Georgia State University
ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

English Theses | Department of English

8-18-2010

A Joint Reading of the Color Purple and the Awakening: From Feminism to Womanism and the Significance of Authentic Feminine Space

Catthuan L. Nguyen
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_theses

Recommended Citation
Nguyen, Catthuan L., "A Joint Reading of the Color Purple and the Awakening: From Feminism to Womanism and the Significance of Authentic Feminine Space." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2010.
http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_theses/87

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

"A JOINT READING OF *THE COLOR PURPLE* AND *THE AWAKENING*: FROM FEMINISM TO WOMANISM AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OFAUTHENTIC FEMININE SPACE"

by

CATTHUAN LE NGUYEN

Under the Direction of Kameelah Martin Samuel

ABSTRACT

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* fundamentally share the universal feminist yearning for personal freedom and independence within an oppressive, patriarchal society. With regards to the texts' stylistic differences and disparate social contexts, their heroines seek to ideologically oppose social rules and conventions for women without achieving the same results. This difference lies in the fact that Chopin's text fosters the traditional feminism embraced by the majority culture, while Walker's text makes use of womanism. The availability and authenticity of feminine space for the generation of women's culture also determine the extent of changes achieved.

INDEX WORDS: Alice Walker, Kate Chopin, *The Color Purple*, *The Awakening*, Feminism, Womanism, Psychoanalytic theory, Race relations, Class struggle, Spirituality, Maternity

"A JOINT READING OF WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE* AND CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING*: FROM FEMINISM TO WOMANISM AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUTHENTIC FEMININE SPACE"

by

CATTHUAN LE NGUYEN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

Copyright by
Catthuan Le Nguyen
2010

"A JOINT READING OF WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE* AND CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING*: FROM FEMINISM TO WOMANISM AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUTHENTIC FEMININE SPACE"

by

CATHUAN LE NGUYEN

Committee Chair: Kameelah Martin Samuel

Committee: Janet Gabler-Hover

Elizabeth West

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

August 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
2	Chapter 1: Gender Reconstructed in *The Awakening* and *The Color Purple*	8
2	Chapter 2: The Making of Feminine Space	49
3	Bibliography	76

Introduction

During her final years in college, a case of unwanted pregnancy left Alice Walker paralyzed with the fear of living with the consequences and alienated from her own body. Her fear was justifiably informed by social taboos about female sexuality and assumptions from her own family of her morally depraved constitution. Walker seriously contemplated suicide and conceived of it as the only way out of her hopeless situation. After a number of self-mutilated acts, she visited a clinic which her friend had located and had the cause of her trauma removed. This pivotal period in her life and the insights gained from it would come to form a significant governing principle for her art and aesthetic credo. She credits relentless solicitude and support of her female friends as instrumental in dissipating the pervasive sense of depression and restoring her to life through their resourcefulness. The experience made her realize the profoundly alienating condition of women forced to define themselves through reproductive relationship to their bodies. Moreover, the theme of community of women lending their help and support and transforming lives reverberate throughout her works and her theory of womanism.

Walker's most well-known work is *The Color Purple*, which interrogates what constitutes a family within the larger context of communal feminism or of Walker's own term "womanism," an idea which allows for more inclusion and flexibility than the term "feminism" encompasses. In its personal tales of the women's acquisition of independence and and self-ownership are encoded social and racial struggles that more or less shape the world of the characters. It shares with other feminist texts in depicting the source of a woman's struggle as society's deployment of prejudice against her precisely because of her sex. The female characters of Walker's text are burdened with operating within an additional dimension of

prejudice based on racist ideology. Walker has expressed her admiration for Kate Chopin's works, among which one comes to mind in the context of feminist struggle. Chopin's *The Awakening* shares basic elements of such struggle with Walker's *The Color Purple*, although the two worlds are constructed differently and proceed with different conventions. Besides feminist concerns, the worlds of both texts are evidently informed and effected by contemporary racial antagonism euphemistically termed as class struggle. Yet it seems that the female subjects of Walker's text are more successful in demonstrating spiritual as well as physical transcendence of the social-historico problems burdening them since the beginning. Chopin's lone heroine Edna, it may be argued, has slipped into unknowable terrain inaccessible to immediate understanding. It would be tempting to discuss her final action as self-annihilation, but in keeping with the text's abstract style and tone her action is shrouded in abstraction.

Thus, a case can be made for the parallels between Walker's *The Color Purple* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The novels situate their heroines, Celie and Edna, in oppressive circumstances where events gradually unfold to mobilize them towards self-agency. Edna and Celie live out their fictitious lives in closer temporal proximity to each other than the distance between the publication dates suggests. Edna inhabits the liminal period between the nineteenth and twentieth century when a new kind of people wholly concerned with business and proprietorship emerges. Celie lives in the rural south from conjecturally 1910s to 1960s. In the external socio-economic world, the characters are doubly separated by race and social status insofar as the constituents of their material existence render them each other's opposites. While Edna spends her days idly traversing the spectrum of leisure activities afforded her, assuming one and abandoning another according to her disposition, Celie lives her life in a perpetual state of overwhelming labor both in the house and out in the field. The world Walker creates takes no

heed of sexual division of labor so that women like Celie and Sofia make no unusual apparitions in the field. Sofia's tragic defiance against the mayor and his wife at the suggestion of domestic service culminates in her arrest and thereafter the mitigation of her punishment in the form of employment with the mayor's household. Moreover, the novel makes apparent Sophia's unwillingness subsumed as detachment from the mayor's family not only suggests her unhappy state but also provides an insight into the inner life of the quadroon nurse and numerous black servants maintaining the domestic sphere in *The Awakening*.

The question of motherhood seems to haunt both texts with ambiguities as if it is at once a source of life-giving and a tool of self-destruction. Maternity as dependent on the female's inscription in patriarchal society is resisted and deconstructed in both texts. Edna certainly recognizes the relationship between motherhood and prescriptive femininity of her class. Unwilling to perform the role of a dutiful mother and wife, Edna seeks to systematically remove herself from scenes of patriarchal signification and inhabits her world as if she were an independent single woman of society. The text deconstructs contemporary upperclass feminism through Edna's characteristically unfeminine physique and her gradual acquisition of masculine mannerism. At the margin of Edna's world occupies the servitude class whose twilight existence wavers between significance and insignificance and seen and unseen. In every scene that calls for labor, the servant designated for such task is always identified as a black female. They are regularly seen performing some kind of task, yet they remain relatively unseen within the world of the novel. The presence of racial iconography illustrates the subterranean dimension of the prevalent feminism of elite class. This feminism which deploys leisure and exhibitionist ideals depends on the hierarchy of class and by extension of servitude in order to achieve the illusion of

splendor and elegance. The subservience and inscription of the lower class in the domestic sphere of the upper class complicates the question of feminism.

The same injustices resulting from class struggle can also be found in *The Color Purple*, but they occupy only a marginal status. The text is centrally concerned with exposing the tyranny and detriments of masculinist hegemony at the social and familial level. It is a narrative about the passage from the patriarchal oppressive world to a utopian world of women's culture and self-autonomy. Along the way it struggles to expose the abusive collaborationn of sexism and racism towards women and mobilizes to reconstruct an order of existence in which masculinity is contained. Encompassed within this new order is a reconfiguration of the family insofar as who can constitute a family and whether conflict of interest plays a role in the formation of a new family order based on mutual respect and understanding. The reconstruction of the family is facilitated by the women's collaboration on maternity characterized by their agreement to take care of each other's children.

The communal ambience as apparent in *The Color Purple* seems more cohesive and compellingly motivated by shared circumstances than the one in *The Awakening*. A sense of alienation and distance seems to pervade the environment of *The Awakening*, so much so that the vacationers of the Grand Isle seem to be disparate from one another. Real connection is neither established nor sought by the island's congregates; no one understands anyone, and each person or couple is absorbed in his/her or their own business to the extent that they make a discordant group. Thus, it is not surprising that *The Awakening* lacks the strong presence of the community of women as empowered in *The Color Purple* even as it tries to compensate for this lack with the representation of Mademoiselle Reisz's feminist/artistic existence. Perversely, whatever semblance of subversion or alternative is represented by or embodied in Mademoiselle Reisz is

ultimately undermined by society's perception of her as an unpleasant, troublesome old woman. Chopin plays on this societal stigmatization of women who repudiate marriage and become an independent or artist by ascribing to Mme. Reisz witch-like, deformed physical descriptions, which become more pronounced when she plays at the piano. Likewise, Celie's unattractive appearance coupled with her initial lack of economic status seems to serve as justification for the men in her life to abuse her. The fact of her marriage does not detract from her affinity to Mme. Reisz considering that it was a forced marriage not for her own convenience or comfort. It may be argued that Celie's own "awakening" owes much to the united spirit of the women in *The Color Purple*. For the most part, the women in *The Awakening* try but fail to realize sisterly bond or they have completely lost it through socialization as they become the eyes and ears of patriarchal hegemony. This is evident when they judge other women through a masculine gaze that reinforces societal expectations of women, even in the absence of men.

The availability of feminine space for women to cultivate and nourish themselves as individuals can determine the outcome of their struggle. The world of *The Awakening* lacks authentic feminine space for self-exploration. Grand Isle may appear to be an ideal escape from the mainland world of commerce, business and convention, but it is in fact a microcosmic replica of the outside world from which it is physically isolated. On this island, the rules of the outside world still apply if not with more vigilance and scrutiny. Woman vacationers are still expected to display feminine ideals and obligations so as to reflect on their husbands favorably. Mademoiselle Reisz's residence and the "pigeon-house" which Edna hopes to buy so she can live alone are depicted as places of possible recluse for Edna. A closer examination reveals that their authenticity is compromised by either personal or socio-economic exigencies. In the end, Edna returns to the Gulf of Mexico where she had learned to swim earlier. She submerges into

the water and seems to experience a state of being that only she understands. Could the sea be that feminine space that Edna has tirelessly seeks in society? Or is her return to the sea a resignation or a confirmation of her loss?

The Color Purple also expresses a kind of yearning for feminine space insulated from the prying eyes and disruption of men. The female world is dramatized in a succession of feminine spaces, the quality of which corresponds to the strength of the female and their presence. The porch is a place where many come and go or sit and talk about the passing of the day. Many events transpire on Albert's porch. It bears witness to the development of Celie's and Sofia's friendship, which culminates in their collaboration on a quilt aptly named Sister's Choice. Interestingly, Harpo's jukejoint becomes another such feminine space as the strength of the female presence dwarfs their male counterpart. More importantly, the jukejoint serves as an agent for publicizing the scene of personal struggle to the effect of exposing the errors of masculinist judgement and enervating the assumption of their power. Moving forward from the jukejoint, Celie and Shug travel to the latter's home in Memphis. Their stay here generates Celie's productivity and creativity and shows a domestic side of Shug as the two live in harmony. Their stay in Memphis solidifies Celie's growth and strength and puts her on the path towards economic independence, which extends outward to improve and promote better relations between men and women and white and black people.

The world of *The Color Purple* is richer in its capacity to facilitate changes and provide contexts conducive to those changes. Also perhaps the communal impulse evident in the text somewhat contributes to the successful transformation. *The Awakening* lacks such communal support and seems to gravitate towards a solitary existentialist search for the meaning of life. Its quest is both personal and philosophical. The world of *The Color Purple* operates with the logic

that a community should create its own model of governing principle rather than adopting that of the dominant culture. To that end, the culture eventually generated in the novel is based on a women-centered model that seeks to transform the oppressive and position of its women. *The Color Purple* and *The Awakening* can be read in conjunction, notwithstanding their styles and socially and racially demarcated worlds. The common search for authenticity in life from a woman's position connects the two novels through their deployment of a different vision of life from the one in which they live. Although these novels are established as feminist/womanist novels exploring the conditions of women and giving expressions to their particular concerns, the particular insight they give is a shared human condition, irrespective of race and class so that we may argue race and class are human constructs devised to keep us further alienated from one another, from our shared condition. A juxtaposition of the texts may help to illuminate certain aspects of each text not immediately answerable within the confines of its logic.

Gender Reconstructed in *The Awakening* and *The Color Purple*

Since their publications respectively, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) have separately become the subject of scholarly investigations from multiple perspectives as well as schools of thought. Both texts are complex and certainly lend themselves to a variety of discourses. Chopin's text highlights the struggle for female individuality in late Nineteenth-Century restrictive society. Similarly, Walker's text resonates with the underlying theme of self-authority in a social context doubly oppressed from the collaboration of racism and sexism. While elemental differences between the two texts may be numerous and range from narrative style to social context, a joint reading of the texts could prove valuable for broadening the scope of possibilities as questions of social, racial, and economical significance are considered. By putting the two texts in conversation, this section aims to focus on the texts' representations of how the ideology of maternity/motherhood/femininity is constructed and signified through social imperatives and conventions. Interestingly, both novels evince a deliberate preoccupation with the aesthetic of the female body, particularly its relationship to the consumption of food, and its materialistic decoration as if to evacuate the bodily site of patriarchal heterosexual influences. Thus, it may be argued that in patriarchal context the female body bears marks of class struggle and racial demarcation. Racism and class struggle are figured with varying degrees of significance in both texts. Chopin's text renders them marginal to the effect that it is uncertain if they are perceived in the consciousness of the characters. Nonetheless, racial iconography and by extension class struggle persist in the shadow of the immediate and central plot. Their shadowy presence complicates knowledge of maternity/femininity particular to the universe of Chopin's novel. It suggests that the making and appearance of maternity/femininity are arguably tied to the subterranean existence of racism and class hierarchy. Within class the body becomes subject to mass gaze and scrutiny that

inexhaustibly look for signs of both conformity to and deviation from contemporary idea of femininity. Racist ideology at the turn of the century categorically posits the moral and aesthetic superiority of white bodies over black bodies. Rather than portraying the manifestation of feminine ideals in their female characters, Walker and Chopin emphasize the physical aspects of their characters that may be considered anomalous, defective and uncelebratory in the dominant culture. In juxtaposition, the two novels demonstrate that "whiteness" and "blackness" are individually defined by beauty, ugliness and any perception in between. Many readers might note that as description of and reference to whiteness permeate the narrative of *The Awakening* so does blackness in *The Color Purple*. "Whiteness" and "blackness" as cultural signifiers appear in both texts as mechanisms for understanding the appropriation of norms and establishment of social taboos. The world of *The Awakening* portrays the social imperatives of the upper-class as manifested in and embodied by women. Women serve as the vessels which carry many of the important cultural ideals of the upper-class, including the ideal of being as white as possible, for white is considered beautiful. As we shall see *The Color Purple*'s narrative logic is embedded in the inversion of the paradigm that predominantly prefers white over black and ascribes to the former positive more aesthetically pleasing characteristics. In *The Color Purple*, it becomes evident that black is beautiful and physical robustness and vigor in the female are celebrated and coveted and serve as the source and strength of personal and social elevation.

