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THE SELF IN GOETHE'S
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CHOPIN'S THE
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DYNA DINNAWI

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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

AN EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS: THE IDEALIZATION OF THE SELF IN GOETHE'S *ELECTIVE AFFINITIES*, CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING*, AND CUNNINGHAM'S *THE HOURS*

A Thesis Submitted to
The English and Comparative Literature Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

By Dana Dinnawi
May 2006

The American University in Cairo

An Evolution of Consciousness: The Idealization of the Self in Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Chopin's *The Awakening* and Cunningham's *The Hours*

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has been approved by

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the female protagonists in *Elective Affinities*, *The Awakening*, and *The Hours* illuminate the cycle of contention and reconciliation between inner and outer worlds, between idealism and realism. Each protagonist negotiates a journey of authentic self-evolution, whether within or outside the confines of her respective social realm, to regain possession of the unconscious. All three protagonists attempt to make art out of ordinary experience in negotiating the relationship between the unconscious and the idealization of the self. Parallel to this creative effort is a sense of failure due to the high expectations that each protagonist places on herself. The value of each life-project is determined by how each character interprets her respective success or failure, and not exclusively by social considerations. Instead of maintaining the ideal or the real in separate realms, creativity overcomes the conflict between the demands of the ego and the constraints of culture. The three works examined in this thesis help demonstrate that creativity itself can become an ideal that can transform reality.

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Introduction

The framework of humanity's evolution is an undulating course between two points: that which exalts in reason and order – the rational – and that which yearns for emancipation from this order – the imagination. From this standpoint, the rational "ideal" only provides an abstract conception of perfection, categorical, general, beyond the concrete or palpable. The only plausible affirmation in this case would be retrospective, involving the application of the ideal to a succession of intellectual and experiential fluctuations that go down through the ages.

In *Elective Affinities*, *The Awakening*, and *The Hours*, the female protagonists illuminate the cycle of contention and reconciliation between inner and outer worlds, between idealism and realism. However, the confrontation between the ideal and the real rarely resolves itself equally. These characters demonstrate an inner search or perspective in which the self is the site where conception and reality collide, and where, more often than not, their turmoil looks forward to humanity's conscious evolution. The conflicts are mostly obscure, involving a silent dialogue within the self to emancipate its imaginative dimension from an imposed, overdeveloped rational paradigm. But this private dialectic invariably erupts into a blatant confrontation with the so-called reality principle, the proverbial social realm, in an overt attempt to repudiate hypocritical, imperious expectations. Driven by needs for creativity, sexuality and contemplations of life and death which emerge inextricably within the context of their daily life, each protagonist initiates her ego-forming experience distinctly, and as such, holds herself accountable to her sense of identity. All of them share a common desire for continuity in time.

Historically, the search for the ideal issues from a previous ideology which was once also a search. Thinkers of the Enlightenment foresaw unity and not discord between man and his world by emphasizing observation, experimentation, critical investigation and classification of nature, producing an imitative system based on supposedly universal values. In contrast, the imagination became the central feature in what came to be known as Romanticism, where versatile feelings, soul-searching and a new love of nature explained moral and ethical dilemmas, and where, once again, an attempt was made to reconcile the unremitting rivalry between our inner and outer worlds. The Realists then disregarded these Romantic values in favor of a more unembellished 'slice of life' outlook; the Symbolists rejuvenated them. Later on, the Modernists repudiated Romanticism yet again. Post-Modernism continues the cycle by reverting once more to an autonomous and speculative art.

This sense of self-urgency is universal. What appears to be limited is the ability, or the bravery, to take action, to transform this sense of urgency into a different reality. Those who lack this 'intimation' of self-discovery invariably are those who find it much easier to eschew reaction through passivity or indifference, to remain simply anonymous by conforming to antecedent and sometimes obsolete rules of behavior rather than becoming an architect of one's own value system. On the contrary, those who are endowed with this substantial intimation, as these protagonists are, are more assiduous in character, forging a life rather than simply becoming absorbed by it. They are the select few who actually hazard to actualize their identity, to construct their 'selves' and to find an ideal. This journey of self-construction becomes truly unique, specific, yet diverse in its scope and potential.

Why is it that so few are predisposed to this endeavor while the majority remain immune? What is it that propels a person toward a need for self-fulfillment outside convention, but holds another back? Could it be simply a matter of personal endowments? An inexplicable, innate propensity for challenge? The theories are inconclusive and will probably always be so. What is clear, however, is that those who dare to risk the unknown by plunging into self-discovery threaten those less-ambitious individuals who accept conventional life. When antagonized by this threat, they unremittingly challenge and then hinder the endeavors of the idealists, sometimes to their detriment. Those who choose self-discovery with the goal of self-construction, often find themselves, after being imbibed with an immense sense of resilience and purpose, recoiling and renunciating their theories, coerced by the deficient ideals of those around them who cannot comprehend or support the complexities involved in change and who, more often than not, label this conduct as transgressive and the perpetrators as transgressors.

This thesis will examine how these protagonists can, essentially, negotiate a journey of authentic self-evolution, whether within or outside the confines of their respective social realms to regain possession of the unconscious. Although the purpose of this thesis is not to present a feminist justification for self-evolution, it will certainly bring together elements of this discourse. Can the female protagonists create a realm of idealism that is self-sufficient while maintaining a relationship to the world? And when constraints present themselves, can she persist in resisting the established order, subsisting alone on its fringes? And how will she subsist – with emancipated poise or

remorseful self-abnegation – when both these stances can entail social ostracism and its painful consequences? These literary works provide different answers to these questions.

Written on the cusp of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, *Elective Affinities* projects Goethe's view that it is not enough to delve into one's unconscious for an explanation of human nature. One cannot simply rely on an "ideal"; some sort of hold on reality must be maintained at the risk of disaster. Ottilie's struggle to create a concrete awareness of reality that she may apply to her own understanding of life is an early example of how the deeper human instincts can be at odds with their surroundings and clarifies how the empirical methods popular during the Enlightenment are inadequate to explaining the complexities of human nature.

Considered immodest and, to an extent, graphic by the standards of her day, Chopin's *The Awakening* rebels against the very foundations of Victorian society by releasing Edna's suppressed self on a journey of personal discovery. But even though Chopin unlocks Edna from her stifling cage and staunchly warns against pressuring a woman into traditional roles lest they repel her, hers is also a cautionary tale of the consequences of excessiveness.

Loosely based on Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Cunningham's *The Hours* connects one seemingly ordinary day in the lives of three women, Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown, and Clarissa Vaughan, who live in three completely different time frames. But the diversity of time and place is used to highlight the universality and significance of the "ordinary." Each female protagonist, in her respective role, presents a separate phase in the progression towards the ideal self – as past, present, and future. One woman writes about it, one reads it and one actualizes it.

Chapter One: *Elective Affinities*, Unveiling the Unconscious

Goethe's *Elective Affinities* is a hybrid novel which juxtaposes the eighteenth century Enlightenment ethos of stability and propriety with the emerging emphasis on the imagination and its focus on the 'self' which became the central concern in what came to be known as Romanticism. Enlightenment thinkers emphasized reason and rationality and developed intellectual systems based on supposedly universal values to explain the world. But with the onset of the nineteenth century, this configuration proved difficult to maintain. It became dubious, especially in terms of human feelings, relations and moral issues, since these matters are not central to science. Goethe uses an analogy from science, the chemical term 'elective affinities', as a basis for his work, but he infuses it with a strong, albeit early, use of the idea of the unconscious, which he cautiously unveils and dramatizes in the interplay between his characters and in each character's internal struggle.

'Elective affinities', if taken at face value, is the scientific term used in chemistry to describe the causes and effects of two entities, originally unified, separating and uniting with two other, different entities. With respect to Goethe's implicit view of love and marriage, its meaning is certainly applicable as a framework for arbitrary attractions – or repellants – among humans. However, the dichotomy belongs to the argument that, despite its apparently arbitrary nature, elective affinities, as a theory, can only support itself within a limited domain. It is inconclusive in terms of human and moral dilemmas.

But by applying the concept of the "unconscious" in the modern Freudian sense to highlight the conflict that flares between "the feeling of our own self, of our own ego," which

"appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else," and the fact that "such an appearance is deceptive, and that on the contrary the ego is continued inward, without any sharp delimitation into an unconscious mental entity which we designate as the id and for which it serves as a kind of façade" (Freud 12), Goethe clarifies the ambiguities perpetuated by the scientific explanation in the interplay between Eduard, Charlotte, the Captain and Ottilie and the subsequent transfiguration of their relationships. He presents the characters with an option to their existence as they have known it up until that point, something that makes them question their surroundings, their behavior, their needs and contend with the fact that not every aspect of life has a rational explanation, but that certain aspects are simply meant to be "experienced."

Eduard, a rich nobleman, is a dilettante with no real profession. He is fond of his estate, with its gardens, and the potential for its development, but only as a form of recreation. As an individual, he is still quite immature, unchecked and unaltered by the outside world. As a husband, he is ineffectual. Charlotte is a serious-minded woman who exercises great self-control and exerts continuous effort to maintain social decorum. She works diligently, but amateurishly, on the estate. Although they have reached an impasse in their marriage, where its dissolution is a latent possibility, and a legal one at that, obligation dictates that they remain committed and courteous despite the inevitable void, which exacerbates the psychological strain that they silently endure.

The Captain, an indefatigable character whom Eduard invites to the estate precisely because he does not want to be committed to work, is very resourceful and approaches responsibility with ardent proficiency.

Ottilie is Charlotte's foster-child. She arrives at the estate after an unsuccessful period at boarding school. Ottilie is extremely shy and introverted, yet highly intuitive with a strong work ethic. Being naturally domesticated, she fulfills her feeling of duty toward Charlotte within the house, not outside it. For Ottilie, the gardens are simply a thing of beauty which inspires her soul:

> The better she got to know the circumstances of the house and of the people in it, the more spiritedly did she go about her work and the more promptly she understand the meaning of every glance, of every gesture, of a mere half-word, of a mere sound. She had at all times the same quiet attentiveness and the same unruffled alertness. (Goethe 64-65)

Her ability to sense what the others feel and to predict what they may need is admirable, indeed no small feat for a young woman with little or no experience outside the confines of her sheltered boarding school.

But such was Ottilie's inherent tranquility and physical beauty, that from the outset of her presence, she was "a feast for the eyes" (Goethe 64), one that "exerts a certain healing power on that noble sense, human beauty acts with far greater force on both inner and outer senses, so that he who upholds it is exempt from evil and feels in harmony with himself and the world" (Goethe 64). It is a feeling that soon begins to deeply affect Eduard.

The substance of Eduard and Charlotte's affinity, although officially solid, "lacks the irresistible attractiveness, the powerful force of nature, which links two people unconditionally to one another leaving them no choice" (Reiss 170), and as such makes them susceptible to unanticipated temptations. When the Captain and Ottilie join Eduard and Charlotte, a quiet undercurrent begins to shift the dynamics directing the relationships

between the four. What follows is "the rise and outbreak of passion and the immediate consequences" (Reiss 155).

