahn 32). Indeed, the sea is the only entity which can grant Edna love and sensuality that does not end in separation. The waves of the sea can be seen, indeed, as a womb that may help to grow Edna’s views into a new ideal of autonomy that is separated from a male domain and which entails pain as one of the realistic aspects of life.

Layla Sulayman’s experience is similar to Edna’s in the beginning. She attempts to defy submission to her parents and their patriarchal society through seeking an identity by attaching herself to a male savior. Like Edna, she daydreams of the perfect love story which enhances her confidence and guarantees that she is loved and desired (Al-Zayyat, The Open Door 36-38/32-33). Isam and Dr. Ramzi are both examples of Layla’s dependency on a male figure in her journey of seeking and defining her identity. The rebellious expression of the former and the traditional nature of the latter expose Layla’s myth of a male savior. As Isam and Dr. Ramzi turn out to be similar components of the patriarchal society, however, Layla opens up and explores other forms of liberation which are available to her in her contemporary society. For Layla, that

“terrified child and . . . bold girl” (Al-Zayyat, The Search 115) is introduced to the potential of achieving freedom through “belonging to the whole” (Al-Zayyat, The Search 115). This liberation does not depend on a phallogentric dream; it actually gives away “the over-idealization of love” (Cather 292) and marks a territory which blends the personal with the political (Al-Nowaihi 478) in a creative dialectic that dismisses the myth of the male savior and synthesizes the model of the independent individual. This free-thinking, independent individual cannot be manipulated but makes informed choices. Hence, once Layla frees her soul and mind from the controlling influence of her parents, Isam and Dr. Ramzi, she can take her life in her hands. The only enlightened male figure in Layla’s life, Husayn, only performs the role of the instigator of Layla’s journey and his different view of life acquires strength and solidity in Layla’s head as time goes by; yet he is never looked up to as the aim or the target; he just indicates the way but Layla freely chooses to follow it. Husayn meets Layla after she starts fighting in Port Said (Al-Zayyat, The Open Door 356/344), and even their future life is bound by national struggle (Al-Zayyat, The Open Door 358/347) and not by their “happily ever after” life as a couple. Like Al-Zayyat herself, Layla fights “for [her] complete being to emerge, an . . . individual person as much as an intensely social[ly] committed one” (Al-Zayyat, The Search 106). Through the national struggle Layla realizes her strengths and weaknesses, defines herself and acquires confidence and self-assurance. Complete now and standing on her own feet, Layla is not in a constant need for a male savior in her life to bestow upon her an identity that is ready to collapse at any time. On the other hand, it is a solid identity that, although inspired by a man, has a larger aim as its foundation.

This thesis has dealt with the subordinate status Edna and Layla occupy at some point in their lives. It has proposed that initially both women internalize a myth of a union with a male

savior. However, Edna and Layla do not traverse parallel roads to the end; at one point, they stand on crossroads where two ideologies intersect with each other. Layla consciously adjusts her dream and decides not to be a victim of her myth while Edna falls prey to her own fantasy. While Edna expects “the passion of love to fill and gratify every need of life” (Cather 293), Layla not only rebels against traditional society but also against a traditional form of rebellion, the dominant fairytale which defines a woman’s success and value through her liaison with a man. In her rebellion, Edna is doomed to define *out of place* as a negative notion. On the other hand, in her rebellion, Layla learns “to prefer being not quite right and out of place” (Said 295), giving the *out of place* existence or her choice not to be in the accepted, socially approved space of traditions a new creative meaning and significance.

Nevertheless, the different times in which the two heroines live can give us insight into why Layla manages to define the *out of place* existence as positive while Edna is not able to. Nineteenth-century America definitely imposed more constraints on women than mid twentieth-century Egypt. Although the former century witnessed the beginning of the suffrage movement for the emancipation of women, for Chopin to write about sex and woman’s rebellion was a taboo, which was not the case for Al-Zayyat. Reception of the two works indicates the difference; an author in the “Book Reviews” in *Public Opinion* of 22 June 1899 expressed a view of The Awakening by saying: “we are well satisfied when Mrs. Pontellier deliberately swims out to her death in the waters of the gulf” (“Review of The Awakening,” n.p.). Moreover, as a result of the negative reviews, The Awakening did not circulate for fifty years after its publication (Walker 14). On the other hand, Egyptian society in the 1960s was imbued with the feminist messages and has already contributed to feminist movements. Thus, The Open Door was so well received that in 1963—three years after it was first published—it was made into a famous movie

with the same title. Therefore, the different times that separate the two heroines created different social settings which might be the reason why Edna could not escape her estrangement while Layla could.

What should not be overlooked is Edna's status as a married woman while Layla is only a child who grows into adulthood. Since Edna's awakening takes place while she is married, society has no tolerance for cases like hers and is ready to demonize any attempt for rebellion on her side. On the other hand, Layla's awakening happens early in her youth and this timing is by itself a great advantage before she commits herself to the wrong husband. In addition, unlike Edna, who grows up distant from her sisters and friends, Layla has the privilege of a close brother and friends who fulfill her needs of love, affection, and care.

Moreover, while Robert, the instigator of Edna's awakening turns out to be conventional and adheres to social norms and rules, Husayn offers a world for Layla that connects between both rebellion and social acceptance, an option that is never available for Edna. Edna has always two different roads to tread upon, either social acceptance linked with submission or social rejection linked with rebellion. On the other hand, Layla finds social acceptance in Port Said in her union with Husayn and in the new family of Mahmud and Sanaa and the national struggle where being "national" entails the element of collective acceptance and blessings.

Both Edna and Layla share a common experience of being *out of place*. One form of the *out of place* existence is the escape to the imaginary idea of liberation through a man; another form is to find new modes of expression not through a man, but, rather, through a collective and progressive discourse. Edna paves the way for Layla to achieve such realization. She sacrifices herself to give next generations of women the consciousness to find a voice and a tool of self-expression. It is because there were Ednas in the world that Laylas were born.

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