A. Feminism, Maternity, and the Maternal Fantasy as Oppositions to Patriarchy

Maternity and the question of motherhood haunt both texts insomuch as it would not be a stretch to argue that the struggles of the protagonists are essentially a search for the mother, if not in the literal sense then perhaps in the allegorical sense. Feminism, according to the works of influential critics such as Simone De Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler, is an umbrella term

for any movement that seeks to highlight the subjectification of women and their exclusion from participation in active areas of life, to ameliorate the conditions of existence of women at any or all levels, or to bring forth her being and all its complexities as a force to be reckoned. Feminism fundamentally posits that western society is dominantly patriarchal and progress is predicated upon the recognition of oppression of women and the initiative to rewrite their lives. The works of Luce Irigary, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler not only greatly contribute to feminist scholarship but also reconceptualize feminist thought in increasingly theoretical terms. Concurrent development of theories such as psychoanalytical theory, particularly that of Jacques Lacan, no doubt influenced the theoretical orientation of some feminists while serving as an example of the antithesis of their thoughts. While Lacan's theory, as presented in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* translated by Bruce Fink, is extremely complex and his language impenetrable to meaning, one tiny fraction of his theory could be explicated as thus: human reality is symbolic; language is symbolic; however, subjectivity, knowledge and ideology are only possible within the symbolic order, since outside of it we are nothing. The symbolic order is a system for organizing and knowing the world and reconceptualizing it in language and signification. The repercussion of the symbolic order is that it removes us from the real, which may refer to the real of our experience or the real contact with nature, etc. The symbolic order is masculine and through its resources creates a patriarchal society. Marilyn C. Wesley elaborates:

> In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory the symbolic order of culture replaces phenomenal experience in the actual world with representation through language. Since that phenomenal experience is ideologically associated with the prelinguistic feminine order of Nature, the Mother as a sign of Nature and all the literal experience associated with the physical perception of the natural world must be suppressed in order for masculine figuration (which

> is the symbolic replace of experience) to take place…In Lacanian terms the masculine symbolic order must replace the feminine imaginary; thus the extinction of the 'Mother' and all she represents is imperative to the masculine generation of culture…A woman's text, while making use of masculine symbolic figuration, may find ways to inscribe literal evocations of phenomenal nature, which has been excribed along with the mother…" (87).

Feminism studied in conjunction with psychoanalytic theory ultimately leads to the revelation that all attempts to expose and deconstruct patriarchal society are subliminally a desire to return to the mother, to rediscover the mother as a lost, unspoken-of and unspeakable entity.

Often nature, as an actual physical phenomenon untouched, unbounded and unappropriated by men, is invoked as infinite space upon which the name of the Mother is projected, remembered and fantasized. As it shall be demonstrated, nature, by virtue of its position outside of human society and generation of phenomenal experiences not easily understood, is often associated with the maternal. The space of the Mother stands to signify a part of the human subject that always remains outside of socialization, intuits the contingencies of human life and is never satisfied with life's presentations, masquerades and constructs. In a way, the signifier "Mother/Maternal" is a metaphor for repressed emotion, memories, wants, needs or desires not represented in reality. Chopin's and Walker's principal female characters possess the insight and knowledge of the signification of the Mother, which serves as the source of their restlessness and the impetus for personal and social mobility. In *The Awakening*, the protagonist Edna Pontellier demonstrates the intuition that life is incomplete and partial, consisting of the "outward existence that conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin 17). The outward existence conforms to the order and precepts of society and is immersed in the symbolic order of law and culture. However, docile conformity is undermined once incongruities between societal decrees and natural phenomenon are perceived. Anti-essentialist

theorists such as Kristeva, Butler, and Judith Haberstam believe that identities such as gender categories are not natural givens but are rather socially defined by identification of characteristics. The biological accident of having been born with certain anatomical organs does not automatically determine one's destiny. Furthermore, a person's biological-anatomical makeup in no way in and of itself suggests or indicates that he or she must perform certain duties in life and act or think a certain way. Society writes the script and disseminates the fiction of femininity and masculinity. However, it is sometimes demonstrated that the line of demarcation between the categories of male and female, i.e. femininity and masculinity, is not as stable as or natural as it seems.

Perhaps contemporary theories in art and science at the time Chopin's text was written partly informed concepts of gender and sex. Chopin and to some extent Walker resist entering contemporary debate in art and the aesthetic since to do so would mean indirectly subscribing to categorization and definition. In general the novels aim at subverting society's rigid categorization of gender and definition of femininity and masculinity. Michael T. Gilmore notes that at the time *The Awakening* was written art was transitioning from Realism to Impressionism. Impressionism emphasizes "the artist's response to what he saw as much as the object itself" (Gilmore 60). Chopin's text dramatizes the struggle for methodology of aesthetic representation, namely between Realism and Impressionism, in a number of ways. In Impressionism Edna finds a mode of expression as nebulous and enigmatic as her emotions. At the narrative level, the language of Edna's expressions is abstract and encodes her impression of and response to her environment, such as when "she turned her face seaward to gather in an impression of space and solitude, which the vast expanse of water, meeting and melting with the moonlit sky, conveyed to her excited fancy. As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself" (Chopin 33). At another time, Realism is registered through the perception of Adele who delights at Edna's realistic

rendering of her subjects; Adele exclaims, “surely, this Bavarian peasant is worth framing; and this basket of apples! Never have I seen anything more lifelike. One might almost be tempted to reach out a hand and take one” (Chopin 65). The above passages illustrate the metaphorical assignment of Realism and Impressionism to diametrically different characters with opposing ideologies. In science, Darwinian theory of nature prevailed and was often invoked to support or defend the belief in the naturalness of all aspects of reality/social life. Gilmore asserts that Chopin aims “to question the idolatry of nature. For nature is seldom an objective or neutral category: much of what passes for the natural in a given culture’s self-definition is in reality social, the social masked as the inevitable” (70). Gilmore’s assertion is valid on the subject of gender. Chopin characterizes Edna with both realist and impressionist qualities and feminine and masculine attributes. She is described as handsome rather than beautiful; she enjoys food and is not reserved in her consumption. Andrew Delbanco seems to hold a critical view of Edna as he discerns in her gradually independent identity a tendency to emulate men, especially her husband (100). Delbanco adduces as examples of her emulation her inclination for going out and gambling (in horse racing), much like her husband has done. However, Delbanco’s view is problematic since it seems to reinforce socially sanctioned and gender-specific roles which serve as the foundation of the concept of femininity and masculinity. Perhaps Chopin illustrates Edna ambiguously or androgynously as a mean to expose the social, rather than natural, reality of identities. Cristina Giorcelli argues that the novel attempts to escape categorization and definition. This resistance is reflected in the narrative and stylistic wavering between direct and indirect and serious and jest, prompting the reader to wonder whether it is a work of realism, naturalism, symbolism or impressionism and whether it is a short novel or a long short story (Giorcelli 110).

Like *The Awakening*'s lack of narrative and stylistic uniformity that can be read as a sign of resistance and distancing from dominant culture's insistence for definition and categorization, *The Color Purple*'s narrative and stylistic richness invites varying interpretations. Lauren Berlant observes that some passages employ fairy-tale language such as when Nettie begins recounting their family's history with "once upon a time, there was a well-to-do farmer" (26). It is most evident that, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr argues, Walker's use of free indirect discourse is influenced by Zora Neale Hurston. Gates notes that Hurston blended "dialect with standard English to create a new voice, a voice exactly as black as it is white" and that Walker's innovation on this literary device is the complete avoidance of standard English in Celie's narrative (251). Nonetheless, bell hooks warns that to situate the novel in any critical discourse only illuminates certain aspects while obscuring, restricting and controlling others since critical discourse is not complete and need not be "fixed" or "static" (284). Critical discourse of the novels should resist the temptation to identify them as works of certain genres or to assess their quality on the basis of their conformity to genre conventions.

Walker's and Chopin's texts frame the overarching theme of subjectivity and self-autonomy outside the bounds of stylistic coherence for easy identification; instead, as previously shown, the narratives are woven together by different styles and literary devices. Their stylistic unorthodoxy, stemming from the fact that it is impossible for critics to situate each text in any one specific genre or style as discussed above, departs from novelistic conventions with an undertone of rebellion. The protagonists of both texts seek to find or create a mode of existence according to their vision and which is denied to them by the larger culture. In constructing an ideal world, where for example femininity equals masculinity rather than subordinates to it, the texts make use of masculine figuration, as Marilyn C. Wesley has noted, to access indirectly natural or phenomenal experiences associated with the Mother.

Motifs of nature proliferate in both texts as they are understood to be connected to the Mother and what it represents. The search for natural/phenomenal experiences and their expression underlines Edna's emotional journey throughout *The Awakening*. Edna's perception of the natural world functions as the novel's most important trope for implying its "maternal" instincts within a reality where the law of the father dominates. Physical consciousness of the natural world is introduced into discourse in *The Color Purple* through Shug. Perhaps she is its most innovative character for the way she perceptively and spiritually reorganizes her system of faith and belief around an indiscriminate epistemology. She explains to Celie, "God is inside…everybody. God is everything…that is or ever was or ever will be. God love everything you love. It pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (Walker 196-97). With these assertions, Shug drastically alters Celie's anthropomorphological notion of God, whom she has thought of as "big and old and tall and graybearded and white" (Walker 195). Shug recognizes in Celie's uninformed faith both masculinist and racist influences. Celie had obviously inherited her notion of religion and God from the white dominant culture. Shug recounts that she began to eradicate the "old white man" from her thought by thinking about the trees, the air, the birds, then other people, which eventually led her to the "feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all" (Walker 197). She also believes that God cannot be found in church, since it represents him according to the "white folks' white bible" (Walker 195). Shug further advises Celie, "you have to git man off your eyeball, before you can see anything a'tall…Man corrupt everything. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God" (Walker198). With these statements, Shug has in effect divested the core of her faith of racist as well as sexist oppression. Shug's philosophy also lays the foundation for what hooks calls the text's construction of "an ideal world of true love and commitment where there is no erotic tension" where men and women with intertwining feelings for

one another can live together in peace and harmony (287). This ideal world essentially is driven by womanist ideals with the central "vision of inclusion" (hooks 291).

It should be remembered that before Shug's vivacious presence solidifies the effort towards the construction of a new world order, she was introduced into the text during a vulnerable time in her life. Upon seeing her for the first time at Mr.___'s house Celie observes that she "look like she ain't long for this world but dressed well for the next" (Walker 45). Over the course of the next few days, Shug gradually convalesces under the watch and care of Celie. At this point in the novel a nascent subtext of female unity was already forming between Celie and Sofia and manifested in their collaboration of a quilt called "Sister's Choice" (Walker 59). Inevitably female relationships born under pressure, as in the case of Celie and Shug, or out of choice and common lot, as in the case of Celie and Sofia, suggest the absence of the maternal imaginary within an overwhelming patriarchal hegemony. Celie's construction of an epistolary narrative provides a medium for accessing the effaced maternal order of existence and bringing it into focus. It brings to life the fantasy of the mother and shows that the fantasy of the mother and the law of the father are complementary theories wherein the latter offers a perspective through which life's arbitrariness and absurdity are accounted for while the former imagines an escape from conscripted life. It is an escape grounded in nostalgic longing and wonderment for what could have been if oppressive regiments like patriarchy had never been formed or thought of and finally dominated the way of life.

To understand the texts' attempt to subvert society's convention and re-envision life in an inversely different order, an illustration of the restrictive world in which the protagonists live is needed. Their societies are organized around a patriarchal value and belief system that privileges men over women and confers upon the former hegemonic power in both the social and domestic worlds. In *The Awakening* the idea of proprietorship is embodied in the character of Leonce

Pontellier, Edna's husband, who looks "at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property" (Chopin 4). In *The Color Purple* masculinist ideology informs household order, as Celie's Pa and Mr.___ relegate all household chores to Celie in addition to subjecting her to their sexual needs. One of the themes depicted in Walker's text is the danger of untempered masculinity. Its perpetuation generates long-running and deep repercussions to the social and familial being of both men and women. Mr.___'s lifelong unhappiness and destructiveness originates from his inability to marry Shug, as his father had forbidden the union. As a result of this law of the father, Mr.___'s life unfolds in a pattern of long absence from home and indiscreet lovers' trysts with Shug which causes Anna Julia, his wife, adversity in caring for their children alone and which causes her to seek the comfort of another man, who eventually kills her as she tries to leave him to devote more time to her children. Her death leaves an indelible mark on her oldest son, Harpo, who continues to be haunted by the fact that he had bore witness to his mother's death. In his own adulthood, Harpo shows that he has been completely immersed in the inculcation of a patriarchal/masculinist structure of marriage and life. In desiring to emulate his father's domineering position in marriage, Harpo effectively destroys the genuine love that characterizes his marriage to Sofia and distinguishes it from that of his father's. Unwilling to accept the fact that his wife Sofia is a free spirit and possesses the physical capacity to resist him, Harpo continually tries to make her submissive to his will as his father Mr.___ does with his wife Celie. These personal histories illustrate that a pattern of self-destruction and affliction caused by paternal law and tradition generates domino effects on the lives of others. One solution may be to dismantle patriarchy's long-standing influence and oppression.

The need to expose and dismantle patriarchal abuses towards women in western culture can be demonstrated by showing the mechanisms of patriarchy. Patriarchy appropriates and reduces women to the status of commodity. Its calculated law limits perception and understanding of

humanity and the world. Understanding of humanity and the world under patriarchal existence is fragmented and even discouraged as people are told to divide parts and parcels of themselves and invest them in various ideological apparatuses such as religion, marriage, motherhood, femininity, masculinity, heterosexuality, and so forth. To establish hegemony, fear is subsumed as contempt and feeling of superiority, and the object of fear is sought to be contained. Thus, the tragedy of patriarchal romance lies in its recalcitrance to account for and legitimize behaviors or desires that do not fit into such categories. Deviation from the established norms categorically warrants social stigmatization in forms of pathological labels.

The Awakening illustrates society's appropriation of and dependence on psychiatry for diagnosing deviant behaviors not well understood at the time but nonetheless pose a threat to the current social order. In *The Awakening* Leonce seeks the advice of doctor Mandelet on how to interpret his wife's newly acquired deviant behavior for a woman such as going out alone, abandoning housework and not receiving guests at home as she used to do. Leonce is seemingly concerned that Edna "doesn't act well. She's odd, she's not like herself…she's peculiar" (Chopin 76-77). Based on his concern, it is obvious that Leonce wants Edna to observe faithfully societal dictates concerning feminine virtues. In response to Leonce's observation of Edna, the doctor asks gravely, "nothing hereditary? Nothing peculiar about her family antecedents, is there?" (Chopin 77). The doctor's immediate connection of female behavioral deviance to mental illness represents the period's collective social psychology conditioned to stigmatize erratic acts on the ground of pseudo-scientific explanation.

Pathological labels and ostracism are socially powerful tools for ensuring that women conform to society's prescriptions. *The Awakening*'s pariah artist Mademoiselle Reisz's non-conforming attitude and way of life alienate her from the community. As an artist who never

married and lives on her own, she drastically rejects the institutions of marriage, appropriate femininity, and subordination to men, all of which are supposed to define a woman's life and her achievement. As an artist-woman, she is one of those "brave soul[s]…that dares and defies" (Chopin 74). Chopin's novel shows no reservation in depicting the extent of her ostracized existence nor in subscribing to the period's belief that physical appearance reflects or indicates morality or internal qualities, as Rebecca Nisitich reveals (123). Edna's endeavor to locate Mademoiselle Reisz's residence reveals the latter's unpopular existence. At a residence listed as her address, Edna finds that the landlord pretentiously claims to not know of any Mademoiselle Reisz, since all their "lodgers were people of the highest distinctions" (Chopin 68). Another character whom Edna asked for assistance proclaims that "he did not want to know her at all, or anything concerning her – the most disagreeable and unpopular woman who ever lived in Bienville Street" (Chopin 68). This unpopular perception of Mademoiselle Reisz may be accounted for by the social short-sightedness of the period which is only capable of conceiving of women in two terms: An angel when she conforms to conventions, produces what is demanded and become a dutiful mother and wife; she is a monster/witch when she goes against expectations and carves out a piece of individuality on her own terms. Clearly, Mademoiselle Reisz falls within the latter category. Textual description of her encapsulates contemporary prejudice that connects physical appearance with reputation. When Mademoiselle Reisz plays at the piano, she is described as sitting "low at the instrument, and the lines of her body settles into ungraceful curves and angles that give it an appearance of deformity" (Chopin 74). It is not coincidental that she is depicted most hideously witch-like as she demonstrates the very talent and skill that sustain her independence.