Predominantly, the momentum for this transfiguration is driven by each protagonist's instinctive association to the estate, to the landscape. Charlotte and the Captain are servile, disciplined characters who acknowledge a strong affiliation with their society and its traditions. They uphold propriety and embody much of the eighteenth century ideologies of empirical thought. Their parallel frames of reference not only facilitate their interactions concerning the plans for the garden, but create a pleasurable experience based on complementary achievements that ultimately fuel their simmering attraction. "These plans further separate Eduard from Charlotte and bring her closer to the Captain. For Eduard it creates a vacuum which is filled by his attachment to Ottilie" (Reiss 165).

Eduard shares with Ottilie characteristics of sensitivity, spontaneity and a key sense of innerness. He finds in Ottilie a similar desire for self-satisfaction independent from the limitations of decorum or society, or so he believes. Acting in accordance with his own intense, and often misguided feelings, Eduard takes advantage of the situation to be in Ottilie's company and to keenly discern her behavior. Ottilie is seemingly not conscious of what she feels for Eduard. But she betrays herself in that:

> What he wanted she tried to provide, what might provoke his impatience she sought to prevent. She quickly became, like a guardian spirit indispensable to him, and he began to notice it when she was absent. She seemed to grow more communicative and candid as soon as they found themselves alone. (Goethe 71)

Eduard effortlessly relents to his materializing feelings for Ottilie to the point of obsession. Wholly self-absorbed, Eduard does not shy away from exploring his emotions despite their consequences. The turning point for Eduard is when he asks Ottilie to remove the miniature of her father which she wears on her breast. Eduard's explanation, that he fears that the cumbersome glass and metal object may accidentally injure Ottilie, seems innocent enough, and given his rationalization, Ottilie finds no reason to object. However, the deeper implication of this request is that Eduard manages to procure for himself tacit acquiescence from Ottilie: "He felt as if a stone had fallen from his heart, as if a wall between him and Ottilie had been broken down" (Goethe 74).

At the same time, Goethe writes of "a more dangerous affection" (Goethe 80) that grows between Charlotte and the Captain, in contrast to Ottilie and Eduard. Whereas Eduard was making every effort to include Ottilie in their daily routine and activities, the Captain avoids being alone with Charlotte, something which leads Charlotte to "esteem him all the more highly" (Goethe 80). With a single-minded determination, they dismiss their emotions, remaining steadfast in their commitment to propriety. Indeed at times, one feels that Charlotte and the Captain share more intense feelings for their on-going enterprises than they do for each other. "Thus the contrast is completed between the mature self-sufficiency of Charlotte and the *Hauptmann*, and the immature dependence of Ottilie and Eduard" (Drake 254).

Secluded in their country estate, the group finds itself incapable of deciphering their circumstances as they have only each other for reference. It takes an external catalyst, the visit of the Count and Baroness, for them to cautiously admit their emotions and clarify the

options they never openly considered. But it is only Charlotte who is wary of the effects the liberal attitude of the Count and Baroness might have on them, and on Ottilie in particular:

> She knew well nothing is more dangerous than too free conversation in which a culpable or semi-culpable situation is treated as normal, commonplace, or even praise-worthy, and anything that impugns the marriage tie certainly comes into this category. (Goethe 93)

But just as Charlotte confirms this to herself, the Count suggests that perhaps the Captain, who displays such talent and workmanship, would be better employed elsewhere. For the first time Charlotte, despite the methodical restraint she asserts over her feelings for the Captain, must face the possibility of losing him and this probability obliges her to confront the truth about herself. As readers, we have been shown aspects of her mind as she grapples with an emerging unconscious that she cannot truly know. In a rare scene of emotional upheaval, Charlotte succumbs and relinquishes control, releasing her pent-up passions. By allowing the unconscious to surface, she forces herself to review and analyze the situation. By so doing, she rapidly regains control, suppressing her emotions once more, and this time definitively. She manages a temporary and superficial reconciliation with her husband despite the fact that she remains wholly occupied by the Captain, who represents the larger society that she feels a part of.

That night her relationship with Eduard is irreparably damaged. Their desires overlap precariously during a scene in Charlotte's bedroom. Eduard comes to Charlotte in a drunken stupor. She receives him after having just experienced frantic anguish over the possibility of losing the Captain. Their passions are heightened, but for other people. Having no other alternative, they seek gratification in each other:

> In the lamplit twilight inner inclination at once asserted its rights, imagination at once asserted its rights over reality. Eduard held Ottilie in his arms. The Captain hovered back and forth before the soul of Charlotte. The absent and the present were in a miraculous way entwined, seductively and blissfully, each with the other. (Goethe 106)

On the following day, two significant events occur simultaneously which determine how each of the characters will continue with their respective relationship. When Ottilie copies Eduard's handwriting so that even Eduard cannot distinguish it from his own, he takes this as proof of Ottilie's love for him. "You love me! he cried. Ottilie, you love me! And they embraced one another and held one another. From this moment the whole world was tranquil for Eduard, he was no longer what he had been, the world was no longer what it had been" (Goethe 109). Eduard relinquishes all control and surrenders to his instinctive feelings for Ottilie without the slightest hesitation, even making public declarations of his newly found state in front of Charlotte and the Captain: "If you love one person, love from the very heart, all other people seem lovable too!" (Goethe 109). Eduard possesses only a modicum of propriety, surrendering to his passion unconditionally in a haphazard and self-gratifying manner. While Ottilie struggles for the entirety of the novella to reconcile the turmoil of her inner passions and the conventions demanded of her outer self, Eduard appears to have no such qualms. He believes that it is his right to exercise his inner desires and that social conventions should bend to his desires and not vice versa.

But when Charlotte and the Captain share an intimate moment on the lake in which they embrace, both of them are remorseful. Charlotte tells the Captain:

> We cannot help it if this moment is an epoch in our lives, but whether this moment shall be worthy of us does lie within our power. You must go, dear friend, and you will go. I can forgive you, and forgive myself, only if

> we have the courage to alter our mode of life, since it does not lie within our power to alter our feelings. (Goethe 111-112)

Charlotte abnegates the Captain by firmly re-establishing herself as Eduard's wife: "She was always accustomed to know herself, to exercise self-control, and even now she did not find it difficult, by giving serious thought to the matter to come close to the equanimity she desired. She knelt down and repeated the vow she had made to Eduard at the altar. She felt inwardly restored" (Goethe 112).

While Charlotte renews her marital vows to Eduard in an attempt to reconcile her inner turmoil and guilt, Eduard obsesses about marrying Ottilie: "He kisses the copy of the document a thousand times, he kisses the beginning of it in Ottilie's coy childish hand...Oh, if it were only another kind of document! he whispers to himself" (Goethe 113). Eduard is no longer ruled by moderation but pursues an obsession: "Ottilie's presence consumes everything, he is utterly lost in her, he thinks of nothing else but only her, the voice of conscience no longer reaches him, everything in his nature that had been restrained, held back, now bursts forth, his whole being flows out toward Ottilie" (Goethe 114).

After the Captain's departure, Charlotte takes advantage of the opportunity to confront Eduard in an attempt to restore their marriage. Her honesty and sense of propriety are impeccable: "You are in love with Ottilie... and on her side too affection and passion are springing up and growing. No one expects us to wander into an extremity of folly, no one expects us to make ourselves blameworthy, not to speak of ludicrous" (Goethe 131). Charlotte's brief encounter with her feelings has reaffirmed her previous dedication to propriety and decorum upheld by rational thinking: "When troubles come the one who sees most clearly must be the one to act. This time I am that one. Dear, dear Eduard, leave things

to me! Can you ask me to give up all my well-earned happiness, my most treasured rights, without more ado, can you expect me to give you up?" (Goethe 131)

Up to this point, Ottilie has not had to contend with her unconscious on a significant level, simply playing a passive role and awaiting the decisions to be made by the adults. She cannot independently conceptualize what she must do concerning her emerging feelings for Eduard. Her romance with Eduard is one perpetuated by him and one might question its wisdom and value. Being as young and immature as she is, and driven by feelings that she cannot explain, much less control, she acts according to Eduard's advice. He has convinced her that Charlotte and the Captain are in love and that his marriage with Charlotte has no future: "Ottilie, borne by the feeling of her conscience along the path to happiness she desires, lives only for Eduard. Fortified in all that is good by her love for him, because of him happier in all that she does, more open towards other people, she lives in a heaven on earth" (Goethe 118).

With the Captain's and Eduard's subsequent departures however, Ottilie's internal and external equilibrium are shaken. But it is at this point of imbalance that she awakens to the inner trajectory she must contend with, and her struggle for self-development, what Goethe calls *bildung*, begins:

> In Eduard she had discovered for the first time what life and joy were, with things as they were now she was conscious of an infinite emptiness of which she had hitherto hardly had any conception. A heart that is seeking something feels there is something it lacks, a heart that has lost something feels its loss. Desire changes into ill-humor and impatience and a woman accustomed to wait passively now wants to step out of her usual confines, wants to become active, wants to do something to promote her own happiness. (Goethe 141)

Ottilie struggles with her feelings toward Eduard for several reasons, the most significant being Charlotte: "Ottilie's awareness of the moral implications of her love for the husband of her benefactor, especially when this love is admitted and a union with Eduard seems possible, reveals that she is not the somnambulistic, amoral child some critics have conjured up" (Lillyman 54). In a sense, Ottilie feels she owes Charlotte her life. Charlotte has been a surrogate mother to her since her own mother passed away, bestowing care and attention on her as well as providing for her financially. But even if Eduard wasn't married to Charlotte, he was, nonetheless, married, an obstacle in its own right, making adultery unacceptable to a person who prides herself on maintaining a certain code of honor which maintains high moral standards.

Ottilie's development from this point to the end of the novel is a series of regressions in which she oscillates between yearning for and renouncing Eduard, coming to definitive conclusions each time. Regression can be effective as a retrospective tool from which one projects into the future. But Ottilie's regressions recur with foreboding frequency. Just as she begins to awaken from the reverie of her ill-fated, short-lived romance, she finds herself drawn back into fantasy to a degree that produces in her a desire to escape her predicament: "She would even want to get off the land itself, she would leap into the boat and row to the middle of the great lake… and there she would always discover her friend, he would tell her she had always been close to his heart, she would tell him he had always been close to hers" (Goethe 141-142).

After that, her initial regression is repeated upon her discovery of Charlotte's pregnancy: "She could not hope and she should not desire. She withdrew into herself. She had nothing more to say" (Goethe 151). Whatever doubts she may have entertained about Charlotte's and

the Captain's marriage are confirmed. She is left to contemplate the ramifications of her situation and her future. Again she comes to the realization that it is not in her nature to forego propriety despite the intensity of her feelings. Morally, she has an obligation to renounce Eduard for the sake of Charlotte and for the sake of the unborn child:

> Ottilie becomes aware that to follow the dictates of duty is as much (if not more) a part of her nature as her love for Eduard. Respect for the laws of religion and of society, for the sacred quality of marriage, belongs to her nature in the same manner as the passion for Eduard. An inner contradiction appears to be at work in nature. (Reiss 177)

She becomes yet more reclusive, lonely, contemplative and can only find an outlet for her emotional confusion and imagination in writing and dreams. Through her diaries Ottilie demonstrates herself as a uniquely self-reflective character in her struggle to try to form coherent impressions of her world. She writes about her society and places her emotions in a reflective medium that potentially engages the unconscious: "She writes down her thoughts, the thoughts of a person whose life is turned inward and who does not wish to shine in the world. Her diary is a mirror of herself. The spoken word, the direct communication with the external world, concerns her less" (Reiss 177).