Chopin's text is well represented with personification of each prevalent stereotype of the female as either an angel or a witch. While Mademoiselle Reisz may be stigmatized as witch-like,

Adele Ratignolle's immaculate physical and moral perfection elevates her to the status of the angel. Her identity solely consists of being a loving dutiful wife and a devoted mother. Outside of these prescriptive roles, she has no identity of her own. Mademoiselle Reisz may potentially serve as a formidable influence on Edna, but her socially pariah status and seemingly loveless existence render her undesirable to Edna's romantic aspiration. Adele, on the other hand, seems to have love and comfort in a predesigned manner, so she lacks an authenticated sense of self, which is central to Edna's being. Surrounded by such disparate characters, Edna essentially finds herself alone in her search for an identity not yet realized by any other character within the universe of the novel. As Edna's self-exploration progresses, it becomes evident that she has conceived a mode of being that can be described as a collage of different elements drawn from disparate identities.

As we have seen, patriarchal society is organized around the fiction of womanhood, but equally fictional is its concept of motherhood. First and foremost, it mobilizes to construct the illusion that the phenomena, womanhood and motherhood, are not only related but also the natural lot of a woman. The value of literary theories thus has been the dismantling of this age-old illusion. The works of Judith Butler have greatly contributed to our understanding that womanhood as well as manhood are in essence a performance that takes direction from social scripts. Women's self-presentation is inescapably informed by their relation to men, if not by their signification of men. Luce Irigary views the existence of woman as "an occasion for meditation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself" (Chang 140). Her theory echoes Levi-Strauss's anthropological finding and conclusion of a woman's operative position in society. According to him, a woman's existence, marked by her indoctrination into marriage, passes her from her father's house to her husband's house as an occasion of transaction between men. Men have been writing about women longer than women have been writing about

themselves. As a result of men's authorship and dominance in the print culture, a cultural narrative about women established in print which presents and disseminates the ideal image of women as the Madonna and the ideal place for her as the kitchen. The dichotomy of the Madonna or angel-in-the-kitchen, as represented by Adele, and the monster dominated popular conceptions of womanhood in the nineteenth century; they also served as convenient categories for identifying women according to their lifestyle. Regarding the essential alienation of motherhood, Julia Kristeva argues:

> The Madonna serves as the supreme fiction of the unity of the mother and child…that our coming into being is somehow tied to a subject, the mother, rather than realizing the more disquieting reality…that we come into existence from a void, 'a subjectless biological program,' that is instilled into a 'symbolizing subject, this event called motherhood.'
>
> (Barker 64-65)

Kristeva's theory aims at de-essentializing the intricacies of human relationships which have been long viewed as natural. She seems to be arguing that human existence is essentially insignificant and meaningless and that a semblance of meaning is created through establishing familial bonds and naturalizing them. To the detriment of the female sex, the price of familial and by extension of societal cohesion comes at the expense of their self-authority.

The cultural narrative Feminist theory puts forth aptly underscores the thematic concerns of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and provides a theoretical framework in which to view Edna Pontellier as well as other female characters in the novel. For Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, this narrative about the plight of the female in society exposes the racist, sexist, and social conditions of black women, and the monstrous abuse inflicted upon them serves as the occasion for their rising above their circumstances. Although removed by social barriers of class and race, or rather in spite

of these barriers, the female characters in these texts find themselves fighting the same battle against the prescribed roles designated for them.

In *The Awakening*, the insistence on class division, such as that between the upper-middle class and the working class, coupled with racial division makes possible the luxurious lifestyle of the Pontelliers and their friends. The ephemeral yet intermittent appearances of the servants throughout the domestic sphere of the novel form a subterranean world marginal to the larger one and whose apparent oppressive condition is never once discerned by any of the more privileged characters. Despite its marginal treatment, the subtext of the black servants blends into the narrative a discomforting reality that the characters and the privileged world of *The Awakening* would rather overlook and evade discussing. In fact, the text's passing, nonchalant mentions of the servants reflect the way they are treated: as trivial and sometimes cumbersome tools. The presence of blackness, as represented by the servants, casts a shadow over the whiteness that pervades the narrative. In *Playing in the Dark* Toni Morrison notes that "images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness – a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and loathing" (qtd in Nisitich 134). This "dark and abiding" presence functions as a moment of truth, a rupture, that subtly perforates the fabric of pretension and hypocrisy worn everyday in the larger dominant culture.

Descriptions of servant girls, besides positing a racial iconography, concisely convey a shadow of ennui derived from the servants' confined existence. When they appear in the novel, they are always shown doing various house chores or running after the children. The mischief of the children often makes their nurse-maids look "disagreeable and resigned" or lift their voices in "mild protest and entreaty" (Chopin 23, 59). When they are not being pushed to the brink of their patience

by the children, they perform other tasks mechanically with an air of distance and remoteness from their immediate surrounding. For example, Madame Lebrun's "little negro girl who worked [her] sewing machine" tends to sweep "the galleries with long, absent-minded strokes of the broom" (Chopin 38-39). Together these snapshots of a servant's life speak more forcefully about the brute reality of the perceived socially and racially inferior people than all of Edna's attempts at giving expressions to her new sense of being. Snapshots like these are dispersed throughout the novel and are never illustrated in more than one sentence. The brief nature of the passage coupled with the fact that the racial identity, the fact of their blackness – the quadroon nurse, the black servant, the negro girl - of each servant is always used to identify them strongly indicate the racist undertone of their identification. Like a shadow or an apparition sliding in and out of focus, their brief appearances are filled with the reverberating silence of their condition and agony. A sense of inner unwillingness for their position can be deduced from their look of unhappiness.

Could it be that through these glimpses of domestic servitude, we are bearing witness to a kind of montage of circumstances to which Sofia might have been subjected following her transition to service for the mayor's household? While Walker's text never directly takes the reader into the scene and source of Sofia's silence, Chopin's textual illustration of servants laboring in their domestic tasks might supply a glimpse of Sofia's silent suffering. Before Shug Avery comes along, Sofia Butler charges into Celie's narrative, and thus her world, like a ray of sunshine with her blunt and disarming attitude, determination, pride, strength and aptitude for self-defense. She is perhaps one of the novel's most attractive and outspoken characters. Tragically, the qualities that make her attractive also prove to be the instruments of her downfall. While on a public outing with her family Sofia is approached by the white mayor's wife who condescends to offer her an unsolicited position as her maid. Sofia dares to speak up and refuses the position; her audacity angers the mayor. What

ensues is a public scene of class struggle that bears witness to the humiliation of a black woman standing up to a powerful white man. From this moment on, Sofia's life becomes a lifelong term of servitude to her white offenders. Many years of hard labor and subordination categorically erode Sofia's former strength. Once a fearless outspoken person, Sofia has become silent, resigning to her unjust fate. Readers of both novels would undoubtedly make a connection between Sofia's condition and those of the female servants of *The Awakening* in terms of racism and class struggle. The value of a joint reading or putting into conversation two disparate texts such as *The Awakening* and *The Color Purple* is that where one text only subtly hints at an issue the other might provide a bigger picture of the same issue by making it its central thematic concern from a different perspective. The servant girls of Chopin's novel are minimally represented without psychology or personal histories as if they had none and existed only for the purpose of servitude. Walker's novel while In *The Awakening* issues of race and class struggle simmer at the peripheries of social consciousness and is implicitly and marginally expressed in the minor characters of the female servants. In *The Color Purple*, racism, sexism, and class struggle play an important part in the individual, spiritual and communal transformation eventually taken place.

That one of the servants' main tasks is to look after the children is tied up to the discourse of maternity. Echoing Kristeva's de-essentializing argument that motherhood is an event of fiction, Edna's own maternal philosophy borders on a kind of recognition of motherhood's fictitiousness and materialism, as evident when she 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 is only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (Chopin 55-56). Edna's confession can be read as a substitution of one subjectivity for another - that of a mother for that of an individual - or a preference for one over the other. Her privileged socio-

economic reality renders her statement unsubstantial in light of the fact that the provisions she is willing to give her children are already provided for by means of her husband's prosperity. When privileges and materialistic abundance fortify external life, what else is there to give or share but one's self?[1]

Adele Ratignolle, the supreme mother-woman and friend yet total opposite of Edna, finds Edna's convoluted outburst strange and incomprehensible as if "the two women did not appear to be…talking the same language" (Chopin 55). A common feature of scholarship on *The Awakening* views Adele's character as a foil to Edna's. She lives her life in perfect harmony with and conformity to the expectations of womanhood and motherhood, devoting herself solely to her children and her husband. Her husband's pecuniary resource makes allowance for extra if not predominant help with maintaining the household and children, but Adele sometimes on her own volition performs certain domestic tasks in accordance with her role as a mother-woman. It should be understood that the sustenance of the domestic sphere in no way relies on her engagement, but rather the voluntary nature of her involvement made possible by an army of servants conveniently supports and reinforces her façade as a resourceful mother and wife. When visiting, Edna may find her friend "engaged in assorting the clothes which had returned that morning from the laundry" (Chopin 64). Upon seeing Edna, Adele "at once abandoned her occupation" justifying that it really is Cite's – "a young black woman" – business to sort the clothes (Chopin 64). At home, Adele takes care to embody the angel-in-the-house[2] image, looking, as Edna notes, "more beautiful than ever there at home, in a negligee which left her arms almost wholly bare and exposed the rich, melting

---

[1] Rebecca Nisitich argues that the socio-economic situation of black women provides the means for Edna's awakening; they are the hands, the eyes, the ears, the voice performing, by economic pressure, the duties of motherhood so that Edna has time to meditate on motherhood (128).

[2] Angel-in-the-house/kitchen is a vocabulary of nineteenth-century ideology of gender that idealizes the image of the domestic woman who fulfills her familial duties while maintaining her appearance according to prescribed standards.

curves of her white throat" (Chopin 64). This description of Adele adduces an instant, of many, in the text wherein the image of whiteness is deployed through both Adele and Edna almost in direct contrast to or juxtaposition with the image of blackness. Blackness is introduced persistently into the text only through one medium: the servants. Thus, the novel suggests a thematic and ideological opposition between whiteness and blackness.

It should be noted that Edna's observation of Adele may only be a reflection of the former's prejudice against domestic bliss, comfort, and harmony, for "the Ratignolles understood each other perfectly [such that] if ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union" (Chopin 65). Edna's observations of her friend's home life and marriage may seem to be commending her friend while it belies her true feeling of revulsion and superiority for having displaced herself outside the reach of domestic pressure. She leaves her friend's house feeling more confident and convinced than ever of having made the right decision to abandon her home lot but not without being moved by "a kind of commiseration" for her friend, "a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium" (Chopin 66). While Edna's judgment evinces a tone of pity that could only be produced by her friendship with and love for Adele, it is also carried out with an undercurrent of chastisement and resentment towards her friend for not realizing her own self-effacing existence and by extension that of all women. Perhaps Edna would agree with critics such as Martha Fodaski Black in her argument that Adele achieves realization of the perfect conventional woman by "dramatizing her dependence [and seeking] masculine applause and support" (101). Black further asserts that Adele's domestic harmony and bliss are illusions and "the price of Adele's life is the scene of 'torture' near the end of the novel when her role is vividly clarified" (102).

Another critic, Deborah E. Barker, contends that Adele's immersion in the role of the mother-woman is absolutely totalizing to the extent that she gives her body and soul; her body through pregnancies and her soul at the expense of having a self and her own thoughts (72). Theoretical feminist indictment against Adele, as exemplified by Black's and Barker's assertions, respectively, combined with Edna's symptomatic tendency to freeze and filter perceptions of Adele through her own predilections construct more or less a fictional account of Adele as a woman whose submission to patriarchal prescriptions helps to perpetuate the oppressed condition of woman as devoted wife and mother. Edna conceives of her new self as completely contrasting Adele's, and in setting out to cast herself in this new role Edna perhaps inadvertently assumes an act deemed the most horrendous and destructive ever perpetrated by men to woman's existence: she objectifies Adele, thereby casting her friend in a binary opposition with herself. In order to conceive of herself as a new independent woman, Edna needs an image of the opposite woman as a frame of reference from which to fashion herself. Adele embodies all the manners and prescriptions of womanhood which Edna detests; nonetheless, Adele's conformity clarifies to Edna what she does not want to be in her conception of a new identity. Out of the need to cast Adele as an opposite of herself, Edna is guilty of subconsciously viewing Adele in an objective way. Deconstructionist theory highlights the fact that binary oppositions - i.e. black versus white, gay versus straight, male versus female – are constructed pillars of society designed to uphold its status quo while imposing upon them the façade of meaning. Binary oppositions are basically meaning-making mechanisms whereby one's definition and identity depend on its not being the other. For example, in the context of the world of *The Awakening* the simple statement "white is not black" immediately elicits an intangible progression of social and racial connotations in a person's mind. In the world of *The Color Purple* a

statement like “black is beautiful” reconfigures the mainstream paradigm by asserting that black is also beautiful.

There is evidence in the text that Adele is objectified as a living breathing embodiment of an ideal woman. Physical description of Adele evokes romantic ideals of the “bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams” (Chopin 11). Her lips are pouted and “so red that one could only think of cherries or some other delicious crimson fruit in looking at them” (Chopin 11). Perhaps the most striking and insistent characteristic of the passage devoted to describing Adele is the language itself, which seems indirect, evasive and conditional on negative construction: “If her husband did *not* adore her, he was a brute…There are *no* words to describe her…There was *nothing* subtle or hidden about her charms…the blue eyes that were like *nothing* but sapphires…One would *not* have wanted her white neck a mite less full…*Never* were hands more exquisite than hers” (Emphasis mine, Chopin 11). While this passage contains the most extensive physical description of any character in the novel, it clearly emphasizes on the superficial corporeal aspects to accentuate their individual beauty. Adele’s “commodity” status is established through linguistic inscription of her body whereupon the text of her own story is written before she makes her appearance in the novel. The “negative” manner in which she is described foreshadows the condition of her existence as one in negation of the self, one who is present but is not. It is significant that the text exposes her looks but nothing of her self and individuality because she does not have one; or rather the reader is made to believe that she cannot conceive of such thing.

Perhaps Adele’s function in the text is not as a foil or a binary opposition to Edna, whose yearning for personal freedom is rendered vividly by virtue of her friend’s submissive monotonous existence. Rather, Adele possesses strength, character, adaptability, and the wisdom to survive the demands of her time in the same way that the women of *The Color Purple* mobilize to re-shape their

lives with whatever means available. Adele knows more about the world than Edna seems to; she understands desire and seduction and in committing herself to one sphere she is fortified against these advances. Her warning to Robert to let Edna alone because "she is not one of [them]; she is not like [them]" is indicative of her wisdom (Chopin 24). Her supplication derives from past experience with Robert's flirtation and familiarity of the capricious nature of his attachment. She immediately intuits Edna's sensibility and realizes that she may misconstrue Robert's intention and allow it to lead her astray from duties of a wife and mother.

In her essay on the leisure-class of the late nineteenth century, Li-Wen Chang draws from Thorstein Weblen's 1899 book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* to illustrate the socio-economic interdependence of femininity and masculinity. Weblen's theory seems to have preceded feminist and psychoanalytic studies in highlighting the existence of women as signifying the dominance of patriarchal values. Weblen demonstrates that the term "leisure" as applied to the preoccupation of upper-class females is deceptive since it represses evidence of calculation and self-expenditure in the acquisition of the state or appearance of leisure. He posits that women of this era lack personal identities and are alienated from the concept of subjectivity as they must heed society's call to consume and spend their husband's money as a way of flexing his pecuniary strength. The frequency and quality of their consumption, the approximation of their personal appearance to the contemporary standard and their adherence to the idea of femininity are all reflections and definition of their husband's masculinity.[3] As long as woman's existence depends on men's economic provisions due to the lack of opportunities for women, their presence will always be pointing outward to accentuate men's masculinity in the same way that a piece of property's attractive

[3] Psychoanalytic and feminist theorists elaborate on this concept of women as the "reflections of masculinity" and re-formulate it in Lacanian terms so that now "woman is the phallus" in that she is patriarchy's object and instrument. See, for example, Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, New York: Columbia UP, 2000.

qualities reflect favorably on its proprietor. Representations of Adele throughout the text tend to immobilize and "freeze" her into a picture of perfection. Edna likes "to sit and gaze at her fair companion as she might look upon a faultless Madonna" (Chopin 14). The image of the Madonna is once again invoked to inform an impression of Adele as an objectively perfect female, and Edna is no less at fault for imposing this image as she perceived "never had [Adele] seemed a more tempting subject than at that moment, seated there like some sensuous Madonna, with the gleam of the fading day enriching her splendid color" (15). In this passage Edna, a fledgling artist, is looking at Adele through an artist's lens and with an artist's desire to capture and translate beauty the moment it is perceived. That Edna refers to Adele as a "tempting subject" and the former's attention to color evoke an artist's sensibility. Edna's tendency to objectify Adele as she does in the above passage does not indicate her affinity with patriarchal values; rather, this tendency derives from her subconscious need to objectify Adele as her opposite. Edna needs to set herself apart from Adele and all that represent patriarchal construction of womanhood mainly for herself.

The same gender ideology operates in *The Color Purple* so that the existence of women also comes to contain reflection of their husbands. In the world of the novel the characters are situated in a racist socio-economic context that precludes leisure opportunities and personal maintenance as criteria of ideal femininity within the domestic sphere. Rather, these qualities are desired outside of marriage, which indicates that the institution of marriage as operative in the text reproduces conditions not unlike slavery or domestic servitude. The commodification of a strong-bodied woman to make a good housewife becomes the paramount concern in a man's search for a wife who possesses the physical capacity to work around the house. Unlike Edna, whose rebellion is conceived in abstract terms because her materialistic and class privileges are established and upheld by the same institutions that oppress black womanhood in Walker's text, Celie as well as other

female characters in the text will learn to better articulate their conditions because they are grounded in concrete problems of reality caused by social, racial and masculinist prejudices.

Wendy Wall writes in "Lettered Bodies and Corporeal Text" that in *The Color Purple* patriarchal power is established through rape, wife-beating, genital mutilation, and scarification to make victims feel powerless (261). All of these acts are symbolic marks of oppression on the female body. The opening scene of *The Color Purple* illustrates not one but two instances of the immobilization of the female body, all of which are perpetrated by the male figurehead of the household. Celie's mother just gave birth to little Lucious and became physically unable to accommodate her husband's sexual need, repeatedly refusing him. She is physically weakened and the exhaustion causes her some degree of confinement not unlike the scene of Adele's accouchement towards the end of *The Awakening.* When she leaves home for a doctor's visit, he rapes Celie, seeing her as her mother's substitute since she is the oldest of the girls. Celie's mother never completely recovers from childbirth; rather, her illness is exacerbated with the suspicion of a sexual relationship between Pa and Celie, so that until her death she remains confined and tormented. With the passing of their mother, Celie realizes that she and Nettie stand to be used by their Pa, as she writes "I see him looking at my little sister. She scared. But I say I'll take care of you" (Walker 3). She believes that marriage would provide a relief for the both of them, with either their Pa remarrying or Nettie's marrying Mr.___.

The transference of the female body from one patriarchal household to another and the separation of Celie from her beloved sister and children as necessary resorts for survival indicate the terror and danger of masculine sexuality. In feminist discourse, it is theoretically accepted that the original power and promiscuity of female sexuality threatened masculine hegemony and mobilized

them to debilitate the female body and castrate her sexuality through various forms of violence.[4] Contrary to this theoretical narrative, Walker's text posits that the real problem lies in untempered male sexuality that does not distinguish blood relations or sexual boundaries. As Sofia aptly states, "a girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (Walker 40).

In *The Color Purple* objectification of the female body for signs of capacity for labor and obedience is carried out unabashedly like a reenactment of the slave trade. Mr.___'s consideration of marrying Celie is occasioned solely by his need to find a caretaker for his home and children, whose unruliness have recently exhausted the hired help and his own mother. The transaction of marriage takes place on the porch of Celie's family home where she is summoned to stand in front of Mr.___ so he can look her over. She stands still on the porch and turns around when she is told while Mr.___ deliberates from his horse and her Pa tries to encourage his decision by saying "she good with children…Never heard her say a hard word to nary of them" and that she comes with a cow (Walker 11). At Mr.___'s home, Celie is treated no less than a servant, exhausting herself both inside the home and in the field, and at night she is no more than a body to her husband. Mr.___ apparently enjoys this power structure which informs his family life and secures him the sedentary position of sitting on the porch, smoking his cigar and overlooking his children's and wife's work. Celie is so oppressed that even his visiting sister, Kate, is outraged at his treatment of her. She tries to stand up for Celie to no avail and encourages her to fight. Celie concludes that while submission may not be the best way of living, it nonetheless has kept her alive.

B. The Body as a Tool for Subversion

---

[4] Coppelia Kahn, in *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*, examines the construction of masculinity in Shakespeare's Roman plays. Kahn shows that demonstrations of masculinity consistently depends on violence towards, alienation from, and disregard for women. Raping of woman and disfiguring her beauty are some of the ways patriarchy leaves its marks.

This power structure is maintained for a long time and comes to impress upon the minds of the young children the notion that marriage consists of a domineering husband and an overworked subservient wife. Young Harpo certainly grows up with this impression and throughout his life struggles with his delicate nature and a desire to emulate his father's dominating stance in his marriage to Sofia, a marriage that is otherwise loving. At a young age, Harpo already displays a somewhat misogynistic attitude towards women, proclaiming that "women work" when Aunt Kate asks him to help Celie bring in the water (Walker 22). He might as well believe that the hierarchy of domestic order is naturally ordained and unfolds in its natural course when marriage takes effect. Sofia's strong-willed character coupled with her physically strong body frustrate Harpo's attempt to reproduce the conditions of his father's marriage in his own. Furthermore, Sofia's resistance against malleability undermines Harpo's belief that women are naturally weaker than men and suited for house works only. Descriptions of Sofia's physique are as impressive as her dynamic character. Celie notes that she is not "quite as tall as Harpo but much bigger, and strong and ruddy looking, like her mama brought her up on pork…Arms got muscle. Legs, too. She swings [the] baby about like it nothing" (21, 35). Compared to Sofia, Harpo is thin and tall. Sofia observes that while she would "rather be out in the fields or fooling with the animals. Even chopping wood. But [Harpo] love cooking and cleaning and doing little things round the house" (60). Their predispositions are problematic for Harpo, who can only imagine one paradigm to measure his manhood and that is the one exemplified by his father.

Sofia's difference from Celie undermines Harpo's masculinity because she will not allow him to use her body as a site of his authority and a signifier of his masculinity. She consents once to the deployment of her body as a means to extricate her from her family so that she and Harpo can fulfill their desire to be together. By agreeing to be impregnated by Harpo, Sofia ironically

commences the first step in attaining a sense of self-autonomy. Rather than being weakened and confined by multiple childbirths, she continues to exert a kind of physical strength that could have only formed under conditions conducive to adversity, oppression, and abuse. She is the kind of woman that Toni Morrison calls "a complete woman…she could nurse, she could heal, she could chop wood, she could do all those things…those women (black mammy) were terrific, but they were perceived of as beastly in the very things that were wonderful about them" (qtd in O'Reilley 84). These women are considered beastly by the majority culture precisely because their physical effusiveness makes them versatile in all aspects of life's necessities and their resourcefulness has the effect of confounding gender-specific roles. Their presence destabilizes group-specific boundaries and exposes them as constructs instituted and upheld by privilege. In the privileged world of *The Awakening* a woman of Edna's or Adele's class stature would be perceived of as "beastly" if she demonstrated and executed an all-around knowledge of essential survival skills. Moreover, her physique would "descend" from a feminine delicate form to one that has adapted to hardship and manifests its strength. The standards for a woman like Edna and Adele are different and they benefit from the alliance of class. The nineteenth century conception of beauty reveals a racially motivated agenda to further marginalize and stigmatize black people. Rebecca Nisitich reveals that nineteenth-century racial ideology disguised as morality posits that skin color is a moral indicator, that white women were sexually pure while black women were overly sexual (124). In addition to the abhorrence of blackness, robustness of the body was considered vulgar and associated with working-class women "whose bodies signified manual labor, frail upper class women's unproductive and essentially decorative bodies advertised their elite social status" (Beilke 112).

The deployment of the body as a site of class distinction as well as domestic and sexual domination is dramatized in both texts. In *The Color Purple* this struggle finds its overt expression

in Harpo's struggle for power against Sofia. Witness Harpo's desperate fight with Sofia in an effort to insert himself in the masculinist tradition:

> He try to slap her…She reach down and grab a piece of stove wood and whack him across the eyes. He punch her in the stomach, she double over groaning but come up with both hands lock right under his privates. He roll on the floor he grab her dress tail and pull. She stand there in her slip. She never blink a eye. He jump up to put a hammer lock under her chin, she throw him over her back. He fall *bam* up against the stove. (Walker 38)

In this scene it is apparent that Sofia emerges victorious in the sense that she suffers from fewer physical injuries while Harpo receives extensive physical damages as well as emotional affliction and frustration. The outcome of this fight and perhaps countless others not depicted make Harpo realize that despite the fact of his biological sex, he remains physically inferior to Sofia. His solution is to increase his weight by eating beyond his capacity.

In *The Awakening* Edna's rebellious spirit is signified by both the shape of her body and her disregard for social conventions. In her examination of Ellen Glasgow's 1926 novel *Romantic Comedians*, Debra Beilke situates the heroine Edmonia Bredalbane's social transgression in the context of late nineteenth century southern idea of containment of the female body. Drawing on the works of Susan Bordo and Joan Jacobs Brumbery, Beilke connects Edmonia's ravenous appetite to the larger ideological resistance against upper-class social imperatives governing female desires and containment of bodily aesthetic so that one aspect reflects the other (112). Edmonia's uninhibited appetite and indulgences are antithetical to the convention of female reservation in thought and

action. Edmonia's violation of gender aesthetics functions as an allegorical denudation of the female body of patriarchal markers and ornaments.[5]

Chopin understands the ideologically-informed connotations of appetite and its potential to function as a moral indicator within the social context. She ascribes to Edna a voluptuous appetite and engages her in many scenes of dining, both communal and solitary, to suggest her difference from the conventional woman and restlessness as she refuses to stay home and attend to domestic business. At the Cheniere, she awakes from a deep relaxing slumber to the nagging pains of hunger. Alone in the abode, she finds "a crusty brown loaf and a bottle of wine…[She] bit[es] a piece from the brown loaf, tearing it with her strong, white teeth. She pour[s] some of the wine into the glass and [drinks] it down" (Chopin 44). The bestial motif of this description suggests her lack of reservation and an unpretentious approach to hunger, but it should be noted that the absence of company precludes necessary observation of etiquette. Edna's ferocious appetite is demonstrated once again when, hardly a couple of hours have passed since a social dinner, "she was hungry again, for the Highcamp dinner, though of excellent quality, had lacked abundance. She rummaged in the larder and brought forth a piece of 'Gruyere' and some crackers" (87).

In the world of *The Color Purple* food represents an extension of the cook and a symbol of his/her trust and friendship. Here, food is both one's labor and the product of that labor to be enjoyed by the laborers and their friends and family. Enjoyment of food is a celebration of community, family, and physical accomplishment. While the creation of food expends energy from the body, it restores to it what it previously took. The communal as well as personal endowments of food render Harpo's "abuse" of it, in his desperate attempt to overpower Sofia, transgressive of unspoken communal codes. *The Color Purple* contains many scenes of collective dining in which

[5] In showcasing the grotesqueness of Edmonia's body, Glasgow reveals her alliance to the sentiments of her time and disapproval of alternate transgressive female types (Beilke 112).

almost all of the characters are present. The centrality of women in this community, especially in scenes of communal dining, is further indicated by the fact that food is almost always prepared by the women. This fact coupled with the strong presence of women and their support for one another deems Harpo's utilization of food so damaging. On the contrary, the world of *The Awakening* is structured by the division of class and its appropriate labor so that the characters never come to approximate the symbolic gesture of food, its signification. In Chopin's text, food or rather the materialization of dishes is always the product of the others. It always undergoes the transference from its maker to appropriate beneficiaries so that the former indefinitely remain alienated from their own products while the latter blindly consume. The implication of class in the discourse of food questions its status as a legitimate instrument for rebellious assertions. While Edna's enjoyment of food can still be perceived as audacious and liberating, its transgressive power rests on unsubstantial foundation, as the tool of her subversion comes not from her own making but from those underneath her. For example, the soup that she eats with "evident satisfaction" while her husband compulsively seasons it with "pepper, salt, vinegar, mustard" was prepared by their cook, as is everything else she eats at home (Chopin 59). Any victual she receives outside of her home is also prepared by women of the working-class such as the "mulatresse" who has "a small, leafy corner, with a few green tables under the orange trees" to accommodate the few customers privy to her hidden garden (121). Edna comes here for the "milk and cream cheese…bread and butter" (121).

Discussion of Edna's indulgence of food illustrates an aspect of her society's idea of femininity. It is a kind of femininity that expects women to look and act a certain way all the while displaying their privileges provided by the husbands. The women seem pampered more than overworked, which may mislead to the impression that their husbands do not own them. On the contrary, in both worlds the contract of marriage is significantly defined by ownership. As Mr.___

tells Harpo, all women, especially wives, are expected to be beaten by their husbands for stubbornness and disobedience. Besides, he reasons that "all women good for –" without finishing, but within the context of his sexist prejudice it may be assumed that he had pejorative and degrading thoughts in mind (Walker 23). Celie's marriage to Mr.___ provides the narrative a substantial account of marital abuses and oppression which in turn serves as a preface for the text's emotional and economical amelioration of its female characters. Because masculinist ideology of womanhood operates mainly and most oppressively within the domestic sphere and the family unit, targeted characters eventually must leave the scene of their oppression as the first constitutive step towards liberation. In leaving they effectively destabilize the family unit and threaten to dissolve its unitary structure, the fact of which indicates the centrality of their role within the family. The narrative's mobile impulse to construct an ideal world is in actuality a drive to re-construct the family in an expansive communal sense that allows for a harmonious existence among lovers, husbands, wives, children, step-children. In this re-construction of the family, conflict of interest that may otherwise lead to problems is subsumed or short-circuited by a re-organization of the sexual drive and sexuality. Carolyn Denard explains that black women advocate the kind of feminism that is usually more "group-centered than self-centered, more cultural than political…they tend to be concerned more with the particular female cultural values of their own ethnic group rather than with those of women in general" (qtd in O'Reilly 85).