Ottilie might lack social intelligence, but her natural tendency, despite its sometimes almost robotic adherence to protocol and convention, is to ponder the beauty in life, to look beyond that which is merely functional to find that which is purely ornamental. What proves indefinable and at times impermeable in reality, she confronts through contemplation. Her journal pulsates with her sense impressions as they flow in response to surrounding circumstances and also expresses the overwhelming passions that threaten to subvert her sense of rationality. And yet, "she does not solve her spiritual and emotional problems, nor

even look for solutions. Practical activity, but certainly not the formation of abstract rules, is her destiny" (Reiss 181).

Ottilie's idealism is very palpable in the first entry of her journal in which she praises the qualities of portraits and their significance. Her association with the realm of the ideal and art is basic to her character. The first entry shows that Ottilie cannot live without art, without an ideal. She cannot envision an existence devoid of a means of forging connections with loved ones, as painting does: "You can still think of life after death as a second life, which you enter into as a portrait or an inscription and in which you remain longer than you do in your actual living existence. But sooner or later, this portrait, this record existence, is also extinguished" (Goethe 165). Ottilie also frequently and easily loses herself in her thoughts once confronted with an object or idea of art as she does in the newly-renovated chapel:

> Ottilie was delighted to see things familiar to her thus brought together into an unfamiliar whole. She stood, walked back and forth, looked and examined. At length she sat in one of the stalls, and as she gazed up and around it seemed to her that she was and was not, she felt her existence and did not feel it, she felt that all this before her might vanish away. (Goethe 169)

She questions her existence, her reality, and her mortality in ways that are unique to her character, "the lonelier she was, the more she lived in imagination, yet the more she lived in imagination, the more alone she felt" (Goethe 171).

However, not all of Ottilie's journal entries are personal reflections on the turmoil of her soul or reactions to her surroundings. Frequently, Ottilie simply copies phrases and maxims from an unknown source. By interspersing her journal with these unoriginal aphorisms, Goethe emphasizes Ottilie's oscillation between the realm of the real and the ideal, and how these fluctuations reveal the journey of her self-development by highlighting

its progressions and regressions. But even as she repeats verbatim something she has overheard or read, her choice of what to replicate resonates with a deep and particular ability to be discriminating:

- "We are all willing to acknowledge our shortcomings, we are willing to be punished for them, we will patiently suffer much on their account, but we become impatient if we are required to overcome them."
- "Passions are shortcomings or virtues intensified" (Goethe 181).
- "Passion is both enhanced and alleviated by confession. Perhaps the middle course is nowhere more desirable than in confiding in and keeping quiet before those we love" (182).
- "You can do anything in society except anything that has consequences" (194).
- "Everyone desires significant qualities but no one wants them to be uncomfortable and troublesome" (194).
- "If we live with someone who is sensitive about propriety we are anxious for his sake when anything improper occurs. Thus I always feel for and with Charlotte if anyone rocks back and forth in his chair, because she finds that unendurable" (195).
- "You cannot escape from the world more certainly than through art, and you cannot bind yourself to it more certainly than through art" (196).
- "Art is concerned with the difficult and the good. Even in the moment of our greatest happiness and that of our greatest misery we need the artist" (196).

With the arrival of Luciane, her bridegroom and their entourage, Ottilie is once again inundated with unending household tasks which leave her with little time to daydream about Eduard. However, the behavior and antics of Luciane indirectly work to develop Ottilie's unconscious, as it is through them that Ottilie sees most clearly that to which she aspires and that which most repels her. Luciane, Charlotte's daughter, is Ottilie's antithesis. Luciane embodies the courtly behavior which Goethe mocks. She is a capable girl in terms of academia but lacks artistic sensitivity. She has no aesthetic sense and her relationship to life, although frivolous, remains dull and superficial. When she displays her talents for singing and playing guitar, they prove to be deplorable, as is her unimaginative recitation of poetry. She is a benevolent but rude girl, continuously scoffing Ottilie: "[Luciane] looked down

with contempt on the dear child's constant quiet industriousness which everyone else approved and applauded" (Goethe 205). Luciane is jealous of Ottilie, for Ottilie effortlessly endears herself to the men in Luciane's party, with minimal intent or responsiveness. Compared to Luciane's gregarious and idle performances, Ottilie's naturally reticent self is much more effective in impressing others.

As the architect tells Ottilie, when she questions him as to why he did not display his art collection to Luciane and her company: "If you knew how roughly even cultivated people treat works of art, you would forgive me if I am disinclined to bring mine out in a crowd..." But that is not the case with Ottilie: "...it would be impossible for you to do it: good breeding and propriety are inborn in you" (Goethe 200).

Ottilie's aversion to artificiality manifests itself again in the Nativity Scene designed by the architect. Although Ottilie, as the Queen of Heaven, appears to be infused with "the purest of humility, the loveliest sense of humbleness before a great undeserved honor, an incomprehensible immeasurable happiness, suffered her features" (Goethe 203). She feels acutely uncomfortable in her costume to the point of disconcertion, a feeling that is heightened when she discovers her old schoolmaster in the audience: "She succeeded in regaining her composure only when she was at last able to greet the new arrival in her ordinary clothes" (Goethe 204).

Ottilie has learned much from her experience of life: "What had an unanticipated passion not taught her in the year just gone! What tests and trials did she not see ahead of her even if she looked only to the most immediate future" (Goethe 211). The schoolmaster discovers that she is transformed. Gone is the young, shy and introverted ingénue that he had observed for so long back at the school. He found her "changed very much to her advantage in respect

of a more relaxed manner, an easier conversation and a greater insight into worldly affairs, which manifested themselves more in her actions than her words" (Goethe 213).

Ottilie, however, still has not developed to the point where she may voice her opinions or objections concerning the course of her life. When the schoolmaster makes the proposition that Ottilie return to the boarding school, she cannot object even though inwardly she shudders at the thought. She has to comply with Charlotte's suggestion that they delay the return for the time being.

When the parson who baptizes Charlotte and Eduard's baby dies during the baptismal proceedings, Ottilie is once again thrown back into the throes of contemplating life and death. "The life of her soul had been killed, why should her body remain alive?" (Goethe 222). Images of Eduard are revived as she dreams of him: "The figure delineated to the smallest detail, moved before her of its own volition without her having to do anything, without her having to want it or to make an effort of imagination" (Goethe 223). These visions fortify her and assure her of his existence and possibility of reunion:

> Just a year ago, she had come there as a stranger, as a creature of no importance; how much had she not acquired since that time! But how much, alas, had she not since that time lost again! She had never been so rich and never been so poor. Her feelings of wealth and poverty alternated one with the other with every passing minute, they met and crossed one another in the depths of her soul, and she knew no way out but to attack whatever task lay immediately to hand with sympathetic, with passionate involvement. (Goethe 225)

To this extent, she occupies herself with caring for Eduard's garden but even more so, she devotes herself entirely to the care of his son Otto. She realizes that this child could be the cause for the reunion of his parents and that it should grow up in their care. Almost at once,

she resolves to become completely unselfish in her love. She wanted Eduard to be happy, but she would never belong to him (Goethe 226).

All this changes, however, with Eduard's return and their encounter at the lake when he tells her of his master plan of uniting Charlotte with the Captain so that they may marry. The scene is hectic, passionate. They are awaiting Charlotte's response to the proposition. Ottilie tells Eduard to return to wait for the Captain:

> Ottilie stood agitated and confused; she knew Charlotte would be waiting impatiently for the child. She sees the plane-trees standing on the other side of the lake, only a sheet of water divides her from the path leading straight up to the pavilion. As with her eyes, so in her mind she has already reached it. The doubtfulness of venturing on to the water with the child is forgotten in this sense of urgency. She hurries to the boat, she pays no heed to her beating heart, to her trembling feet, to the signs that she is near to swooning. (Goethe 261-62)

As she falls into the boat, the child drops into the water. Ottilie again confuses time and space in this tragic scene. When she regains control of her senses, the reality that faces her is more detrimental than anything she has experienced before and its ramifications will cost her her life. She wakes up to a long-forgotten memory of the day her own mother died and Charlotte became her surrogate mother. She tells Charlotte that she has broken the rules that were intended for her. She concludes: "I shall never be Eduard's! God has opened my eyes in a terrible way to the crime I am committing. I am going to atone for it, and let no one think of preventing me" (Goethe 268).

Her feelings of culpability, which have haunted her intermittently since the outset of her romance with Eduard, peak with the baby's death. This is God's final reprimand for so blatantly abandoning propriety to live according to the promptings of the unconscious. She atones for this grave transgression by taking a vow of silence, conclusively annhilating her

desires in one final repression, until her death. Ottilie is encumbered between the dictates of society and the tribulations of her soul. She understands that neither may be eluded, much less eradicated.

Ottilie pursues what she perceives to be a path of righteousness, in which the renunciation of passion offers a pertinent solution to her predicament. Having abided by a scrupulous "code" her entire life, when that code disintegrates, she must deprive herself of that which nurtures her soul: her love for Eduard. She denies herself physical nourishment and prohibits any mental or emotional interaction as she goes on a mission of guaranteed penitence. Ottilie struggles to bridge the gap between her inner and outer worlds but simply cannot tame her unconscious in favor of the rules of a society she finds insensitive and shallow. Perhaps this resistance would appear to be an obstacle in her metamorphosis into maturity, but she holds fast to her ideals.

That Ottilie transgresses for falling in love with Eduard is a fallacy. Goethe demonstrates the morals and values which invariably permeate life, by emphasizing the emerging unconscious. As Ottilie persists with her struggle, her commitment to her inner self strengthens. Whereas Charlotte and the Captain yield to outside pressures, to the limitations of their society and with themselves, Ottilie remains steadfast in her feelings toward Eduard. She cannot surrender herself to the pressures surrounding her despite her suffering. However, Ottilie cannot face *herself*. Her social realm accepts the consequences of all their actions; it even appears that the initial reconfiguration of the group may be possible. But Ottilie's struggle is within herself. She cannot relinquish control to her unconscious even if its desires are in accord with what is acceptable in her social realm. Ottilie suffers "an innocence of immaturity and of fatally stunted growth" (Atkins 180). So long as it falls short

of her prescribed order, it must be abolished. She finds her only reprieve in death. It is as if Goethe professes that the final rectification between Ottilie's inner and outer worlds can only transpire in death.

Ottilie is an introverted, aesthetic character who banishes the trivialities of the outside world and for whom death is a welcome respite. Those who choose propriety and reason over the unconscious and art also stand to lose, as did Charlotte. So what Goethe is advocating ultimately is not one or the other, but a combination of life and art. Since one cannot apply science to explain moral and ethical dilemmas, Goethe advocates soul-searching, allowing the unconscious to shine through, as Ottilie demonstrates. Despite her trials and tribulations, her singular destiny rings true of her inner being: "Leave my soul to me" (Goethe 285).

Chapter Two: *The Awakening*, Pursuing the Unconscious

Kate Chopin's controversial novel, *The Awakening* is concerned with how Edna Pontellier's journey in both its spiritual and physical aspects shatters the traditional Victorian mold of womanhood. Chopin, an early feminist, liberates and unravels what might possibly constitute the "essential" woman by weaving her into an iridescent web of intricate thoughts, feelings, ambitions and desires. Not satisfied and unconvinced with the seemingly singular binding role which Victorian patriarchal society conveniently assigns to women, Chopin dares to defy this society in the form of an intrepid Edna, who, by allowing her soul to emerge and transform itself, shakes the very foundations of her milieu. Chopin warns against pressuring a woman into traditional roles that lock her in a stifling cage, yet this is also a cautionary tale of the consequences of excessiveness.

Issues of morality and feminism abound in *The Awakening* and Chopin interplays their significance with Edna's search for the 'essential' self. The ego-formation process necessarily involves a confrontation with the unconscious, a power struggle between the ego and the instincts within, so that the endeavor to achieve self-liberation becomes privy to a series of threats, those emerging from within Edna herself and those dependant on the outer world, her social realm. Ringe succinctly states that "the philosophical questions raised by Edna's awakening: the relation of the individual self to the physical and social realities by which it is surrounded, and the price it must pay for insisting upon its absolute freedom" are the issues at hand (588).

Throughout her formative years in Kentucky, Edna was characterized as an intellectual, meditative girl with a strong appreciation of the arts and a reputation for being self-concerned and prone to romance and idealism:

> Edna had an occasional girlfriend, 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. Her most intimate friend at school had been one of rather exceptional intellectual gifts, who wrote fine-sounding essays, which Edna admired and strove to imitate, and with her she talked and glowed over the English classics and sometimes held religious and political controversies. (Chopin 20)

Furthermore, Edna longed for the unattainable. Her first romantic experiences were little more than amplified delusions through which she externalized an introverted self. The things after which she longed were simply objects that in no way presented any grounds on which she might have created a reality distinct from fantasy. She fell in love with a young cavalry officer at too early an age. There was another young man who was engaged to her neighbor and then there was the writer, a "great tragedian" whom she never met but whose picture she kept and idolized: "Edna sleeps and lives in a world of romantic fantasy far more than she seems to awaken to self or reality" (Franklin 510). Despite their illusory nature, when these romantic projections ultimately disappear, Edna addresses the issue of their unreality. Ironically, but in a way that compliments her predisposition for introversion and contemplation, she assimilates the necessity to delineate between inner and outer worlds. She concludes uncategorically at that early phase of her life that she must demote her unconscious desires in favor of social constraints, denying her soul even the possibility of romance or fantasy.

She is then introduced to Leonce Pontellier: "He fell in love, as men are in the habit of doing, and pressed his suit with earnestness and an ardor which left nothing to be desired. He

pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her. She fancied there was sympathy of thought and taste between them, in which fancy she was mistaken" (Chopin 21). Her previous passions eluded her, and the fact that her relationship with Pontellier does not betray any traces of passion reinforces her conviction that it will then naturally thrive: "She grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution" (Chopin 21).

Marriage is the first conscious assertion of her adult life: "As the devoted wife of a man who worshipped her, she felt she could take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams" (Chopin 21). But having so abruptly closed those portals, Edna unknowingly solicits misfortune. Once married, she undertakes her responsibilities, accepting her role and position as a wife and mother with minimal conflicts despite the fact that she was only permitted to be a passive recipient of her husband's demands: "Her role was to consume, not create, to display, not discover, to obey, not rebel. But the moral and spiritual values that would condemn a woman to such a colorless fate were devoid of meaning: they could not define Mrs. Pontellier's essence" (Carson 6).

Leonce Pontellier is affluent and typically patriarchal. He is not particularly interested in children or married life per se, preferring billiards and the stock market. He approaches Edna with undeniable care and devotion, while imposing conventional expectations on her as a congenial wife and mother. Yet in the long run he cannot relate to her except as a commodity, instrumental to realizing his social stature. He indulges her financially yet his limited emotional intelligence cannot stimulate her mentally or physically: "Edna ... is provided for beautifully, though with insubstantial psychic nourishment as Pontellier's gifts of bon-bons

imply" (Franklin 513). As a result, Edna lacks a soul-mate. Her husband's "very presence reminds her of the fake role of devoted wife and mother which impedes the expression of her latent selfhood" (Spangler 256). Gradually, he evolves into nothing more than a mere nuisance in her life, so that her marriage is not only unfulfilling in its basic precepts but also smothering and tedious in its daily monotony. Increasingly, an ominous feeling overtakes her evoking "a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her" (Chopin 22).

However, this responsibility exists within Edna in a way that would not influence less impassioned women who thrive on social convention. Edna's social realm, that of the obstinate Creole society in New Orleans, is the mis-en-scene where her metamorphosis transpires. Through this perspective and as a direct result of its impact, or lack of impact, Edna contends with the tug-of-war between her existence as it really is and that to which she aspires it to be. Ironically, the women who belong to this world prove to be the catalysts for Edna's transformation. Edna's composed manner contrasts sharply to that of the demonstrative Creole women with whom she lives in New Orleans and with whom she vacations at Grand Isle.

Edna's social realm that summer is defined by a dominant female Creole collective manifested in such figures as Adele Ratignolle, the 'Madonna' of women and epitome of "mother-women," who are in full proliferation at Grand Isle: "The Creole women exercise great social and psychological force on their sisters to conform to the narrow roles prescribed by the patriarchs" (Franklin 513). Adele, Edna's antithesis, embodies the Victorian quintessence of what defines a wife and mother: she is simple, voluptuous, yielding, and never questions her place in society. She only envisages the possibility of any other existence in order to denounce it. Adele is incessantly absorbed in the meticulous care of her husband and

children, ensuring them a constant state of satisfaction: "There were no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams" (Chopin 10).

Edna loves her children, but she is by no means comparable to Adele as a mother-woman. She is deeply aware of the diverse possibilities of life, not just the restricted realm of motherhood:

> In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-woman seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. (Chopin 10)

Edna "was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them" (Chopin 21). Her maternal instincts are actually more spontaneous than those of the child-idolizing mother-women, and yet she is subjugated to considerable criticism: "He [Leonce] reproached his wife with the inattention, her habitual neglect of the children" (Chopin 8).

What baffles Edna is the Creole women's outer composure, which camouflages their discussions about romance and life, particularly when "their talk easily and naturally turns to matters Edna has been taught to consider the most intimate" (Spangler 253). Edna had a reputation for high-coloring once the shocking tales began. Often the women would cut their stories short because Edna was embarrassed and gave them the impression of being a prude, not realizing that their tales served the purpose of unleashing female unconscious drives within a safe environment. Gradually and very subtly, the conversations stimulate her own repressed

feelings, awakening romantic, artistic and intellectual needs that she believed had been long outgrown and left behind upon marriage.

Adele fails to activate, much less contain Edna in the traditional role of mother and wife. Edna is unimpressed by the women's maternal excessiveness but is excited to feel that she need not be so reclusive in her demeanor. Enfolded by the sensuality of the Gulf of Mexico, she begins to both feel and acknowledge the inner stirrings of her repressed unconscious. She tells Adele that "sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again, idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided" (Chopin 19). As a young girl she ran through this meadow away from prayers, from a dogmatic duty. Now, years later, she again has this feeling, the need to escape the stifling existence that confines her. Edna is burdened with mixed emotions – that her marriage lacks passion and that her life does not evolve around her children. When she hints at this to Adele, she feels immediate release: "She was flushed and felt intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor. It muddled her like wine, or like a first breath of freedom" (Chopin 22). But whereas Adele and the other Creole women only "speak" liberally, Edna feels impelled to continue to uncover candid ways to express her long-repressed emotions. But what Edna is yet to discover is that the unconscious possesses deceptive magnetism that challenges the bold soul to navigate safely through temptations on a journey towards psychic growth.

Robert Lebrun is the crucial temptation in Edna's transformation. Their relationship evolves rapidly from a mere friendship to a tacit, unspoken discernment of something brewing on a deeper level. "With Robert Edna feels the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as young woman" (Chopin 51). She sees the potential rebirth of her soul and life through him. Robert embodies everything

that Leonce is not, not the least of which is his unattainable status. He showers Edna with attention. He is completely absorbed by her character, and becomes engrossed in her discussions. She, in turn, feels exhilaration in his company.

But these are feelings which are kept in check, restrained by Edna's position as a married woman. Robert's reputation also meant that his association with Edna could only be fleeting, or endure only during the summer months when she occupied one of his family's cottages at Grand Isle. For he was renowned for his innocent fickle attachments to married women. The ease with which the Creole women, including Adele, could associate with Robert without any fear of disrepute is questionable. But, as Chopin indicates: "The Creole husband is never jealous; with him the gangrene passion is one which has become dwarfed by disuse" (Chopin 13). So secure are they in their wives' fidelity that they have eliminated a basic human feeling, a natural instinct in human nature.

But, despite her brewing feelings: "Mrs. Pontellier was glad he [Robert] had not assumed a similar role toward herself. It would have been unacceptable and annoying" (Chopin 13). Initially, when Robert engages in demonstrations of affection, however innocent, she is shocked and repelled: "She could not believe it to be thoughtlessness on his part, yet that was no reason she should submit to it. She did not remonstrate except again to rebuke him gently but firmly" (Chopin 14). Edna is not an adulteress; she does not at any point project impropriety, despite the fact that we, as readers, have been given a glimpse of her less-than satisfactory life with Pontellier. And yet, she and Robert share an unspoken affection for each other: "No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire" (Chopin 34).

One night, the vacationers were listening to the piano playing of Mlle Reisz. The effect of her music left a mesmerizing effect on Edna and intoxicated her emotionally: "But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking and the tears blinded her" (Chopin 29-30). Her senses are intensified to such a degree that it is almost as if she needs to find a higher plain to rest upon, so that when Robert suggests that the group go for a midnight swim, she readily accepts despite her inability and fear of swimming.

Edna spent a great deal of time that summer in learning to swim, receiving assistance and encouragement from several of the vacationing men, including Robert, but to no avail. That night, however, in a scene of climactic imagery, Edna experiences a surge of exhilaration as she unexpectedly swims on her own. Clearly symbolic, Edna's liberating swim releases in her soul a stronger craving for more of the same. Previously her unconscious desires were struggling to establish themselves in spite of her ego. But now, she confronts her inner needs in the dark sea, exploring and conquering her unconscious in experiencing its potential rebirth. Soon she is changed forever.

The idea of the 'essential' self – a predominantly Romantic notion - necessarily implies an inexplicable link to nature. This 'pure' moment of exhilaration and unity with the self occurs in the sea. The sea becomes her element – all-encompassing and unyielding in its tenacious hold, the quintessential realm of the 'essential' soul: "The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation" (Chopin 16). If she could conquer the immense sea, surely she could be released from a tedious and repressed existence: "That night she grows up. She faces her fears and uncertainties and takes her first

successful swim, 'she was like a tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its power, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with overconfidence'" (Davesolko1). "She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (Chopin 32).

Edna soon relinquishes all previous restraint over her emotions. She concedes that her earlier repression of her feelings was extreme, that she never actually repressed the intimation; the seed for ego-formation, only the urge to pursue it, so that when the opportunity for liberation presents itself, her reaction to it is also extreme. As the possibilities of an evolving unconscious present themselves exponentially, she confirms that: "Her earlier repression of the unconscious has to be lifted before growth can occur" (Franklin 516). But even as she surrenders to this psychic release, she is naturally confused: "But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic and exceedingly disturbing" (Chopin 16).