The women of *The Color Purple* are the force of the transformation as they turn antagonistic relation into familial cohabitation and love and change what can constitute maternity and motherhood. In so doing they re-establish the concept of family not necessarily based on biological tie/blood line, monogamous exclusion or marital relation, but rather on mutual respect and experience. Perhaps this thematic reconfiguration of the family constitution not based exclusively

on blood tie explains the recurrent imagery of blood throughout the text. The first reference to blood appears in the first few pages in which it is insinuated that Celie's impregnation at a premature age has caused her to be infertile, according to "a girl at church [who] say you git big if you bleed every month" and Celie "don't bleed no more" (Walker 5). The second image of blood occurs on Celie's wedding day, which she spends "running from the oldest boy [Harpo]…[who] pick up a rock and laid [her] head open. The blood run all down tween [her] breasts" (12). Perhaps the most powerful image of blood is recounted in Celie's narration of her rape to Shug; she recalls "how it stung while [she] finish trimming his hair. How the blood drip down [her] leg and mess up [her] stocking" (114). All these images of blood pouring out, running out of the body in a sense, share the common feature of occurring within the domestic familial space. The forced rupture of blood contaminates the domestic context, which should serve as a safe haven. A family unit has traditionally rested on the biological tie of having the same blood line, but the violation of its symbolic signifier desecrates the tradition and, furthermore, indicates the need to rethink and reorganize the family structure divorced from genetic ties if needs be. The reconfiguration of the family is most evidently manifested in Harpo, Sofia, and Mary Agnes's children and the crisscrossing of love and dynamics among the adults and children that makes them seemingly an extended family.

C. A New World Order

After a long physical absence interrupted by intermittent visits, an elderly Sofia gets reunited with her husband and children, but her alienation is noticeable and her demeanor more subdued. It is revealed that in her absence her sister Odessa and her husband and Harpo and Squeak all helped raise Sofia's kids. During one of their first dinners together at Odessa's house, Sofia is depicted as a stranger at the table, one who has been too long removed from her family and community insofar as she seems to have lost her voice through hard work and oppression. At the table, she sits down "like

there's no room for her. Children reach across her like she not there" (200). The children call their aunt Odessa "mama. Call squeak little mama. Call Sofia 'Miss'" (201). When Celie brings up the fact that if Harpo "hadn't tried to rule over Sofia the white folks never would have caught her" Sofia is so stunned "to hear [Celie] speak up she ain't chewed for ten minutes" (202). Sofia's alienation quickly dissipates by virtue of the children. Of all the children Harpo has with Sofia and Mary Agnes, the one child he has the most affection for is not his by either but rather Henrietta, Sofia's child with Buster the prizefighter, with whom Sofia had a relationship after she left Harpo. Henrietta is "sullen, mean, mischievous, and too stubborn to live in this world. But [Harpo] love her best of all" (203). Perhaps his love for her signifies his redemption for and remorse of his past action which generated the repercussions out of which she was born. While Sofia's children may not be familiar with her enough to show their affection, Suzie Q, Harpo and Mary Agnes's daughter, expresses her interest in Sofia, when she comes over to her, looks up at her and asks "you gotta go Misofia?" (206). After Sofia pulls her up on her lap, Suzie Q "lay her head on Sofia chest" and says, "poor Sofia" (207). Witnessing the display of affection, Harpo remarks to Mary Agnes, "darling, look how Suzie Q take to Sofia" (207). Mary Agnes replies, "children know good when they see it" (207). Then she and Sofia smile at each other. This welcoming friendly gesture solidifies their reconciliation of the previous conflict at Harpo's juke joint when Sofia punched Mary Agnes. The gesture also signals the beginning of their existence as an extended family wherein collective effort is executed to take care of the children. It is further strengthened by Sofia's offer to take care of Suzie Q while Mary Agnes embarks on a singing career.

Another family whose formation is representative of the reconfiguration is Doctor Samuel's family, whose missionary engagement in Africa, of which Celie's sister Nettie partakes, forms a separate narrative in the novel. It is eventually exposed that his children are in fact Celie's children

separated from her at birth. Nettie's self-imposition into the family at Celie's insistence after Albert ejects her from his home ultimately disturbs the complacent denial of the children's true parentage with which Corrine, Doctor Samuel's wife, has chosen to live. Corrine gradually becomes suspicious of Nettie's true identity and intention for joining her family as she perceives the children's resemblance to her and her closeness to Samuel. Corrine's emotion is a mixture of jealousy and fear of losing her husband and children. Her torment devolves into physical debilitation; on her dying bed, Nettie and Samuel try to restore her peace of mind as Nettie tries to make her remember encountering Celie at the fabric store in their hometown. All three sit "talking a little and holding on to each other until Corrine fell off to sleep" with Corrine waking up in the middle of the night to tell Samuel that she believes and then she "died anyway" (188). Nettie's mention of Corrine's passing in such a succinct manner in her letter to Celie indicates insensitivity and lack of respect on her part. Corrine's death naturally clears the way for Nettie's ascension to the maternal-wife position within the family. Unlike Harpo's and Sofia's extended family, the change in Samuel's family brings them closer to the traditional family structure based on blood relations and leads to the culminating family reunion at the end. Regardless of the positive outcome resulting from the reconceptualizing of the family, it is nonetheless shown to be dependent on the absence of an "extra" maternal figure. Perhaps Harpo's familial arrangement works because Mary Agnes will be absent for a long time as she pursues a singing career. Samuel's family is disposed to be incorporated into the larger communal context upon their return to America since the potential obstacle is removed with Corrine's death.

The dramatization of the families' histories, past and present, illustrates a different kind of motherhood that could only be generated out of a communal sensibility. Molly Hite notes that "in *The Color Purple* children create mothers by circulating among women who in other contexts are

daughters, sisters, friends, wives, and lovers" (102). While Walker's text does not seem to dispense completely with traditional mothering, it calls for a reconfiguring and expanding of the concept of motherhood; in so doing, it redefines maternity. In *The Awakening* disruption to the conventional family structure also occurs in the form of Edna's abandonment of her prescriptive roles as mother and wife. Although her children will circulate among the servants and relatives such as their grandmother in the absence of their mother as they do even in her presence, the circulation is not the same as in that of *The Color Purple*. Edna's action fails to command reformative power or to produce transformative results precisely because she tries to rewrite her own personal history at the exclusion of her family. Unlike Edna, the women of *The Color Purple* re-inscribe themselves into existing (familial) history thereby transforming it by contingency. They do not pretend that people or family are erasable.

Central to the realization of the new "ideal world" as manifested at the familial level in *The Color Purple* is the reconfiguration of other ideologies informing the lives and actions of its characters. The traditional concept of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality upheld by the larger culture is deconstructed almost point by point. Concerning femininity, it has already been shown what the dominant culture considers as feminine and beautiful. As images of whiteness pervades *The Awakening* to suggest that it is a desirable indispensible element of beauty, images of blackness inform the concept of beauty in *The Color Purple*. Seeing Shug for the first time in a photograph, Celie records in her letter that she was "the most beautiful woman I ever saw. She more pretty then my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier then me" (6). Upon seeing her in person, Celie notes that "her face black as Harpo…[her] lips look like black plum" (Walker 46). Anna Julia, Albert's first wife and Harpo's mother, is also remembered as a pretty woman. Sofia is another good-looking pretty woman whose strong physique is often highlighted. She is fully capable of

performing tasks designated for men. She exemplifies what Toni Morrison calls a complete woman, one who could do it all. While initially Sofia and to some extent Celie may represent the concept of a complete woman, the agency of change substantially begins with Shug, whose dynamic presence has the effect of conflating gender identities and thus destabilizing the polarization of womanhood and masculinity and all that each entails. Celie realizes that "Shug act and talk sometime like a man. Men say stuff like that to women, Girl, you look like a good time. Women always talk bout hair and health. How many babies living or dead, or got teef. Not bout how some woman they hugging on look like a good time" (Walker 82). Shug's non-conformist attitude extends to linguistic usage that sees her modifying the semantic of the term "virgin" in the context of pleasure rather than penetration. Upon learning that Celie has never enjoyed sex, Shug matter-of-factly says "why Miss Celie, you still a virgin" (Walker 78). Shug's emphasis on pleasure as the signification of one's engagement in the business of living reflects her spiritual philosophy that posits God wants his people to have and "look like a good time."

Masculinity also comes under the transformative power of the narrative. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes that Celie is in control of her narration, even to the point of controlling other characters' speech, which her readers cannot encounter without hearing their words merged with hers (250). Furthermore, if Zora Neale Hurston's free direct discourse[6] and writing "aspired to the speakerly, then Walker's apparently speaking characters turn out to have been written" (252). Gates's assertions highlight the effect of the epistolary form on narrative and remind readers that the story is being told from Celie's perspective. Celie's epistolary narrative demonstrates that it possesses capacity for subtly subverting the representation of masculinity in its own text even within the midst of oppressive conditions. One way Celie repeatedly undermines the masquerade of masculinity as

[6] Gates argues that Hurston's "free direct discourse" in *Their Eyes were Watching God* influences Walker's narrative style in *The Color Purple* in the way the former represents black dialect in writing.

exhibited by Albert and his seemingly authoritative hegemony is drawing attention to or inserting within her narrative the fact of his diminutive size. As Shug sings Bessie Smith's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" at Harpo's place, both she and Celie look at Albert. As Celie's passion for Shug increases, she begins to view Albert with contempt and ridicule. While Shug is singing, Celie observes that "for such a little man, he all puff up. Look like all he can do to stay in his chair" (Walker 74). Seemingly aware that the song is a covert reference to him, he can't help but feel discombobulated as the women's eyes rest on him. An earlier reference to Albert's size occurs in Celie's conversation with Harpo concerning Sofia's recalcitrance to submit to his will. Invoking Celie's subordination to Albert as his wife, Harpo reasons that as his wife Sofia needs to do the same. Celie rationalizes, "do Shug Avery mind Mr.___? She the woman he wanted to marry. She call him Albert, tell him his drawers stink in a minute. Little as he is, when she git her weight back she can sit on him if he try to bother her" (Walker 64). Significantly, Celie's references to Albert's size begin only after Shug Avery appears and their friendship is formed. Prior to her influence, the only other physical description of Albert Celie's narrative divulges is his handsomeness. Corrine makes this assessment of Albert when she and Celie exchange some words outside of the fabric store. Corrine seems to think that Albert is a "fine looking man…not a finer looking one in the county. White or black" (Walker 15). Early on this description of Albert as well as his domination of his wife and children consolidate to form an impression of him as the personification of masculinity in all its advantages. Under the influence of Shug as well as Celie's advancement of self-authority, the masculine image of Albert gradually falls away to be replaced by the signs of his own weakness. While the female characters' physical attributes are sufficiently described for readers to form a mental picture of them, the male characters are hardly revealed in their physical reality. Because the woman-centered narrative allows for feminine discourse to take place, such as

the ones that transpire between Shug and Celie, it becomes an effective space for deconstructing and subverting masculinity. Apart from the references to Albert's diminutive size, Shug's revelation to Celie that Albert used to wear her dress for fun further erodes his authoritative image.

It appears that Albert's demise proceeds in parallel relation to the improvement of relationships among the others. His complete transformation is suggested by the fact that he has descended to living "like a pig. Shut up in the house so much it stunk. Wouldn't let nobody in until finally Harpo force his way in. Clean the house, got food. Give his daddy a bath," as Sofia tells Celie (Walker 227). Albert's deterioration may indicate to Harpo that his lifelong endeavor to emulate his father might have been erroneous. By taking care of his father, Harpo in some way acknowledges his error and mobilizes to rectify his father's sins, beginning with his insistence that Albert give Celie all of her sister's letters (Walker 228). As Harpo brings to light a tender side of him and sets out to repair damages caused by his father, he demonstrates to Sofia a new kind of manhood, one that cares, understands, forgives, and acts. Sofia finds herself falling in love with Harpo again, and they begin to work on their new house, symbolic of their love and redemption. Towards the end, Albert begins to recover spiritually and his transformation is confirmed as he confides to Celie the lessons he has gained in life and his remorse for the ways he treated her and Anna Julia. Acknowledging that the root of his wrongdoings resulted from his cowardice to defy his father, the symbol of paternal law, Albert says "my daddy was the boss. He give me the wife he wanted me to have" (Walker 275). United in their love for Shug and subdued in forgiveness and remorse, Celie's and Albert's reconciliation is signaled by his putting "his arms around [her] and just stood there on the porch with [her] real quiet…[Celie] bend [her] stiff neck onto his shoulder" (276).

Albert's transformation makes it possible for him to enter the new world order that is inclusive in nature and fortified against the threat of patriarchal tyranny. It represents a hopeful

beginning for all. bell hooks, however, reads Albert's transformation as containment of the threat of masculinity (288). She asserts that "unable to reconcile sexuality and power, Walker replaces the longing for sexual pleasure with an erotic metaphysic animated by a vision of the unity of all things, by the convergence of erotic and mystical experience" (288). hooks's argument is valid in consideration of the fact that central to Albert's confession to Celie is the discourse of love, the destructive insatiable prone-to-jealousy kind that Albert has had for Shug and vice versa for a period. Without attributing his conversion to the impact of any particular event, Albert concludes that his overall experiences in life made him see the light. His conversion is mystical, indeed, but plausible. On the other hand, his conversion could also be read as proof of the uncontainability of the threat of femininity. Albert admits that he "never understood how [she] and Shug got along so well together and it bothered the hell out of [him]" and that when he saw that the two of them were "always doing each other's hair, [he] start to get worry" (Walker 275-76). hooks views Albert's and Celie's struggles for Shug's affection not as a polarization of homosexuality and heterosexuality and argues that neither poses a threat to the other, since Shug rejects them both in favor of a young man (286). This point of view suggests the significance of sexuality to Shug's power. Shug's sexuality can be described as inclusive and self-reflexive as it resists definition by the sex or gender of its object of affection. Rather, it operates as an instrument measuring the strength of her seductive power based on her ability to attract. Except for Anna Julia who precedes the narrative, no others have been hurt by Shug's power to love. On the contrary, the men benefit from it; Grady lives off of her money and even uses her land to grow marijuana. The legacy of her love is embedded in the personal and collective histories of the characters and unfolds itself as the narrative moves towards the end.