At this point Edna obviously has no clear objective in mind, but only experiences the awakening sensation of liberty and the possibility of defining her own existence which had eluded her before or had been repressed in the past: "In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being... this may seem like a ponderous wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of 28, perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman" (Chopin 16).

What is undeniable, however, is the farce that is her marriage. She rejects Leonce's oppressive nature and begins to realize that true liberation can only be achieved by extricating herself from Leonce, as her status is thus not only meaningless but a stagnant obstacle to her newly formed experience of life. She dreads Leonce's very presence and cannot bear the thought of spending any time with the person she sees as an instrument of patriarchy, stifling

her personal fulfillment: "There was no longer any purpose for her presence in the marriage. Mr. Pontellier was either unwilling to fulfill her need for sensuality or incapable of quenching her desire for passion" (Singley 7).

Her previous compliance had been second-nature to her, like walking or sleeping. But she never gave much attention as to why she felt certain feelings and never pondered taking action to change her situation: "Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. They seemed never before to have weighed so much against the attendance of her husband's kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood" (Chopin 8). The new urges seemed perfectly natural to her, but, at the same time, contradicted her character. So was it that she always had these urges but just never paid them much attention by simply ignoring them? Or did she never have them at all? Was this experience a new one, or an old one reasserting itself, having been previously quelled by external forces?

Edna's first mistake is to believe that the needs of her emerging unconscious are dependent on Robert, that it is because of him and only through him that her metamorphosis will transpire: "Through Robert she expects the satisfaction of both her romantic and passional longings" (Spangler 250). She fails to recognize her own previous limitations and lack of awareness for yearning for the unattainable as the source for her inspiration, and she refuses the implied warning: "The past was nothing to heed…the present alone was significant, was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded" (Franklin 516). However, Robert does heed the warning signals by unexpectedly leaving for Mexico on pretenses of finding work. Edna is left anxiously awaiting his return and pondering the fate of their relationship.

She decides to release herself from obligations and duties which do not nourish her new self and its subsequent transformation: "...her assertion becomes a matter of principle as well as the basis of her daily behavior" (Spangler 251). She makes her choice, one feels, without the complete understanding or knowledge of where this journey will end or to what extremes she will go to reach her goal. However, her objective is clear to her mind; there is no return.

Once in New Orleans, she begins the rebellion against her society, the point when theory must be put into practice. How will she announce, declare, her 'essential' self? "This is the moment at which her individuation must move into the conscious level of the will" (Franklin 520). She begins to shed her burdensome social responsibilities, and then gradually, she systematically sheds all traces of her life as it existed prior to her time at Grand Isle: "She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility" (Chopin 36). The more Edna asserts herself, and sheds the Edna she had perfected for society and her husband's sake, the more Leonce "...could see plainly that she wasn't herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume with which to appear before the world" (Chopin 64). In reality, she was becoming more and more stable, pursuing vigorously the unconscious needs as they become more visible. Edna ultimately relinquishes all control. The lure and power of the unconscious proves too enticing, she can hardly resist: "...a disturbing, even alienating ruthlessness about Edna, but a ruthlessness which eludes moral categories because it is more and no less than the reflection of her passional nature's drive for fulfillment" (Spangler 251). Hers is a desire that will not be impeded by customs or social convention. Indeed she seems oblivious to the sneers and jeers of society and even seems to thrive on them; they impel her forward and intensify her need for self-validation:

"There was with her a feeling of having descended the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligation added to her strength and expansion as an individual" (Chopin 104).

Mademoiselle Reisz is the other character with a strong influence on Edna. As a means to define her soul, Edna pursues more seriously her talent and love for art, no doubt influenced by the eccentric Reisz, an accomplished pianist who has foregone the domestic life in favor of her music and lives as a semi-outcast among her community: "She was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost everyone, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others" (Chopin 28). Although Edna has Reisz as a mentor and a model for her aspirations, she does not seem to be moved by the repercussions Mlle Reisz's life choices have had on her life as a member of society. Mlle Reisz embodies what Edna could become. Reisz is a symbol of broken femininity and she herself warns Edna: "The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering to earth" (Chopin 92). She also tells Edna: "To be an artist includes much: one must possess many gifts – absolute gifts – which have not been acquired by one's own effort. And moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul, the soul that dares and defies" (Chopin 71).

In fact, Edna strives and begins to succeed in becoming like her. When Leonce leaves on business, she sends the children to their grandmother, then proceeds to move into a smaller house to complete the process of liberation. What Edna fails to recognize is the major difference between them. Mlle Reisz makes the choice, between art and motherhood early on in life so that, although she is considered eccentric and disagreeable, she is still part of society.

Edna, on the other hand, chose first to become a wife and a mother. Her deviation from her duties suddenly for no apparent reason is deemed unacceptable and is more shocking than if she had been an eccentric artist all her life. Victorian society would not tolerate a middle ground between these two ideals: "Artist figures either gave up their art for motherhood or renounced motherhood for their careers" (Bartley 726). Basically one was either an Adele Ratignolle or a Mlle Reisz.

Edna extricates herself from the collective folds of the Creole women in hope of defining her 'essential' self on precepts of absolute freedom. Yet, ironically, the incurring circumstances remain out of her control. She claims independence from Leonce but in reality his departure has another meaning. She does not terminate their relationship or take steps to achieve independence before he leaves. Thus, his departure is hard to associate with her inner journey. He goes on a business trip out of obligation to his duties, not because Edna expresses a desire to be left alone. Once away, Edna remains dependant on him financially – a significant factor, which she somehow relegates to the recesses of her mind. And then Leonce overshadows her attempts to achieve independence by announcing publicly that their house will be under renovation, thereby justifying her departure for society.

As she progresses on a journey to achieve complete control of her unconscious, Edna achieves physical freedom through her affair with Alcee Arobin, a notorious and accomplished womanizer. Although she does not love Alcee, she commits adultery with him on the same day she learns of Robert's return from Mexico. But Chopin does not take issue with Edna's adultery. Described with controversial vagueness, Chopin does not delve so deeply into this occurrence because it only provides one of the steps towards Edna's awakening. Adultery is something that is taken for granted, but her transformation would be incomplete without it.

It is a tribute to Edna's evolving character that her first adulterous experience is with someone with whom she has only a fleeting interest. Obviously her instinctual needs are pushing her to the limits of freedom and self-discovery to explore every desire. The experience is true to her sense of awakening: "It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire" (Chopin 92). Arobin, however, was not the soul-mate that she sought and needed:

> She felt as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to look upon and comprehend the significance of life, that monster made up of beauty and brutality. But among the conflicting sensations which assailed her, there was neither shame nor remorse. There was a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips. (Chopin 93)

Upon Robert's return and definitive declaration of love, Edna hopes to fulfill her sense of self-esteem and to fashion her life according to her deeper needs. Robert reciprocates her feelings. But, unknowingly, Edna is too concerned with the idea of the 'essential soul' to affirm Robert as an individual. She is in love with the 'idea' of him, with the "awakening" he has aroused within her and all its projected possibilities. As she tells Mlle Reisz, she does not understand why she loves him – as she does not really comprehend the changes overtaking her as a whole – simply that these are callings she must heed: "Edna's greatest challenge: to understand that romantic love is born of erotic longing within oneself for transcendence that cannot be fulfilled by union with another human being" (Franklin 523).

However, this vision is quickly shattered. She realizes that her key to breaking out of social convention is locked within himself. Robert, despite his apparent liberated attitude and love for Edna, is still a Victorian patriarch who follows the rules of society. He leaves her after realizing that he will not be a controlling factor in her life as he presumably wanted to be:

> You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy, she is yours, I should laugh at you both.' His face grew a little white. 'What do you mean?' (Chopin 119)

He had not understood her after all and was no different from Leonce. Despite being the object of his affection, Edna is still only a woman, and one who is willing to cross the social boundaries which work to his benefit. Suddenly his pride and manhood are threatened: "Robert is so foolishly scrupulous – the conventionality...being a mark to hide a severe deficiency of masculine force" (Spangler 255). He is completely taken aback by this unexpected proclamation. The patriarch and 'good Creole' he would cease to be if he has to bear all of the insults that society throws at him. Sadly, his love for Edna proves too weak an incentive; indeed not an incentive at all in allowing him to break free from society's grip. He leaves Edna to continue her journey of self-discovery and defiance of norms.

This is the beginning of the end for Edna as she realizes that her battle against society, although it alters her own being, will never alter society itself or those who live in it. The struggle for personal aspiration is bound to the confines of one's surroundings and can only evolve within a certain framework. It is as if she suddenly realizes or wakes up to find herself in a strange land, a confined space with very little room to maneuver and even less space or potential for escape without recriminations. But she is not remorseful: "Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life" (Chopin 123).

Chopin does not categorize or attempt to justify Edna's self-evolution; it is an inherent process, a response almost like a reflex. As Edna tells Adele: "I would give up the unessential,

I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (Chopin 53). By conceding that she would relinquish her life for her children, Edna is in fact making the two most singular essential remarks on her transformation simultaneously: that her children, despite her short-comings as a "mother-woman," are essentially a priority, that she does, in theory, relate to them in the same selfless manner of all mothers, but that in denying them her 'self,' she confirms the substance of her story. She is and always will be an 'essential' soul, a unified being, solitary despite her emotional and physical links. Just as her children are forever linked to her physically, she will protect them physically if need be. But her 'soul,' that part of her being which is not linked in any physical way to any human being, must always remain hers – unconditionally. In this respect, Edna must be admired for her "strength of will, her ruthless determination to go her own way. In thought and act she has rejected unequivocally the restraints of conventional morality, social custom and personal obligation to her husband and children" (Spangler 254).

But this is the final warning. With Robert's rebuttal, she must make a final choice between the reality of her life and the nature of her illusory romance, or refuse the fact that this 'love' is transitory and "embrace death" (Franklin 524). She makes the final admission to her self that it is not Robert, nor Alcee, nor even a host of men would be sufficient, because, quite simply, they were irrelevant. She must "confront solitude presented throughout as magnetic and destructive. Unconscious contents of her psyche, not sufficiently examined and integrated, are still a powerful 'other' which she does not have the strength to endure as she seeks individuation" (Franklin 526).

Edna will not be beaten by society and her death is her final act of defiance. She will not conform. She will not go back for forgiveness or be an outcast. Her projected possibilities having failed, she sees her salvation, once again, in the sea: "She subsequently chooses the immediate and perfect deliverance of death over the hectic improvisation of means and ends – the slow and painful approaches to what would always be a succession of partial deliverances, the process bearing fruit only in a future beyond her generation" (Bartley 742).

Edna's idealization assumes a direct form. She does not merely contemplate what she might accomplish, nor does she lack the ability to understand why she does not fit into her society. Her situation is clear. We meet Edna not at the beginning of her inner struggle but at the point where she has seemingly criticized and analyzed her self, her surroundings, and created a mental vision for herself. As readers, we are more witness to the execution than the deliberation. That is not to say that Edna does not deliberate throughout the story. However, her deliberations are declarations rather than musings, suggesting that she has a pre-conceived notion that she has taken the decision to bring to life.