As *The Color Purple* moves towards an ending armored with the promises of a new hopeful beginning accentuated by the fulfillment of family reunion, *The Awakening* seems to tread backward

to the beginning as it strives for narrative closure. Cristina Giorcelli contends that Chopin's text's ending is "open" and "circular" as it takes readers back to the Gulf of Mexico, which serves as the opening setting (110). It has become critical commonplace to assume Edna's final plunge into the gulf is suicide. Michael T. Gilmore posits that Edna commits suicide as an alternative to dragging out a life that does not serve to fulfill her new vision (64). Anca Parvulescu, however, questions the assumption of Edna's suicide and that she is ultimately defeated. Parvulescu offers the view that:

> What Edna has is an experience of death, which does not necessarily mean she is dying…Edna has a vision of death when swimming for the first time and – terrified – she retreats from the encounter…[She] is now ready to confront death, to face death. Such is the nature of her awakening: it is an awakening-unto-death. We do not know if she dies, we only know she is ready to die. Or that she is ready to live as if dead. This is the limit of knowing…death is the absolute unknowable. Edna enters an other space – the sea...At this point [she] cannot be narrativized anymore, she has gone vagabonding on an unknown and unknowable terrain. (486)

Situating her analysis of Edna's experience within George Bataille's discourse on the inner experience, Parvulescu invokes Bataille's question in his *Inner Experience*. Bataille asks, "what happens after the love, the sex, the gambling, the tears, and the art?" (Parvulescu 487). Edna would concur with Bataille's answer: "I threw myself in the water" (487). In *The Color Purple*, what happens after the selfish intoxication of love, sex, tears, and art is the communal intoxication of love, tears, and art. In the supportive environment of womanhood in Walker's text, having loved means expanding its narrowness and learning to forgive, tears are shed out of love and joyful occasion such as a family reunion, and art equals economy, independence, and equality. Like Edna who is

supposed to be living at a another level of existence at the end, the characters of *The Color Purple* have also begun to live at a different level of existence.

The Making of Feminine Space

As feminist texts, *The Color Purple* and *The Awakening* share the common theme of searching for space that is characteristically feminine. In this context, space may acquire literal or metaphorical signification to mean the physical space of the characters' surrounding or the personal and spiritual freedom to live as they please. The search or forging for feminine space is imperative considering the patriarchal world in which these female characters live. Edna constructs a feminine space of her own by looking inward and in essence abandoning the physical and social existence of her world. The heroines of Walker's text accomplish both spiritual freedom and feminine reconstruction of the physical space. In both texts the path towards the creation of feminine space begins with the guidance of others or through self-exploration. Eventually, they become more aware and conscious of their private and corporeal space. The awareness of their own female body sheds light on the various ways which patriarchal society abuses it. Patriarchal society subjects the female body to reproduction and at the same time confines it within the home for carrying out domestic duties. The performance of these private duties contains social significance as it is often seen as a reflection of the male's power over his wife. In effect, self-awareness of one's body marks the beginning of a desire to reclaim the body and re-orientate it towards a mode of self-centered pleasure or determinism. A fixation on the body often leads to action emphatically opposed to patriarchal restrictions of the female body. In Edna's world, it is conventional that a woman be alienated from the concept of sensual pleasure since it is considered a taboo. Seemingly rejecting this idea, Edna embraces her body as a receptacle of all sorts of sensations externally received and self-stimulated, and it is no accident that Chopin draws attention to Edna's body time and time again. While Edna learns to listen to the rhythm of her body, Celie and Shug demonstrate a more explicit engagement with the exploration of the female body that involves intimacy and mirror reflections of the body.

The feminist/womanist orientation of both texts gives expression to an ambivalent ambience that is informed by a desire to create a female world and the frustration of having such attempt disrupted by the outside world. Often this disruption comes in the form of domestic duties to one's family and nurturing imperatives to one's children.

The social imperative that calls for women to absorb themselves in the paired institutions of marriage and motherhood is personified most faithfully if not oppressively in the husbands' house. It is a familiar motif of patriarchal/masculine power and at the same time a microcosm that punctuates social conditions of women. Chopin's and Walker's texts illustrate this physical structure significantly in relation to the status of its power. The husband's house, in both texts, figures significantly as a symbol of masculine power and is perceived as a sight of both grandeur and contempt. As the female characters gain and realize self-autonomy, the structure of the house parallels their liberation with its own gradual deconstruction or decay. For Edna, her family house represents a stage upon which she is compelled to perform society's precepts of femininity, motherhood and marriage. At home, she is supposed to fulfill the social requirement of reserving a day for receiving and entertaining whomsoever happens to call. She is compelled to maintain the appearance of a dutiful wife and mother who loves to stay home and look after her children and husband. When Edna decides to move into her own place –the pigeon house- Leon Pontellier, her husband, has their house broken down under the pretext of renovation. At Albert's house, Celie suffers a grimmer reality of patriarchal abuse upon her body. She works tirelessly around the house and in the field while being vulnerable to Albert's verbal and physical abuses without a moment's notice. At night, not caring how exhausted or disinterested Celie is, Albert nonetheless fulfills his sexual need. While Celie spends her time in Memphis in idyllic existence with Shug with entrepreneurial consequences, Albert finds himself alone in his house overwhelmed by perhaps

remorse and self-neglect. He allows the house to descend into a state of unkemptness. The female protagonists implicitly recognize the signification of their husband's house and necessarily instigate emotional distancing as well as physical departure from this structure. Their subsequent mobilization from this space constitutes the expansion of their consciousness in relation to social as well as personal private space.

The existence of other spaces as potential sites for the development of selfhood is distinguished by the absence of a dominant male force while it may retain the socio-economic features promoted and practiced by the larger society. In *The Awakening* The Grand Isle may easily impress as a homosocial female world shaped by geographical isolation. After all it is a popular vacation destination for upper-class families and individuals, and it seems to especially attract female visitors as it is owned and operated by a female, Madame Lebrun. The isle supplies a certain debonair charm to the upper-class clientele who come here seeking peace and refuge from the busy world of the mainland. On the island, their main obligations are to dine, socialize, play with the children, bathe in the water, and other leisurely activities. Because of its physical isolation, the isle seems to promise women a certain degree of discretion and liberation from scrutiny and judgment that are characteristic of the outside world; here, it seems, they do not have to worry about being watched and silently assessed for their every move. This proves to be a false promise of the Grand Isle, for as we shall see, it is a microcosm of the outside world where the same rules apply.

The world of *The Awakening* draws together a group of disparate characters who are absorbed in different concerns and therefore fail to perceive each other's conditions. This characteristic is especially discernible in social situations. On Grand Isle, characters as contrasting as the lovers and the nun who trails them occupy the same physical space while representing different faiths: the former in carnal emotion/pleasure, the latter in spiritual devotion. Other minor

characters are less revelatory of the existence of an inner life. Robert and his brother Victor are also another pair of opposites. While Robert seems serious, sensitive and concerning, Victor is a capricious playboy. Finally, the friendship of Edna and Adele makes another disparate union wherein the friends share no common interests in selfhood, womanhood, and life in general. The lack of unity in predisposition or common causes deprives Edna as well as other female characters in the novel of the chance to coalesce in the effort of gaining social and political recognition. It seems as if their level of economic comfort has tranquilized their minds and made critical vigilance a docile possibility. Having no one who truly understands her predicament or who can help her gain a voice, Edna ultimately fumbles in the dark and gets lost in the currents and tides of the sea and to only herself must she try to make sense of the new sensations emerging within her. Indeed, Chopin initially entitled her novel *A Solitary Soul* perhaps to emphasize her protagonist's solitary struggle. Is her solitary condition a byproduct of society's treatment of women as secondary entities or a culmination of her alienating behavior proceeding from the belief that the outside world yields her no confidante? By implication, to what extent does the disparate society contribute to the outcome of Edna's struggle? If Edna's struggle can be situated in the context of gaining a voice, is she finally defeated or has she found a voice that may not be immediately accessible to ideologically-based comprehension because it identifies with an unconquerable natural element whose power ceaselessly mystifies men?[7]

The chilly absence of a female world in *The Awakening* contrasts with the empowering presence of the unity and strength of womanhood in *The Color Purple*. Walker's text illustrates vividly the transference of the female from one domestic space to another made bearable by the recognition and empathy for their common lot. The progress of Celie's struggle for self-authority

[7]According to Michael T. Gilmore, *The Awakening* dramatizes Edna's desire for an authentic language to replace the empty, formal and distancing, emotionally-obscuring language of everyday speech (66).

can be traced through the succession of physical spaces materializing to support and shelter her at different stages. With the appearance of each physical space, Celie's condition is improved. As we can see, Celie moves from her family house, where she lives in the constant fear of rape, to her husband's house, where she assumes the physical labor of working in the field and maintaining the household behind the guise of marriage. The agency of a powerful woman such as Shug transforms these spaces into progressive alternative spheres that promote sexual equality, establish ties and reconfigure human relationships in ways unimaginable to the outside world. Both texts illustrate the attempt to designate and maintain particularly feminine spaces insulated from the presence and interruption of men. The struggle to create feminine spaces underlines that life is an ideological game, a cobweb weaving together networks of agendas, desires, and abuses. Having realized that patriarchal ideologies dominate all aspects of social life, the women must now find a way to negotiate for their own space or transcend the social imperatives of patriarchy. The characters from both texts are faced with this fundamental task.

In *The Awakening* Grand Isle provides the background for the initial expository development of the novel. Its geographically isolated and socially elite position produces the effect that the vacationers are engulfed in a self-contained world. Sandra Gilbert views the island as an "oasis of women's culture" and a "female colony" (Showalter 44). Perhaps Gilbert is guided towards this critical view by the fact that the small community of the isle consists of a woman who runs her own business, Madame Lebrun, a socially ostracized woman, Madame Reisz, and Adele and Edna, all of whom interact with one another in close proximity. This small vacationing community is sufficiently furnished with women, but closer consideration of the group reveals that it is a disparate group drawn together by circumstance rather than common interest. Each woman has chosen a different path in life and is fervently committed to it. For the duration of the vacation, they have

made few if any connection with each other, as each is absorbed in her own business. Li-Wen Chang radicalizes Gilbert's critical perception of Gran Isle and rewrites it as an "extended social theatre of man-made world that runs the show of leisure" (141). Grand Isle, though isolated from city life, is still bound by conventional ideals wherein women display their bodies and wealth according to fashionable trends (141).

In this space of supposed feminine sensibility, the female characters each bear the mark or the consequences of the masculinist traditions of society. Andrew Delbanco argues that the novel captures a twilight moment in America's history, where Edna "walks suspended between a leisured culture that is dying and a business culture that is thriving" (94). Delbanco attributes the collectively driving force of the business world to men such as Leonce Pontellier, whose business instinct makes him seize marital relationship as property and social relationships as means to promote and enhance his business prospects. To this mass of business-oriented people we may add Madame Lebrun for her management of the resort and popularizing it. She runs a successful business which enables her and her son "to maintain the easy and comfortable existence which appeared to be her birthright" (Chopin 7). Her business instinct is displayed in her command of the resort; especially when it seems to have reached maximum capacity she can be seen "bustling in and out, giving orders in a high key to a yard-boy whenever she got inside the house, and directions…to a dining-room servant whenever she got outside" (4). Her pro-active lifestyle and her engagement in the thriving business world make her the most economically successful and independent woman of the novel. She assumes a responsibility that traditionally has been consigned to men. Her presence in a traditionally male-occupied profession illustrates the twilight period Delbanco speaks of which opens opportunities to women who have been excluded.

Within the world of the novel, there appears to be an undercurrent of conflict between the two cultures which especially becomes relevant in light of the masculine patriarchal values associated with the business world and the objectifying aesthetic values of the leisured culture. Any semblance of conflict between the two cultures should be recognized as false and misleading. Rather than oppositions, they constitute an ideological collaboration that generates even more reasons to confine women in the domestic sphere. Since men are the actual bread-winners by going out into the world and waging a daily battle, they deserve to come home to harmony and bliss and obedience, all furnished by women. The prospect of business as a vehicle to independence lingers in the realm of possibilities for Edna, and her eventual pursuit of it demonstrates that the modern world of business could conceivably afford women self-reliance. Although Madame Lebrun remains the only female figure to earn a living through conducting business, her characterization embodies cold and insouciant qualities for which the business world is known. Madame Lebrun and Madame Reisz are the only two women living on independent means, yet rather than drawing Edna to Madame Lebrun who is more socially prominent and more successful, the narrative connects Edna to Madame Reisz, who is clearly made out to be an outcast.

Edna's restlessness begins to surface in the early scenes set in Grand Isle. In *The Art of Dying* Deborah Gentry observes that the first three chapters refer to Edna as only Mrs. Pontellier, which, she argues, shows the objective way in which society sees her only in relation to her husband (24-26). Arguing in the same vein as Gentry, some critics have also noted that the image of the "green and yellow parrot" in the opening scene of the novel symbolizes and sets the tone of Edna's existence as confining and misunderstood. The synopsis of the bird also captures and enacts significant conditions that will come to define Edna's subsequent struggle. It is described as caged and speaking a "language which nobody understood" (Chopin 3). Edna's solitude substantially

derives from the incommunicability of the things she wishes to express but cannot. While the source of her inarticulation could be located within the materiality of language, it may also be attributed to the inattentiveness and unwillingness of other people to understand her. The latter factor is ideologically motivated since she tries to give shape and form to thoughts that could be construed as inimical to the status quo. Perhaps as equally significant as the parrot's confinement is its fanatical exclamation seemingly aimed at Mr. Pontellier: "Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi!" which translates to "Go away! Go away! For God's sake!" (Chopin 3). That the intended recipient of the parrot's outburst can be understood to be Mr. Pontellier is supported by his solitary presence in the vicinity of the bird and his subsequent anger and movement away from it. The parrot's intuitive aversion to Mr. Pontellier signifies its recognition of him as an oppressive force, foreshadows his perpetual absence and the unpleasantness of his company, and communicates Edna's subconscious wish to be away from him.

At Grand Isle Edna's desire for a female connection manifests through her friendship with Adele and her endeavor to insulate their time together from the intrusion of others. Consider the one time they successfully elude others and the demands of the day to go spend time together and engage in a tête-à-tête:

> The two women went away one morning to the beach together, arm in arm, under the huge white sunshade. Edna had prevailed upon Madame Ratignolle to leave the children behind, though she could not induce her to relinquish a diminutive roll of needlework, which Adele begged to be allowed to slip into the depths of her pocket. In some unaccountable way they had escaped from Robert.
>
> (Chopin 18)

This passage hints at the near impossibility of designating a female social space in which the characters could relate to each other as women and forget for a moment the outside world and their respective roles in society. This womanly space which Edna had so discreetly contrived nonetheless cannot be made completely divorced from the paraphernalia of motherhood, for Adele slips into her pocket her needlework. The mention of escape from Robert implies a kind of threat and distraction imposed by men.

The conversation between Edna and Adele that ensues illustrates Edna's first attempt to articulate her interior life. Adele encourages her to express herself with the inquiry "Of whom – of what are you thinking of?" (Chopin 19). In response, Edna delineates the meandering of her thoughts as if she wants to hear them herself for better understanding them. The scene captures nostalgic reflections of Edna's childhood and is informed by an examination of her current state. Because this scene contains the first revelation of Edna's psychology and her first utterances regarding it, Deborah Gentry argues that the influence of the women, Adele and Madame Reisz, catalyzes Edna's awakening, rather than the men. On that note, Andrew Delbanco observes that "Edna is surrounded by men without presence" (96). Perhaps their lack of presence inadvertently enables Edna to explore the depth of her emotion and make connection to the external boundaries of her existence. Nonetheless, the scene is characterized mostly by a revelation of Edna's inner thoughts to the extent that it marginalizes the few dialogues exchanged between the characters. The scene further substantiates the impressionistic methodology of Edna's psychological syntax which filters through the only medium she knows: nature. Her thoughts and emotion are closely associated with nature as she tends to map them onto what is perceived as the rhythm of the natural world. This self-contained moment of femalehood attempts to realize female contentment and connection but in actuality is underlined by disparity and disconnectedness. Notwithstanding, this

orchestrated space of femalehood allows them to "loosen" the garments of society as when Adele "removed her veil…wiped her face…and fanned herself" easily and Edna "removed her collar and opened her dress at the throat…and began to fan both herself and [Adele]" once they have settled into a quiet secluded space (Chopin 19). Soon this moment is arrested by "the sound of approaching voices" made by Robert and "a troop of children searching for them" (Chopin 23). This external interruption illustrates an instance of societal demands that apparently leaves no room for individuality.

As aforementioned, the sense of pervasive disparity among the female characters invalidates any claim to female solidarity as exemplified in *The Color Purple*. Disparity not only describes the female characters staying on Grand Isle but also applies to all characters staying there. The lack of connection and commonality among Edna, Adele, Madame Lebrun and Madame Reisz has already been explicated. Each of these female characters seems to lead a different life and has different concern, all of which preclude the possibility of genuine connection. Two other figures who are consistently inserted together marginally in scenes with no apparent pertinence to them comprise another example of disparate characters who have nothing in common. The lady in black who is always shown engaging in some form of religious devotion and the two young lovers who seem permanently lost in each other apparently serve no function in the plot. Their juxtaposition makes a picture of contrast in light of the representation of their characters. Joseph Church and Christina Havener argue that these minor characters represent "an age-old ontological problem: how to simultaneously have, despite the obvious insurmountable contradiction, conscious identity (reason, mind) and emotional physicality (eros, body)" (196). According to Church and Havener, the lady in black denies herself of sensual pleasures, subsuming it in her religious devotions. By keeping near the lovers, who manifest eros in their devotion to each other, the lady in black, like Mademoiselle

with Edna, vicariously and even "voyeuristically" keeps herself within touch of the domain of eros. Church and Havener argue that the main characters – Edna, Robert, Leonce, Adele, Arobin – also face the ontological problem of lacking and/or reconciling the two components of being. These observations shed light on the perceived disparity among the characters in revealing that this disparity originates from the characters' incomplete being, a perception which has hitherto defined Edna most prominently if not exclusively.

Addressing the ontological question inevitably complicates and expands the discourse of feminine space. It leads discourse out of the social and psychological context in which the novel has been situated many times over to the more nebulous and abstract philosophical reflections on the human condition. If human existence is measured by where we stand on the spectrum of the "ontological problem," then we are all more similar than different, despite various labels constructed to signify our differences. Nonetheless, the philosophical quest to locate the origin of the difficulty of fulfilling what Church and Havener call "the impossible simultaneous requirement for defining identity and freedom from definition" returns us to the scene of social context, which we were asked to abandon (197). Without the labels and garments of society designed to confer identity in a particular context that makes life as we know it, we would not be human subjects. Theorists such as Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser posit that we are born into language and ideology and that they precede subjectivity. By implication, (human) subjectivity is not possible outside of the symbolic order that is constituted of language and ideology. Thus, the "impossible simultaneous requirement" that Church and Havener refer to is oxymoronic yet universal if we are once more reminded that the symbolic order in which we live fails to symbolize all aspects of existence. Chopin's dramatization of this "ontological conundrum" ultimately emphasizes not so much its impossibility but rather the communal and collaborative energy needed to attain a semblance of completion, be it through

vicarious or voyeuristic method. Each character exemplifies an absorption in either "conscious identity" or "emotional physicality" and some feed off the other for what he/she lacks or for inspiration for what he/she lacks. It is almost as if on a subconscious level they exist in symbiotic relationships.

One such example of such a seemingly harmless symbiotic relationship is the friendship of Mademoiselle Reisz and Edna. While Mademoiselle Reisz may seem respectable by virtue of her talent and wisdom, she is socially alienated for renouncing marriage and by extension love and sensual pleasure. She is similar to the lady in black in that both represent a disposition for conscious identity (reason, mind). Her proximity to Edna mirrors the proximity of the lady in black to the lovers. She keeps close to Edna for the same reason that the lady in black stays close to the lovers. Mademoiselle Reisz's home plays an important part of fostering her own symbiotic relationship to Edna while supplying the latter a refuge from the world, her first true feminine space. Outside of Grand Isle, her home bears witness to many episodes of Edna's emotional indulgence, if not growth. Edna's attitude has observably changed since they returned from Grand Isle. She begins to perceive her husband's home as an oppressive apparatus reinforcing unstimulating social traditions such as reserving one entire day for receiving guests at one's home and accommodating them according to one's social status. No longer at ease with such functions, Edna's exploration of her own independence and personal strength commences with her solitary venture outside of the restrictive domestic domain. It was during one of these excursions when Edna felt "life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation" that she thought of the matronly musician and sought out her residence (Chopin 68). It is appropriate that as she tries to develop her own identity Edna would seek the company of a woman whose life represents both the rewards and repercussions of female individuality of the period.

On Grand Isle she had felt that the musician understood her soul and had played such stirring music that vibrated the core of her being. It may be safe to suggest that back at home Edna seeks out the soul-stirring music rather than Mademoiselle Reisz herself. Even more certainly, Edna is not concerned with forming or strengthening any misperceived connection between the two, as apparently there is none. Rather, the connection is registered on the mind of the reader largely due to the arrestingly emotional response Edna had to the music. In visiting Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna desires to relive the experience of being moved as she was the first time. Beyond the music, any semblance of connection between the two characters the narrative has falsely suggested hitherto collapses. It becomes apparent in this first visit that Mademoiselle Reisz in fact is not as penetrative or perceptive to Edna's restless soul as the quality of her music seems to suggest. She genuinely reveals her surprise and pleasure at Edna's visit, exclaiming "and how is la belle dame? Always handsome! Always healthy! Always contented!" (Chopin 72). Her assumption of Edna's contentedness and well-being reveals her lack of insight. The revelation may have the effect of altering or modifying our perception of Mademoiselle Reisz's musically enlivened comfortable home as a genuine feminine space. Edna's attitude does little to salvage the impression of congenial feminine space within the walls of her friend's home. Immediately, she requests Mademoiselle Reisz to play her the Impromptu and show her the letter from Robert without first making small talk with the host. The musician complies and creates an atmosphere of emotional embellishment for Edna who simultaneously reads Robert's letter and cries to the music. Thus the pattern of Edna's visit is established.

Another structure with significant meaning to Edna's personal growth is the "pigeon-house." With her husband and children conveniently away for an indefinite period, Edna contemplates and envisions an overall transformation of being that is also reflected in the physicality of her

environment. Recognizing that having her own abode represents freedom and independence, Edna arranges to execute the terms of her own survival by drawing from her inheritance and selling her own art works. The house represents the final culminating step of not only realizing her vision but also "relieving herself from obligations…She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life" (Chopin 109). Her vision of an independent romantic life as signified by the "pigeon-house," however, is problematic considering that it conflicts with her already established life as a wife and mother. The indefinite absence of her husband and children leads Edna to suspend temporarily the reality of her existence and enables her to entertain her indulgence for independence and to imagine a different life for herself. Towards the end, the figures of the children are refocused and assert their realness in Edna's consciousness signaled by Adele's painful accouchement and supplication that Edna "think of the children! Remember them!" (Chopin 127). Edna, indeed, does think of the children, as when she concedes to doctor Mandelet that "one has to think of the children some time or other; the sooner the better" (Chopin 128). With this realization, Edna's dream of a life and place of her own vanishes before it could even begin.

The "pigeon-house" thus never gets to realize its potential as a space for cultivating and nurturing what could have been a new kind of femininity for Edna. Essentially it becomes another space in the text full of promises but fails to deliver or delivers something different. Like Grand Isle and Mademoiselle Reisz's home, the "pigeon-house" could be easily perceived as a feminine space by virtue of its owner's intention; nonetheless, it also turns out to be misleading and false in its presentation. Edna's "pigeon-house" aspiration is perhaps in some sense bound to be frustrated by the suggestion of its nickname. As Martha Fodaski Black points out a "pigeon is a domestic bird usually monogamous that we associate with a coop or wobbling parasitically on the ground, hoping to be fed. Even pigeons capable of sustained flight are called homing pigeon" (105). If one believes

in the mystical power of the subconsciousness to encode meaning in language and human behavior, then Edna's choice of residence and her nickname for it are curious and suggestive. Metaphorically, does this mean that Edna is a pigeon inseparable from the domestic inscription? Is she the kind of "pigeon capable of sustained flight" and that possesses, in the words of Mademoiselle Reisz, "a courageous soul?" Certainly, the metaphor of the pigeon falls in line with the several images of birds perceived by Edna throughout the novel. The most significant of such imagery is the bird Edna sees at the end "with a broken wing [that] was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water" (Chopin 133). Many critics view the bird as a symbol of Edna's defeat. At the end, she allows the water to carry her out into the far distance beyond the grasp of life on shore. That different conclusions regarding Edna's fate have been suggested is symptomatic of the human need to understand everything or to make everything understandable. If Edna swims into the vast Gulf of Mexico as she does, then it must be concluded that she commits suicide or will end up dead.

The world of *The Color Purple* is similar to that of *The Awakening* in terms of dominance of patriarchal settings and practices but differs in its pragmatic attitude. Celie's family house, since the decline of her mother's physical and emotional health, has become a place of terror and threat of sexual abuse perpetrated by her supposed father. Initially the text seems to suggest education as a viable mean to extricate the girls from their compromising situation, but as their teacher attempts to instigate an intervention it becomes obvious to her that they had already been claimed physically and otherwise. Marriage then becomes a more desirable option for fleeing from the father. After Celie's marriage to Albert, the text focuses on events taking place at his house. Celie's oppressed condition is vividly portrayed to underscore the patriarchal context of her existence at the center of which Albert presides and dominates. Unlike her father's house, which is totalizing in its suffocation,

Albert's residence allows for "gaps" of feminine discourse by virtue of his indifference to Celie and lack of interest in his children. Her married life expands her world and brings her into contact with different characters, some of whom will come to have an impact in her life one way or another.

The porch of Albert's house serves as the text's first significant space for bearing witness to a kind of nascent female world that develops between Celie and Sofia. The porch also serves as a designated point of meeting, conversing and conducting business and most significantly as Albert's symbolic choice for demonstrating his hegemony. He often sits on the porch smoking his pipe and watching Celie and Harpo work in the field, no doubt deriving a great pleasure from it. In general, porches' function is convoluted throughout the text, thereby making it impossible to isolate it as symbolic of any given event. Its ubiquity testifies to its signification as a defining feature of the world of the text and its struggles. Its inviting and conveniently situated nature against a background of rural setting marks it out as a commonplace for communal interaction and transaction of news, gossip and other trivials of everyday life. Its communal aspect sets it apart from the world of *The Awakening* and drives the text to a resolution that is not unlike returning to the beginning and restoring peace and harmony and instituting reparation and redemption. The significance of the porch within the narrative becomes most clear in the end when it becomes the place of an emotional reunion between Celie and Nettie and the children. In a sense, the reunion on the porch comes full circle to the haunting memory of the initial scene on the porch that subjugated Celie to oppressive terms of marriage and in effect to the beginning of Celie and Nettie's lifelong separation. In the end, it seems that along with others the porch has also undergone a kind of transformation; no longer a place for dissenting discourse nor the scene of power struggle, it becomes a place of homogenous/homosocial relations, an extended family not bound by inherent ties but rather by life.

Sofia and Celie form the first subtext of feminine discourse on the porch and continue to situate their female world in the sprawling structure that sees and knows all that transpires. The beginning of their connection occurs as an exigent reparation of a subconscious betrayal following Celie's urging of Harpo to beat Sofia to make her submissive to him. Sofia confronts Celie on the porch who immediately confesses that she was a "fool" and that she was jealous of her power. Celie's confession turns the confrontation into a revelation of Sofia's own abusive upbringing. She recounts, "all my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (Walker 40). In the course of the conversation, it becomes apparent that Sofia's life has been more similar to Celie's than different. The women acknowledge their adversities and different attitudes in dealing with them by laughing as a conclusive act to the scene. Like a subtext of feminine discourse, laughter figures significantly first as a kind of embankment for potentially destructive behavior and gradually gains power for its ability to ridicule. Collective laughter such as Sofia's and Celie's is embedded with the women's insight and knowledge of a truth not immediately accessible in the world of men. It only becomes apparent that this scene takes place on the porch when they both "laugh so hard [they] flop down on the step" (42). Their reconciliation generates an important component of the emerging female world: they decide to make "quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains" that Celie had given to Sofia, who tore them in a moment of anger and betrayal (42). By making something even more beautiful and personal out of torn fabric - figuratively the torn fabric of their lives - they have solidified their sisterly bond, as suggested by their name for the quilt: Sister's Choice. The materialization of the quilt as well as its name first come to the reader's attention when it is mentioned that Celie and Sofia have been working on it and "got it frame up on the porch" (59).

Once again, the particularly feminine activity of bonding and quilting is linked to the open space of the porch.

After Sofia's departure, Harpo builds a jukejoint out of their former house and it becomes an important social establishment and a significant scene of power struggle and acquisition of self-autonomy for the female characters. Historically, the jukejoint acquired an underground reputation for promoting decadent activities and housing morally depraved characters; socially it is known as an agent of escapist opportunities for the working-class African-American community that would gather here after work for some fun and relief. The jukejoint is also inescapably linked to the kind of music that most prominently comes out of it: the blues. In her book *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, Angela Davis defines the blues within the social-historical context which contributed to its development. According to Davis, understanding of the blues could be organized around these conceptual terms: post-slavery independence, sexuality, community, traveling and the concept of home. Davis writes:

> Emerging during the decades following the abolition of slavery; the blues gave musical expression to the new social and sexual realities encountered by African-Americans as free women and men…For the first time in the history of the African presence in North America, masses of black women and men were in a position to make autonomous decisions regarding the sexual partnerships into which they entered. (4)

The blues community embraces sexual sovereignty, realizes its multi-dimensional relations to life, and immerses in it for a lifestyle ideologically opposite to the one mainstream culture promotes for women. The women reject marriage and motherhood as these cults would hinder with the blues lifestyle. Davis also discusses the role traveling plays in the blues culture and the concept of home for the community. Like sexuality, traveling is "a mode of their freedom," and for women it

provides a means for the "possibility of equaling their men in this new freedom of movement" (67, 72). The destination of the blues travel is often the north with mass migration occurring between 1910 and 1930, historically known as the Great Migration. Some people stayed and established families and communities in the north and other regions, and some returned to the south once their hopes for the north were shattered and they became disillusioned. Compared to the communal and cultural chills of the north, the south came to be regarded as the more comfortable place and "the historical meaning accorded to the South was reconfigured and became associated with release from the traumas of migration" (84). Although the blues culture redefines "black womanhood as active, assertive, independent, and sexual," it would be limiting to perceive the pervasive ideological differences from the dominant culture as rebellion (75). As Davis states, the post-emancipation generations of men and especially women found themselves living in an unprecedented psychosocial reality which they embraced, and the blues culture was developed according to the principles of freedom. Subscription to and self-inscription within the dominant culture's ideological norms would probably result in another lesser form of repression and would be antithetical to the growing consciousness and centrality of desire and the self within the community. For all the progress that freedom brought, the economic situation of African-Americans remained largely impoverished as during slavery (4).