Her journey is the least fettered. She does not recoil on decisions taken. What other characters perceive as set-backs in her quest for self-fulfillment, she perceives as obstacles she simply overcomes by casting aside, whether as husband, children or society. She is entirely oblivious to her surroundings, focused entirely on her being, her 'self' as an entity separate from 'life' and its obligations. And as such, her journey for self-authentication and idealization is not hindered by outside factors but is linear and direct. She follows the path until the end – satisfied with her decision and conclusion – unyielding in her initial precepts.

Chapter Three: *The Hours,* Creativity and the Unconscious

Michael Cunningham's triptych vision of three parallel stories, *The Hours*, is a compelling palimpsest configuration that reveals the evolution of a creative consciousness which exists beyond time and space. By superimposing the narratives of three women and joining their experiences rather than simply recounting events chronologically, Cunningham weaves each woman's story to present aesthetic endeavors that are ordinary and enduring despite their evident complexity. Cunningham constructs a shared space, the hours of one seemingly ordinary day, from the divergent lives of Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughan by employing a technique of "multi-personal representation of reality" (Hintikka 8). Although each experiences a unique time and space which physically separates her from the other females, their unconscious is unified by the omnipresence of Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf focuses on her character's inner lives and the way they experience ordinary things in life, such as a day in the life of a socialite preparing for a party. Cunningham develops this technique further. He simulates the same day in the lives of three different women, each at a complicated crossroads in her life and yet, connected to the other females through sensory experiences: "The realm of consciousness does not replace the reality we naively believe in" (Hintikka 12), but it is shown to constitute this reality. The physical space is united despite discrepancies in temporal perspective in order to shape and project a multi-faceted reality. And rather than giving us a "weakened sense of the reality of our ordinary objects and our ordinary doings, and our own experiences it instead gives us a keener sense of their richness and

depth" (Hintikka 12). In addition to these temporal alternations, Cunningham adds the element of "space-moments" (Hintikka 10), whereas the reader not only is escorted temporally but "moves freely in time with the unconscious of an individual, or moving from person to person at a single moment in time" (Hintikka 9). On this day, Virginia is writing *Mrs. Dalloway,* Laura is reading it and Clarissa is living it.

Each protagonist is absorbed by creation and the creative act, whether through writing, making a cake or preparing for a party. Through their endeavors, Cunningham illuminates how the unconscious and the self function as vehicles for the creative act. The way each character fulfills the role expected of her in life, be it tolerable or intolerable, private or indistinguishable from the external world, is based, to a strong degree, on her need and subsequent ability to create beauty from what is ordinary, revising and improving her creative process throughout the story: "*The Hours* is about the richness of time, creativity and about trying to live true to oneself, if only for one hour" (Krishnaswany 2).

The Hours begins with Virginia Woolf's suicide in a river. The juxtaposition of a symbol of life, the river, with a death experience is not only the point of departure for this story, but one of the main themes which link the stories of the three women. Each encounter with desperation is overcome by hope and recognition of the beauty in life. And even though Virginia, by drowning, does not overcome her desperation in a conventional sense, she is finally united with her stream of consciousness, something that both Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughn also strive for.

Mentally tormented, Virginia turns to death when her creative solitude is attacked and she no longer exercises control over it. A renowned writer, she views herself as a

failure: "She herself has failed. She is not a writer at all, really; she is merely a gifted eccentric. Here, then is the last moment of true perception, her death" (Cunningham 4). Her writing, although not private, since she is after all a celebrated writer, was for her the essence of her life, of her being: "...she is anxious to join it [writing] the way she might join a party that had already started downstairs, a party full of wit and beauty certainly, but full, too, of something finer than wit or beauty; something mysterious and golden; a spark of profound celebration, of life itself, as silks rustle across polished floors and secrets are whispered under the music" (Cunningham 31). But to proceed with her writing, Virginia demands a certain 'space', a void, to separate her from reality, to protect her from it lest it invade the intense concentration and solitude she requires for creation:

> This is one of the most singular experiences, waking on what feels like a good day, preparing to work but not yet actually embarked. At this moment there are infinite possibilities, whole hours ahead. This morning she may penetrate the obfuscation, the clogged pipes, to reach the gold. She can feel it inside her, an all but indescribable second self, or rather a parallel, purer self. If she were religious, she would call it the soul. It is more than the sum of the intellect and her emotions...It is an inner faculty that recognizes the animating mysteries of the world because it is made up of the same substance and when she is very fortunate she is able to write directly through that faculty. Writing in that state is the most profound satisfaction she knows. (Cunningham 34-35)

This is the essence of Virginia Woolf, what determines her success as a woman and as a writer, or the failure of both. Though she does not label it as such, she knows that which is deep within her is a 'spirit', something which in its profound inspiration goes beyond the self and is certainly independent of her external life. More importantly, she comprehends that this unconscious is not within her control. She cannot capture it or connect herself with it, much less begin to integrate it into her social realm. On the

contrary, it is as if her unconscious commands her being, haphazardly relinquishing its power to grant her erratic moments of self-assurance and self-unity which enable her to create through writing.

If she could evoke it at will, she would be in control of her life and her being. But the fact that she cannot not only renders her frustrated but makes her appear insane. Cunningham presents the idea that perhaps Virginia's insanity, or what is perceived as insanity in her society, is in reality an intense sense of awareness, an overactive creative ability, a stroke of rare genius. Certainly in Virginia's case, this creative faculty overwhelms her existence and yet, to write about reality the way she does, with a keen perception of the intricacies of time, memory and consciousness certainly requires a minimal amount of rationality. Her creative process then is a heightened sanity that is easily confused with insanity. She struggles so that society will accept her unconscious to permit her to pursue her creative passion.

Unlike the other protagonists, who are perhaps still searching for or formulating their ideal selves, Woolf struggles to contact a self that is deep within her being, overwhelming her. Whereas others have to contend with the process of self-idealization and the achievement of a concrete social identity, Woolf has already overcome the first obstacle, although she must separate her inner from the outer 'self' she is obligated to present socially. Her search is for the unity between her inner self that is her creative genius and her outer self. She does not want to replace one with the other but to be able to activate one or the other at will. By so doing she hopes to tap into a foundation of connectivity and obtain unity with her social experiences. Only she never acquires this sense of continuity because she never gains absolute control over this "ideal" self of hers:

> The headache is always there, waiting, and her periods of freedom, however long, always feel provisional. Sometimes the headache simply takes partial possession for an evening or a day or two, then withdraws. Sometimes it remains and increases until she herself subsides. At those times the headache moves out of her skull and into the world. Everything grows and pulses. Everything is infected with brightness, throbbing with it, and she prays for dark the way a wanderer lost in the desert prays for water. This state makes her hellishly miserable; in this state she is capable of shrieking at Leonard or anyone else who comes near...and yet this state when protracted also begins to enshroud her, hour by hour like a chrysalis. Eventually, when enough hours have passed, she emerges bloodied, trembling, but full of vision and ready, once she's rested, to work again. (Cunningham 70-71)

To her family and household, she does not embody any ideal; Virginia Woolf is a woman who is continuously unstable, currently recuperating from a previous bout of what they perceive to be madness, prone to relapse at any moment and thus mentally fragile. But unbeknownst to them is the extent that she strives to present some semblance of control and normality: "She has learned over the years that sanity involves a certain measure of impersonation, not simply for the benefit of husband and servants, but for the sake, first and foremost, of one's own convictions" (Cunningham 83).

As a prescription for her ailment, Virginia is being hidden in Richmond, a suburb of London, which is abhorrent to her in its monotony and death-like existence. This not only exacerbates her situation but robs her of the fulfillment she so covets in life. She pines for London, a social realm that thrives with people, art, and music to nurture her soul where she can experience a physical existence and live life to the fullest. It is precisely those elements which she yearns for that are deemed detrimental to her health: "She is better, she is safer if she rests in Richmond, if she does not speak too much, write

too much, feel too much, if she does not travel..." (Cunningham 169-172). But Virginia would rather "die raving mad in London than evaporate in Richmond" (Cunningham 71).

Virginia brings stability to her reality by instilling in her protagonists, in this case, the socialite Clarissa Dalloway, characteristics that she herself either lacks or is forbidden from pursuing:

> This particular novel concerns a serene, intelligent woman of painfully susceptible sensibilities who was once ill but has now recovered, who is preparing for the season in London, where she will give and attend parties, write in the mornings and read in the afternoons, lunch with friends, dress perfectly. There is true art in it, this command of tea and dining table, this animating correctness. (Cunningham 83)

Virginia's antithesis is her sister Vanessa. Whereas Virginia (who is three years younger than Vanessa) appears as "an austere, parched beauty of a Giotto fresco, Vanessa is more like a figure sculpted in rosy marble by a skilled but minor artist of the late Baroque" (Cunningham 114). Although they are close, Vanessa serves to remind Virginia of all she has not succeeded in fulfilling, essentially, the traditional roles of wife, housewife and mother: "Yes, Virginia thinks, that is how one speaks to servants...and much of what Vanessa has to teach is contained in these seemingly effortless gestures" (Cunningham 115). Virginia eschews her duties to her household, viewing the time and effort it would take her to impart her instructions to Nelly, her maid, as an obstruction to her already fragile creative process. She physically avoids Nelly, "fearful that her day's writing (that fragile impulse, that egg balanced on a spoon) might dissolve before one of Nelly's moods" (Cunningham 85).

During Vanessa's visit, Virginia discovers the ending to her novel. She penetrates the clogged pipes to reach what to her is tantamount to an incredible

revelation, a moment of creative deliverance. Almost instinctively, she kisses Vanessa unreservedly and unabashedly: "It is an innocent kiss, innocent enough, but just now, in this kitchen, behind Nelly's back, it feels like the most delicious and forbidden of pleasures. Vanessa returns the kiss" (Cunningham 154). The physical sensation of the kiss is only a harbinger of further mental and emotional sensations that Virginia hopes to experience. Far from feeling guilt or shame over this exchange with her sister, she relishes what it implies about herself, about the renewed potential of her existence and her hunger for a sensual life. The kiss not only raises her morale but gives her the courage to decide to move to London: "What a plunge! It seems that she can survive, she can prosper, if she has London around her" (Cunningham 167-68). She finds the courage to inform Leonard that she is indeed ready to move back to London, to which he agrees. Her anticipation of what awaits her stems from the feelings she experienced in the kiss: "The kiss was innocent – innocent enough – but it was also full of something not unlike what Virginia wants from London, from life, it was full of a love complex and ravenous, ancient, neither this nor that" (Cunningham 210).

Virginia modifies her original plan for Clarissa Dalloway, that she will die by the novel's close. And after kissing Vanessa, Virginia decides that Clarissa too will have this same experience. She will love a woman, she will be privy to the exuberance of a kiss between herself and this woman, just one kiss that will be one of the truest moments of her life and this kiss will carry with its momentum the entire engine that will become Clarissa's life – that life that Virginia cannot and will not ever have. As a result, she cannot die: "She, [Clarissa] will be too much in love with her life, with London. Clarissa, sane Clarissa – exultant, ordinary Clarissa – will go on, loving London, loving

her life of ordinary pleasures, and someone else, a deranged poet, a visionary, will be the one to die" (Cunningham 211).