The character most representative of the blues culture in *The Color Purple* is Shug Avery. Although she has three children with Albert, she blatantly rejects marriage and motherhood for an itinerary lifestyle as a well-known blues singer. Rejecting both domestic and sexual orthodoxy, Shug displays characteristics that can be approximated as powerful, daring, ambiguous, kind, and generous but nonetheless resist definition and categorization. As a blues woman who flamboyantly flaunts her sexuality and resources, she inevitably becomes subjected to harsh criticism from the

church. Her appearance in the text and particularly her convalescence coincide with the establishment of Harpo's jukejoint. It should be reminded that her appearance in the text is conditioned by the fact that she is "sicker than anybody [Celie] ever seen" (Walker 47). When Harpo's place fails to attract customers in its opening weeks, Shug has already recovered significantly; she agrees to "grace [the place] with a song" (Walker 73). Her singing engagement attracts many customers and perhaps even saves the place from falling further into obscurity. Like a powerful cataclysmic force she comes and breathes life into the people and her surroundings. Animated by Shug's talent and energy, the place experiences an increase in people coming and different events transpiring within its walls.

Within the feminist context of the novel, Harpo's place is perhaps most memorable and significant for providing the occasion for Celie's burgeoning assertiveness and encouraging Mary Agnes to gain a speaking and singing voice. At the communal level, the jukejoint brings everyone together in festive spirit; at the personal level, it broadens Celie's social context in which she comes to recognize and identify the mutual silenced condition informing her life and those of others, most notably Mary Agnes whose nickname Squeak connotes her diffidence. It is in the jukejoint that Celie becomes the first person to urge Mary Agnes to demand that Harpo address her by her real name; she tells Mary Agnes, "make Harpo call you by your real name. Then maybe he see you even when he trouble" (Walker 86). In the wake of Sofia's arrest resulting from her defiance of the mayor and his wife, Harpo becomes absorbed in meditation on the matter to the extent that Mary Agnes feels neglected by him. Eventually, Mary Agnes graduates from asserting her real name to singing in the jukejoint. Her growing sense of self-autonomy parallels her singing voice which sounds like "the kind of voice you never think of trying to sing a song. It little, it high, it sort of meowing" as Celie observes (Walker 100). The conditions that gave rise to Mary Agnes's

acquisition of a voice are essentially rooted in feminine sensibility and its correlated concerns for the family and community. Wendy Wall notes that Mary Agnes is willing to be raped by her white relative prison warden in order to procure a mitigated punishment for Sofia, whom she barely knows and with whom she had an antagonistic violent encounter (269). Lauren Berlant argues that the byproduct of her rape is a kind of unspoken insertion into the order of womanhood that is prevalent in the text and predicated on mutual struggle against oppressive, sexist and racist contexts attempting to inscribe their existence (30-31). Her sacrifice has the power of redeeming her initial aggressive act towards Sofia and empowering her to assert self-ownership. Immediately following her rape, she tells Harpo as she rises, "my name Mary Agnes" (Walker 99). Six months later she begins to sing at the jukejoint much to Harpo's perplexity as he ponders out loud "sit in the corner a year silent as the grave. Then you put a record on, it come to life" (Walker 100). Harpo's assessment attributes Mary Agnes's outward change to the mystical power of the blues music. While his observation contains a partial truth, it elides recognition of the racist ideology at work to limit the concept of relativity from miscegenation. The rape enacts more than terror upon Mary Agnes's body; it racializes her identity and symbolically strips her of her half-white identity by the same token that justifies the act in the warden's belief. The conditional construction of his language suggests that he regards their blood relation as illegitimate; Mary Agnes recounts him saying "if he was my uncle he wouldn't do it to me. That be a sin" (Walker 98). The symbolic denudation of her whiteness is strongly suggested by the fact that she goes to meet him dressed like "a white woman" with her hair "grease[d] out" (Walker 95). Afterwards, she comes home with "a limp. Her dress rip. Her hat missing and one of the heels come off her shoe" (Walker 97). Superficially and symbolically, her whiteness has in effect been violated and erased.

Mary Agnes's insertion into the womanist order of the text strengthens her sense of identity and makes less ambiguous her position in the text. Significantly, her ordeal highlights the detriments of masculinist hegemony at the familial, social, and racial levels and emphasizes the exigency for the reconstruction of the family "under the care of women" (Berlant 29). The narrative ultimately accomplishes this task by "awakening" its female characters to the reality of their world, publicizing their struggles, and healing them through various media of expression all the while seeking to generate these experiences within spaces graced by strong female presence and witness. To that end the jukejoint, while seemingly public or by virtue of its public status, operates as one such feminine space masquerading as a social arena in order to publicize the scene of personal struggle. The jukejoint witnesses Mary Agnes's transition from a passive personality to an aspiring blues singer on the strength of the support and encouragement from other women. As social scripts are rewritten and personal lives are changed on the strength of female cohesion, Albert's and Harpo's anachronistic notions of manhood's privileges begin to lose power and defer to the voices and opinion of the women. The social nature of the jukejoint is vital to the progression as it gives expression to their collective problems and provides a model of resolution based on the blues traditions.

Outside of the jukejoint's animation, the novel thrives on giving expression to the yearning for the homosocial world of women's culture and intimacy in the absence of men. While living in Albert's house, Celie and Shug form a subtext of female intimacy and sexuality as they habitually make use of Albert's absence from home. On one such occasion Celie writes:

> Mr._____ and Grady gone off in the car together. Shug ast me could she sleep with me. She cold in her and Grady bed all alone. Us talk about this and that. Soon talk about making love…Grady and Mr.____ come staggering in round daybreak. Me and Shug

> sound asleep. Her back to me, my arms round her waist…Wake up sugar, I say. They back. And Shug roll over, hug me, and git out of bed. She stagger into the other room and fall on the bed with Grady. Mr.___ fall into bed next to me, drunk, and snoring before he hit the quilts. (Walker 113, 116)

At this point the presence of men and their priorities still take precedence over other interests. From this passage, it is evident that the men's disruption of an otherwise idyllic moment between the two women is registered with a hint of resentment and disgust as it signals their immediate separation to accommodate them. Intimate moment like the one above, nonetheless, recurs multiple times with increasing intensity following the discovery of Nettie's letters. Their retrieval of the letters accomplishes more than Celie's wish fulfillment; it calls for a clandestine invasion of Albert's personal private space and exposes the intimate contents of his trunk, which contains "Shug's underclothes, some nasty picture postcards, and way down under his tobacco, Nettie's letters" (Walker 126). Their perusal of Nettie's letters constitutes a new mode of interaction between themselves and deepens their connection all the while inserting her story into the narrative frame. The act of reading the letters is figuratively reconstructive in the same vein as the larger theme of reconstruction. Nettie's letters reveal information about the true identity of their father, their family history, Celie's children, and Albert's attempt to separate them. This new knowledge mobilizes Celie and Shug to take measures in re-inscribing it into the present order with the intention of bringing to light past abuses so they may be rectified.

The revelations of Nettie's letters gives Celie the fortification necessary to remove herself from Albert and travel with Shug to Memphis. Their stay at Shug's house in Memphis illustrates not only the self-contained and self-determined world of women undisturbed by the brute behavior of men but also the women's potential for productivity and creativity when left to their own device.

Here Celie and Shug continue to enjoy each other's company, listen to music and discuss a wide range of topics from building house to social injustices. In the comfort of her own home, Shug surprisingly shows a domestic side:

> Nobody cook like Shug when she cook. She get up early in the morning and go to market. Buy only stuff that's fresh. Then she come home and sit on the back step humming and shelling peas or cleaning collards or fish or whatever she bought. Then she git all her pots going at once and turn on the radio. By one o'clock everything ready and she call us to the table. Ham and greens and chicken and cornbread. Chitlins and blackeyed peas and souse. Pickled okra and watermelon rind. Caramel cake and blackberry pie. (Walker 212- 13).

Shug shows that she does possess a domestic side. Unlike Celie's forced domesticity, Shug cooks and cleans for herself and guests in her own home at her own will. The effort she invests in the activity as well as the abundant spread of delicious dishes reflect her love and generosity.

The merry and tranquil atmosphere of Shug's home puts into motion the transformative enterprise of Celie' creative endeavors. Deploying her skill and propensity for sewing, she resolves to make comfortable pants for Shug to wear on the road as she indulges in junk food. Soon, her comfortable and accommodating designs attract attention and orders begin pour in to keep Celie so busy that she wonders to Shug, "you know, I love doing this, but I got to git out and make a living pretty soon. Look like this just holding me back" (Walker 217). Amused at Celie's naivety, Shug makes her realize that she can make a living out of making pants. She designates the dining room as Celie's working area and suggests that they hire some help with the cutting and sewing while Celie work on the designs. While the fashion of wearing pants among women is not yet a matter of cultural currency, Celie's designs are innovative for shifting the emphasis from fashion and

aesthetic, which divides and objectifies, to pragmatism and individualization. Celie's designs consider the needs and occupation of each individual wearer and materialize in a manner that accommodates and anticipates such demands. For example, in making Shug's pants Celie considers that "cause Shug eat a lot of junk on the road, and drink, her stomach bloat. So the pants can be let out without messing up the shape. Because she have to pack her stuff and fight wrinkles, these pants are soft, hardly wrinkle at all" (Walker 215). For Jack's pants, Sofia's brother-in-law, Celie decides that "they have to be camel. And soft and strong. And they have to have big pockets so he can keep a lot of children's things…they have to be washable and they have to fit closer round the leg than Shug's so he can run if he need to snatch a child out of the way or something. And they have to be something he can lay back in when he hold Odessa in front of the fire" (Walker 216). Priscilla L. Walton notes that her design "celebrates rather than restricts people; they become a symbol of the humanist/womanist utopia manifested at the end of the novel" (76).

As the structure of feminine space progresses, the structure signifying patriarchal power deteriorates, which implies the important position a woman occupies in a familial unit. While Celie is safely tucked in Memphis, Albert descends into a spiral of self-apathy and neglect, denying cleanliness for himself and permitting his house to become inhabitable. Sofia says, "Mr.____ live like a pig. Shut up in the house so much it stunk. Wouldn't let nobody in until finally Harpo force his way in. Clean the house, got food. Give his daddy a bath. Mr.___ too weak too fight…too far gone to care" (Walker 227). Apparently, the departure and absence of Celie and Shug has given him the occasion to reflect upon his own character and past treatment of Celie, and his subsequent resignation from active life represents a form of his remorse. The fact of his reflection primes him for transformation and restores him into the new order of utopia.

It may be worthwhile to note that the final culminating reconstitution and reunion that allots a piece of happiness and contentment to all and excludes none is brought to realization through a series of interconnected cause-and-effect kind of events. Every action inspires a reaction which in turn spurs a reaction elsewhere as if forming links in a chain until finally leading to the reconstituted order in the end. Examples can be adduced at any point in the narrative, calling forth any event. More recently, Celie's and Shug's residence in Memphis produces creative and entrepreneurial results that eventually mutate race relations and those of the characters. Meanwhile, their long absence causes Albert to abandon himself and his surrounding, the fact of which prompts Harpo to take care of his dad and help him get better. Harpo's action had the effect of endearing himself once again to Sofia, who begins to love him again as she used to. Their rekindled relationship inspires them to rebuild their house and in a sense start over again. These examples illustrate the communal aspect of the novel's journey towards a happy ending by highlighting the fact that everyone is responsible for and takes part in the "reconstruction" of a new world order, which might not have been possible without the collective cooperation. In a sense, the novel is more than Celie's passage from oppression to self-determination and from girlhood to womanhood. Her story along with others are figuratively the patterns and squares that make up the quilt of the community.

Having recognized the communal and interconnected quality of *The Color Purple*, it becomes apparent that *The Awakening* not only lacks such quality but also has an aversion to it. While it remains a matter of debate if the communally destitute ambience of Chopin's text accounts for Edna's abandonment of this world, a juxtaposition of the texts reveals that they both essentially share the same desires. Edna wishes to reconstruct the bygone homosocial world of women with Adele but is unable to. Walker's text proceeds from the same standpoint of desire and successfully realizes its dream. Moreover, Edna's aspiration to be an artist and deriving a living from it is never

followed through, while Celie, who never intends to make a living from her talent, inadvertently discovers the path towards independence. Given the many parallels between the texts, their different outcomes may be understood by the simple yet persistent impulse for constructiveness/reconstructiveness present or absent in each narrative. Elaine Showalter contends that Edna never moves out of the emotional private world to create a constructive world according to her vision (48). Rather, she resigns herself to the "impressionistic rhythm of epiphany and mood" (Showalter 43). Edna's lack of constructiveness sharply contrasts the mobility and reconstructionist ideology of *The Color Purple*. Perhaps the contrast can be traced to the different social contexts of both worlds. Edna's privileged social standing guarantees her sustenance so that it is not imperative that she makes a living. Nonetheless, both texts give expression to feminist concerns that transcend racial and social barriers by emphasizing on the personal in the hope of compelling political change because the personal is political.

Bibliography

Barker, Deborah E. "The Awakeng of Female Artistry." *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*. Ed. Lynda S. Boren and Sara DeSaussure Davis. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992. 61-79

Beilke, Debra. "The Courage of her Appetites." *Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth-and-Twentieth-Century Women's Writings*. Eds. Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran. New York: State U of New York P, 2003.

Berlant, Lauren. "Race, Gender, and Nation in *The Color Purple*." *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 211-38

Black, Martha Fodaski. "The Quintessence of Chopinism." *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*. Baton Rouge: Louisian State UP, 1992. 95-116

Chang, Li-Wen. "*The Awakening:* Chopin's Reading of the Leisure-Class Women in Ourland." *Kate Chopin in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2008. 137-58.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening and Selected Short Fiction*. New York: Barnes & Nobel, 2003.

Church, Joseph, and Christa Havener. "The 'Lady in Black' in Chopin's *The Awakening."* *Explicator* 66 (2008): 196-97.

Davis, Angela Y. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*: *Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

Delbanco, Andrew. "The Half-Life of Edna Pontelliers." *New Essays on The Awakening.* Ed. Wendy Martin. Camridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. 89-108.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "Color Me Zora: Alice Walker's (Re) Writing of the Speakerly Text." *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 239-60.

Gentry, Deborah S. *The Art of Dying: Suicide in the Works of Kate Chopin and Sylvia Plath.* New York: Peter Lang, 2006.

Gilmore, Michael T. "Revolt Against Nature: The Problematic Modernism of *The Awakening."* *New Essays on* The Awakening. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. 59-88.

Giorcelli, Cristina. "Edna's Wisdom: A Transitional and Numinous Merging." *New Essays on* The Awakening. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. 109-48.

Hite, Molly. "Romance, Marginality, Matrilineage: *The Color Purple*." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Alice Walker's* The Color Purple. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000. 89-108.

Hooks, Bell. "Writing the Subject: Reading *The Color Purple*." *Modern Critical Interpretations*: *Alice Walker's* The Color Purple. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000. 53-66.

Nisitich, Rebecca. "From 'Shadowy Anguish' to 'The Million Lights of the Sunn': Racial Iconography in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." *Kate Chopin in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Essays*. Ed. Heather Ostman. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2008. 121-36.

Parvulescu, Anca. "To Die Laughing and to Laugh at Dying: Revisiting *The Awakening."* *New Literary History* 36 (2005): 477-95.

Petruzzi, Anthony. "Two Modes of Disclosure in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 13 (2002): 287-316.

Showalter, Elaine. "Tradition and the Female Talent: *The Awakening* as a Solitary Book." *New Essays on* The Awakening. Ed. Wendy Martin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. 33-58.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1982.

Wall, Wendy. "Lettered Bodies and Corporeal Texts." *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993. 261-74.

Walton, Priscilla L. "'What She Got to Sing about?': Comedy and *The Color Purple*. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Alice Walker's* The Color Purple. New ed. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase, 2008. 65-78.

Wesley, Marilyn C. *Secret Journeys: The Trope of Women's Travel in American Literature*. New York: State U of New York P, 1998.