When she decides to commit suicide, she makes a final, conscious decision to take control, to make an end of the 'headaches'. Death is not a strange concept to her. It has always been a welcome respite to her internal struggle: "It is frightening, but not entirely disagreeable, this cemetery feeling. It is real; it is all but overwhelmingly real. It is, in its way, more bearable, nobler... " (Cunningham 165). What she foretells in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the death of a visionary, is only too true. For she, Virginia Woolf, is not Clarissa Dalloway. She does not, like Clarissa, lead a full life in London or any place inherently like it. She is the poet who dies.

Laura Brown wakes up on the same day, twenty-six years later in Los Angeles, reading *Mrs. Dalloway*. She is a pregnant housewife and it is her husband's birthday. Laura is an intellectual. Her husband is a decorated war veteran. She does not marry him for love but as a result of low self-esteem, having little faith that anyone could fall in love with her, perceiving herself as an outsider: "The bookworm, the foreign-looking one with the dark, close-set eyes and the Roman nose, who had never been sought or cherished, who had always been left alone, to read" (Cunningham 40). When he chooses her, she relents effortlessly, especially that since, as a war veteran, he is venerated as a hero of sorts in a context where rejection would almost be tantamount to sacrilege.

It is only long after settling into her marriage and giving birth to a son, that the mundane reality of her stifled existence becomes painfully clear to her. Regretfully she is forced to admit to what extent she has suffered the loss of her identity: "So now she is Laura Brown. Laura Zielskei, the solitary girl, the incessant reader, is gone and here in

her place is Laura Brown" (Cunningham 40). Whereas previously she spent all her time absorbed in the creative folds of literature, she now awakens to a life devoid of any stimulation, with very limited opportunities for self-expression. And what little time she may take to read is precious. The only excuse she has for reading *Mrs. Dalloway* on this particular morning is that she is pregnant: "Because she is pregnant, she is allowed these lapses. She is allowed for now, to read unreasonably, to linger in bed, to cry or grow furious over nothing" (Cunningham 38). She feels guilty for indulging in reading because it takes her away from her duties as a wife and mother, even though she despises those duties and their execution requires a tremendous effort on her part, both physical and mental. "This is her husband, this is her little boy. All they require of her is her presence and, of course, her love. She conquers the desire to go quietly back upstairs, to her bed and book" (Cunningham 43). But the reality is that she simply cannot bear her existence much longer.

Only her son, Richard, stirs any genuine emotion within her. Her love for him is all-encompassing and yet, it too, will fail to inspire her because it is not based on intimate knowledge. She cannot relate to her son, feeling that she lacks some innate "mother-self" that all other mothers seem to possess. Despite her strong emotions for him, "she is full of a love so strong, so unambiguous, it resembles appetite" (Cunningham 76). So empty is her life that she cannot even relate to her own son; she feels she has nothing to offer him, and he certainly is completely ignorant of the fact that he is a burden on her.

Laura is drained. She is physically drained from her pregnancy and the effort she must exert to care for her family. But more importantly, she is mentally and emotionally drained from trying to create a substantial existence from the sham that is her life. Her

life offers no hope for the future and no respite for the present. She feels she has compromised her essence to become something so far removed from what constitutes her ideal self as she had constructed it prior to her marriage and its bonds. Imbedded within her "created" self, "she, Laura, likes to imagine (it's one of her most closely held secrets) that she has a touch of brilliance herself, just a hint of it, though she knows most people probably walk around with similar hopeful suspicions curled up like tiny fists inside them, never divulged" (Cunningham 42).

It is a small seed, but a seed nonetheless, and one she continues to nurture, even if in vain. On this day, she will overcome the humdrum of her existence and find satisfaction by creating, not a penetrating book, or an inspirational painting, but a cake. A simple birthday cake for her husband's birthday. It is an incredibly feeble attempt at creativity, she admits, but a chance, an opportunity to delude herself into thinking that she is making an innovation:

> She is going to produce a birthday cake – only a cake – but in her mind at this moment the cake is glossy and resplendent as any photograph in any magazine; it is better even, than the photographs of cakes in magazines. There are cakes and then there are cakes. At this moment...she hopes to be as satisfied and as filled with anticipation as a writer putting down the first sentence or a builder beginning to draw the plans. (Cunningham 77)

The experience of baking and decorating the cake grants her some respite from the waves of desperation: "She will not lose hope, she will not mourn her lost possibilities, her unexpected talents (what if she has no talents after all?)" (Cunningham 79). But the cake is insufficient to supply her with a strong enough impetus to sustain her dedication to this life, especially since the completed cake, a symbol of her latent desires, is not the success

that she anticipates: "She'd imagined something more. She'd imagined it larger, more remarkable" (Cunningham 99).

Laura is visited by Kitty, her neighbor and antithesis. Kitty is an "attractive, robust, fleshy, large-headed woman several years younger than Laura. In school, Kitty and her friends – steady, stolid, firm-featured, large-spirited, capable of deep loyalties and terrible cruelties – were queens of the various festivals, the cheerleaders, the stars of the plays" (Cunningham 102). In high school, they would never have been friends; Kitty most probably would have snubbed Laura. The fact that, as grown, married women, they now socialize is only a coincidence of life. But Laura's insecurities are still in place. To her, Kitty is as glamorous as a movie star and as popular and "a paragon of domestic competence" (Cunningham 107), while Laura is not any of those things. Laura still feels intimidated in Kitty's presence and almost wishes she did not have to let her in, having not yet changed out of her robe or brushed her hair. Worse, she fears that Kitty will see the cake she has tried to produce.

But Kitty's stature is diminished when she admits to Laura that she is ill. Suddenly, Laura feels that Kitty is weak, vulnerable and frightened. She then becomes the one in a position of strength. She embraces Kitty to comfort her and in that moment of role-reversal, Laura and Kitty both lose control of their emotions: "They are afflicted and blessed, full of shared secrets, striving every moment. They are each impersonating someone" (Cunningham 110). And at this moment of vulnerability, they kiss "…their lips touch. They both know what they are doing" (Cunningham 110). Laura does not feel any remorse at this action but Kitty leaves right away. Laura "immediately feels relieved, as if steel cords have been loosened from around her chest. She can start over

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now" (Cunningham 112). She decides to make another cake. Again, she is flooded with a strong feeling to create, but differently. She is determined to correct the mistakes she made the first time. The kiss has inspired her to create with perfection. Like Virginia, the kiss's significance is clearer in what it implies in terms of emotional and mental freedom. But, again, the cake fails to fulfill her aspirations, despite the obvious improvements over the first one:

> She wants a dream of a cake manifested as an actual cake …she wants to have baked a cake that banishes sorrow, even if only for a little while. She wants to have produced something marvelous; something that would be marvelous even to those who do not love her. She has failed. She wishes she didn't mind. Something, she thinks, is wrong with her. (Cunningham 144)

Laura escapes to a hotel to do nothing else except to be alone and read. "She is so far away from her life. It was so easy. It seems somehow that she has left her own world and entered the realm of the book" (Cunningham 149-150). Reading *Mrs. Dalloway*, Laura loses herself in Woolf's characters and their lives to the point that she is uncertain of her own identity. The two worlds become confused and intertwined in her mind, the overlapping of unconsciousness Cunningham so skillfully employs. "She is herself, and not herself. She is a woman in London, an aristocrat, pale and charming, a little false; she is Virginia Woolf; and she is this other, the inchoate, trembling thing known as herself, a mother, driver…" (Cunningham 187). She could be Clarissa Dalloway, she could be living her life, and to that extent does literature envelop her and transport her away from the existence she yearns to escape.

In the neutral zone of the hotel room, Laura contemplates suicide. The thought had never occurred to her before, but in that hotel room, so far removed from her life,

anything seems possible, plausible and simple. It would be so effortless to take her own life and end her misery. "It could, she thinks, be deeply comforting, it might feel so free: to simply go away. To say to them all, I couldn't manage, you had no idea; I didn't want to try anymore" (Cunningham 151). But her contemplations are short-lived: "She imagines Virginia Woolf, virginal, unbalanced, defeated by the impossible demands of life and art" (Cunningham 152), and she does not want to be that woman. She is pregnant, a life growing inside her, she has a son she loves; she loves life; "it would be simply evil" (Cunningham 152). The few hours she spends in the hotel reading are evocative of what she might do and yet sensations of guilt overwhelm her. "She has gone to a hotel in secret, the way she might go to meet a lover. She certainly doesn't know how she'd explain two and half hours spent reading in a rented room" (Cunningham 188-89).

At her husband's birthday dinner that night, she tries to objectively qualify her reality. Unexpectedly, she senses that perhaps the idealization she seeks is already with her, embodied in her son, her husband and unborn child and manifested in her household. She comprehends that perhaps when she reads, she is like a ghost, "nothing but a floating intelligence; just a presence that perceives, as a ghost might… the same sensation of knowing people, settings, situations, without playing any particular part beyond that of willing observer" (Cunningham 215). But that night, with her family, she is not a simple observer. She created this cake, this dinner, this life:

> It seems she has succeeded suddenly, at the last minute, the way a painter might brush a final line of color onto a painting and save it from incoherence; the way a writer might set down the line that brings to light the submerged patterns and symmetry in the drama. It has to do somehow with setting plates and forks on a white cloth. (Cunningham 207)

Unfortunately, Laura's elevation of the ordinary to an art form solicits only provisional relief, satiating her only for the span of a few minutes. This transient feeling of contentment yields just as hastily as it presents itself; it is overtaken once again by the unremitting power of her inner self: "Laura reads the moment as it passes. Here it is, she thinks; there it goes. The page is about to turn" (Cunningham 208). She returns to being the ghost, who, through reading remains an observer and can only read, and not create. She believes she has failed at creativity, or at least, that creativity can never be born out of her life as it stands. She must escape it. She abandons her family once she delivers her unborn child and moves to Canada.

Clarissa Vaughan is the most liberated of all these protagonists. She lives independently with Sally, her life partner, in one of the most vibrant cities in the world, New York. It is the twenty-first century. She is an editor, exposed to literature and privy to the process of creation which produces it but she is also a busy society wife creating a stable and affectionate home-life for Sally and her daughter Julia (conceived through artificial insemination). It appears that she embodies the best of both worlds and does not suffer from any of the shortcomings or restrictions of the other protagonists. It is as if she epitomizes the overcoming of all their dashed aspirations, the ideal combination of life and art.

She begins her day preparing for a party she will host that evening for Richard, an AIDS-stricken poet friend who recently won a literary prize. This is her creative project. Unlike Virginia and Laura, she begins her day with an almost carpe diem attitude, plunging into the streets of New York to fulfill her errands with palpable enthusiasm:

"What a thrill, what a shock, to be alive on a morning in June, prosperous, almost scandalously privileged, with a simple errand to run" (Cunningham 10). Like Virginia, she is fascinated by the city, its intricacies and its endless potential: "It's the city's crush and heave that move you; its intimacy; its endless life" (Cunningham 15). Clarissa is not intimidated by life, is not fearful that her desires do not conform to expectations. She functions independently and positively in her social realm. Decorum and duty still exist, but do not prevail. It is the desires of the unconscious which propel Clarissa:

> Clarissa simply enjoys without reason the houses, the church, the man, and the dog. Still, this indiscriminate love feels entirely serious to her, as if everything in the world is part of a vast, inscrutable intention and everything in the world has its own secret name. This determined abiding fascination is what she thinks of as her soul, (an embarrassing, sentimental word, but what else to call it?); the part that might conceivably survive the death of the body. (Cunningham 12)

Clarissa enjoys a sense of place that extends to the world. She does not contemplate death as an escape from life; she does not need to escape and her vivaciousness overwhelms the obstacles she has had to face: "Why else do we struggle to go on living, no matter how compromised, no matter how harmed? We want desperately to live" (Cunningham 15). It appears that Clarissa now lives in social harmony, but her outer countenance is deceptive. Richard, the poet for whom she is hosting the party, is a previous lover. Yet, despite the dissolution of their relationship over thirty years earlier, they remain steadfast as lifetime friends. Running tacitly through the façade of their ideal friendship are the memories of lost opportunities which constantly remind them of a future they could have had together. Clarissa makes what she believes was the right choice at the time, to leave Richard (a bisexual). She knows that staying with Richard was the 'safe' choice, and, at the time, she didn't want to be

'safe'. At the prime of her youth, she craved adventure and the freedom to pursue so many options. She pursues her own life, discovers her latent homosexuality and enters into a stable relationship with Sally.

But Clarissa reminisces about this past which she considers to be ideal. She does this by living vicariously through Richard, continuously experiencing that part of her life which she had surrendered. Clarissa avoids the potential life she may have had with Richard, but she does not eliminate Richard from her life. She does not relinquish it completely as she nurtures her memories religiously. She has physically and figuratively moved on with her life, but she remains unconsciously attached to the past. Richard is a poet, an idealist, who venerates his friends and acquaintances but also assimilates them to a personal phantasy: "It is only after knowing him for some time that you begin to realize you are to him, an essentially fictional character, because he needs to live in a world peopled by extreme and commanding figures" (Cunningham 61). And so it is that Clarissa enjoys being a figure in Richard's head, dependent on him to provide her with an imaginative value.

Her present life, despite its ideal aspect feels foreign to her: "Clarissa recognizes these things but stands apart from them. She feels the presence of her own ghost, the part of her at once most indestructibly alive and less distinct; the part that owns nothing; that observes with wonder and detachment, like a tourist in a museum..." (Cunningham 92). Although she has pursued a life path of her choosing and prerogative, she yearns for the past when she was independent of Sally, of Richard even, when she had only herself to contend with. "She could simply leave it and return to her other home, where neither Sally nor Richard exists; where there is only the essence of Clarissa; a girl grown into a

woman, still full of hope, still capable of anything" (Cunningham 92). Again, the oscillation overtakes her, as it did the other women, churned on by a sense of guilt: "This is in fact, her apartment, her collection of clay pots, her mate, her life. She wants no other. Feeling regular, neither elated nor depressed, simply present as Clarissa Vaughan, a fortunate woman, professionally well-regarded, giving a party for a celebrated and mortally ill artist, she goes back" (Cunningham 92-93).

She fills her life with the trivialities of a socialite because of the certainty that she will never be able to recreate her past. But the past does not elude her; it remains within her, a strong, recurring memory of what happiness can be, of what optimism and the potential of youth may offer. Clarissa's disappointment stems from the fact that, despite her freedom to pursue her homosexuality (which Virginia and Laura only briefly experiment with), she is maintaining a traditional role of wife and mother, in exactly the same manner as heterosexual women. She has become conventional and meager, a basic failure. The sexual freedom that her society permits her does not alter what is traditionally expected of her. Moreover, Clarissa herself acquiesces to this role, perfecting it, instead of rebelling against it as might be expected.

Clarissa knows she must exert more effort to accept her existence without belittling it to herself. Virginia and Laura could not. They were adamant in their need to escape it. Clarissa is adamant to accept it, and to accept it wholeheartedly, despite the continuous waves of negativity and self-depreciation which wash over her, threatening to dissolve her life. For she cannot expect her life to give her more than what it already had. She cannot continue to reminisce and regret the missed opportunities of her life, which had she taken them, might have resulted in an entirely different life altogether.

She confirms that her recollections of Richard and that period of their lives, when, as teenagers, they had been lovers, are simply recollections. She will never be able to recreate them. "Couldn't they have discovered something larger and stranger than what they've got? It's impossible not to imagine that other future, that rejected future...as a vast and enduring romance laid over friendship so searing and profound it would accompany them to the grave and possibly even beyond. She could have had a life as potent and dangerous as literature itself. Or then again, maybe not" (Cunningham 97). Richard then was the epitome of her happiness. Nothing can happen again to equal that experience: "Now she knows, that was the moment right then. There has been no other" (Cunningham 98). Her idealization has passed, the opportunity to create an ideal life has passed and gone – forever. Her hour had come and passed.

The day finally ends with Richard's suicide. He is the deranged poet Virginia alludes to; he is Laura's son, and he is Clarissa's lover and friend. With his suicide, Clarissa's attachment to the past is finally severed. He can no longer taunt her emotionally:

> Yes, Clarissa thinks, it's time for the day to be over. We throw our parties; we abandon our families to live alone in Canada; we struggle to write books that do not change the world, despite our gifts and our unstinting efforts, our most extravagant hopes. We live our lives, do whatever we do and then we sleep – it's as simple and ordinary as that. There's just this consolation: an hour here or there when our lives seem, against all odds and expectations to burst open and give everything we've imagined, though everyone knows these hours will inevitably be followed by others, far darker and more difficult. Still we cherish the city, the morning; we hope, more than anything, for more. Heaven only knows why we love it so. (Cunningham 225)

Clarissa's search for happiness, for a genuine contentment that could permeate her being and eradicate her uneasiness concerning the past, ends here. She has arrived at this point of equilibrium after many trials, many oscillations. But her development brings her to this final realization: that true happiness and the pursuit of what life has to offer and maybe even perfection itself are to be found in what is simple in life. Life is an ebb and flow that must be accepted. By intertwining Woolf's literary struggle with Laura's cake creation and Clarissa's preparations for a party, Cunningham pays homage to the ordinary and highlights what makes life worth living. Despite what might appear to be invincible despair, one can find hope and beauty in the ordinary, where the most seemingly trivial acts may have significance and may indeed provide a sense of happiness, even if only for an hour.

Conclusion: Accepting the Unconscious

These female protagonists revise and come to terms with their unconscious, trying to find some unity in their lives despite their families, friends, lovers and ultimately society. All of them in different ways attempt to make art out of the ordinary. However, they are not extolled for attempting to accomplish this. Through their own perspectives, they all fall short of their goals and as a result, come to see their lives as futile. It may initially appear that the female protagonists regress, their efforts seem weak, their determination becomes futile against the tidal wave that is society. But to make such a general conclusion is to negate the idiosyncrasies of the human unconscious. To place the blame wholly on society and its constructs is to underestimate the factor of self-critique. To what degree was each protagonist willing to confront obstacles in her search for the truths of the unconscious? To what extent was she willing – for the benefit of her ego – to concede certain defeats? And to what extent did the unconscious make realistic demands on the protagonist?

Each of these protagonists was a creator. Each created in order to substantiate her individual existence and unconscious experience. And parallel to this creative ability was an equal feeling of failure, due perhaps to the high expectations that each protagonist placed on herself. The value of each life was determined by how each character interpreted her respective success or failure, and not exclusively by social considerations. So the main issue is not necessarily society and its restrictions, but the point of contact between the individual and the social realm.

Clearly the link between the ideal and the real is very complicated and can never be established with certainty. Self-development, or the pursuit of the ideal self, is a fragile process that requires a balance between two essential elements, the inner and outer worlds. One cannot delve too far inside nor too far outside, but negotiate a median. One cannot live too much in the past, as do Ottilie and Virginia, nor too much in the future, as do Edna and Laura. If one moves too far away from the world, one risks perishing, risks ceasing to be interactive, viable, to the point where the ideal loses its social significance, so that this soul becomes almost like a vapor. The ideal then loses the chance of becoming something. There is a real danger in this, as Ottilie proves. Ottilie defines herself against everyone and everything, and perishes, as do Edna and Virginia. Laura, although she does not perish, also defines herself to an extent where she must make a substantial sacrifice.

Ottilie abstains from physical and emotional nourishment as punishment for what she perceived as transgression and eventually dies as a result. Her death is brought on because she could not accept herself, not because her social realm ostracized her. On the contrary, she had been forgiven. Edna's social realm could not accept her transformation, but she could not continue to live except through this transformation. When that becomes impossible, life becomes futile. She relinquishes her life not because of a fear of the social consequences but because of the realization of a certain failing and a disappointment in herself. She knows her need for self-possession would never be completely or wholly fulfilled. Virginia, too, much like Ottilie and Edna, cannot accept that she has no control over her 'self', despite her reputation as a renowned writer, nor can she tolerate an increasingly overbearing social realm. She loses her ability to create,

to access her creative powers and genius, that which fuels her entire life. She feels the only way to re-unite with it is through death. Laura is depressed by her life and crushed by her inability to create a birthday cake or to define her existence independently of her husband and son. Creating a new life as a librarian in Toronto gives her the sense of identity she lost in Los Angeles even though she was not shunned in any way. Ottilie. Edna, Virginia and Laura are prisoners of their eras and societies. Their lives were determined by the extent they were willing to play a role, which each refused to do in a way that involved an incredible sacrifice. They pursued their unconscious at the expense of all and everything, escaping from life instead of accepting compromise.

Clarissa is not a prisoner of her time, and yet she accepts convention to a great degree, playing the role of society wife and mother. Clarissa, in theory, is the most liberated of all the protagonists, but she remains, in essence, a wife and mother, despite embracing and being privy to the most explicit freedom a society may tolerate – homosexuality. And yet, she too feels as trapped and unaccomplished as Ottilie, who precedes her by almost two centuries. Her sense of dissatisfaction is constant, as was that of the other protagonists. It follows her in her daily activities and serves to remind her of all the lost opportunities in her past. And yet, she does not succumb to this feeling of dissatisfaction despite its strong hold on her. She begins each day with an optimism to create art out of ordinary life experiences. Clarissa is the only character who relinquishes her compulsion to live in the past. She accepts the present and begins to see and understand herself within this perspective, by allowing herself to relate to the world and to form opinions in new and different ways. Clarissa then, by becoming interactive , is the idealist who accepts reality.

These three works do not necessarily create something new, since, as Richard tells Clarissa, 'there are no new stories, just endless retellings…" (Cunningham 59). Richard's statement helps us understand the relationship between the unconscious and the idealization of the self. The narratives that record this struggle will always vary in terms of how it is unveiled, pursued or accepted. Freud believed that "the mild narcosis induced in us by art can do no more than bring about a transient withdrawal from the pressure of vital needs, and is not strong enough to make us forget real misery" (Freud 31). However, art is not simply a remedy which can eradicate the pain experienced when the pleasure and reality principles invariably collide. On the contrary, art can imply a way of life, a way of maintaining an ideal within a reality that may be elusive or too difficult to change. Instead of offering only temporary solace in fantasy, creativity can become part of everyday experience; allowing us to fashion an existence and elevate ordinary life into an ideal that can be experienced again and again. Instead of maintaining the ideal or the real in separate realms, creativity allows us to overcome the conflict between the demands of the ego and the restraints of culture. One can create an ideal, even if imperfect. The three works that have been examined in this thesis help demonstrate that creativity itself can become an ideal that can transform reality.

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