

The Escape of the “Sea”: Ideology and *The Awakening* *by Jennifer B. Gray*

Nineteenth-century feminist discourse was an oppositional ideology, a resistance to obstacles to female fulfillment. The hegemonic institutions of nineteenth-century society required women to be objects in marriage and in motherhood, existing as vessels of maternity and sexuality, with little opportunity for individuality. As critic Margit Stange asserts, “self-ownership” was central to the project of nineteenth-century feminism (506). Self-ownership connoted a woman’s right to have possession of her own fully realized human identity. Inherent in this concept was not only sexual freedom and other aspects of personhood, but also “a sense of place in the community and the universe at large,” through love, connection, maternity, and other aspects of fulfillment (Toth 242).

Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* is, as Chopin biographer Emily Toth posits, “a case study” of nineteenth-century feminism (242). Indeed, Edna Pontellier’s first consciousness of her awakening is described in terms that echo the nineteenth-century feminist concept of female identity: “Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (Chopin 57). Her awakening makes

visible her position in patriarchal society and gives her the desire to seek alternative roles.

The female roles portrayed in *The Awakening* are rooted in an ideological system. Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" provides an ideological framework for the female roles and experiences portrayed in the novel. This framework also implicates the ideological system of nineteenth-century society as the ultimate culprit in Edna's fate. According to Althusser, the mechanism of hegemony is "interpellation," the recognition and adoption of an ideology and its practices (299). Edna's awakening allows her to resist the various "interpellations" of the dominant patriarchal ideology and experiment with both alternative and oppositional roles. Her new consciousness makes her ill-suited for the limited female roles, those of the hegemonic ideal and those opposed to this ideal, offered her by nineteenth-century society. Edna experiments with two roles in particular, embodied by central female characters in the novel, Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz. In addition, Edna also experiments with an oppositional role that, significantly, is not embodied by any female character in the novel, a role in which she is both freely sexual and autonomous. Because of her strong interpellation as a mother, a role dictated for married women by hegemonic ideology in her society, she finds that she cannot exist in an alternative or oppositional female role. However, because of her awakening to herself as an individual, she cannot exist in the female roles sanctioned by patriarchal ideology. Her only escape from this ideology is death, and hence, Edna commits suicide at the site of her awakening, "the sea" (Chopin 57).

Edna takes drastic action to elude the ideological system into which she is born. She is repressed by cultural forces that she does not understand and cannot articulate. Althusser's theory provides a clear language, as well as a systematic mechanism, to account for the ubiquitous presence of nineteenth-century cultural force and its perpetuation of hegemonic ideology. Althusser's cultural theory explains the structure and function of ideology, his central thesis stemming from Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. In cultural theory, the term describes the dynamic by "which a dominant class wins the willing consent of the subordinate class to the system that ensures their subordination" (Fiske 310). Consent is not static, but must be "won and rewon" (Fiske 310). Althusserian theory accounts for the manner in which ruling, or hegemonic, discourses and institutions perpetuate the necessary consent for their dominance.

Ideology, the powerful force behind the dominance of hegemonic institutions, is defined by Althusser as an “imaginary relation to the real relations of existence” (299). He posits that the representations that constitute ideology are based in the material world. Such representations exist in those individuals who advocate particular ideologies, as well as their collective ideas and belief systems, and ideologies exist in apparatuses and their practices. These apparatuses and their accompanying practices, termed “Ideological State Apparatuses,” or “ISAs,” are institutions such as religion, patriarchy, and marriage (Althusser 303). Althusser states that there are no practices “except by and in an ideology” (299). Practices of particular powerful social institutions reproduce ideology in an ever-changing dynamic process. Individuals, who are born as “subjects” (Althusser 303) into the realm of some form of ideology, are inevitably called to participate in practices of particular dominant institutional ideologies, with subjection sustained in a more or less circular manner. The individual believes his or her ideas must be inserted into actions, and these are inserted into practices governed by the rituals of particular ISAs. The rituals stem from the ideology of the ISAs, which are the origin of the recognized or formed beliefs of the individual. Hence, individuals do not realize their subjection, believing that they freely form or recognize ideas and participate in ritual practices in order to “act according to their ideas” (Althusser 297). Ideology is perpetuated by subjects and by ISAs in a dynamic, highly irresistible process termed “interpellation” (Althusser 299).

The process of interpellation begins with “hailing,” a calling to participate in a form of ideology (Althusser 302). Hailing is ubiquitous, almost entirely irresistible, and at the center of any ideological system. Through hailing, ideology “acts or functions in such a way that it recruits subjects among individuals” (Althusser 301). Individuals are born into ideology, but hailing recruits subjects of particular ideologies. Althusser states that an institution or individual hails another individual much as the “common everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’” (301). A successful hailing occurs if the individual recognizes and accepts the hail. This recognition, for example, may be the acceptance of a particular social practice or label, such as an advocate of Christian religious ideology terming himself a Christian. If a hailing is successful, an individual becomes a “subject” of a particular ideology, and, hence, is “interpellated” (Althusser 303).

Successful adherence to dominant ideology is ensured through what Althusser terms the “absolute guarantee” of ideology (302). Hegemonic

ideology insists that if “the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen—‘So be it’” (Althusser 303). According to Althusser, if subjects act according to their beliefs, participating in the practices of dominant ISAs, they are assured of a place in hegemonic society.

Although ideological force, exerted as hailing and interpellation, is highly powerful, it is not entirely irresistible. Subjects may adhere to ideology or may resist, though there are normally consequences to the latter. Althusser notes that subjects may be “good” or may be “bad” (303). Good subjects adhere to the dictates of dominant ideology through the recognition, acceptance, and maintenance of its practices. Bad subjects rebel against dominant discourse, often by adopting alternative or oppositional ideologies, and are “punished” through mainstream societal ridicule or ostracism. Only through the “scientific understanding” of ideological systems may those who wish to escape ideology elude its powerful influence (Althusser 303). Through interpellation, Althusser contends that ideology shapes the experiences of human existence, through its control of aspects such as social milieu, class, and power. His cultural theory is an ideal framework to shed light upon the systematic interworkings of gender inequality detailed in the late nineteenth-century setting of *The Awakening*.

The limitations of female roles in nineteenth-century society are described by feminist writer and critic Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Women and Economics*. Gilman argues that “each woman has had the same single avenue of expression and attainment,” and that “all other doors” are “shut” (79). Gilman, of course, writes of the role of wife and mother. In the monolithic climate of nineteenth-century America, most other “doors” for women are indeed “shut” within the boundaries of mainstream society. Though Chopin presents more than one option, or “avenue,” through her female characters, each role is either a singular and limited expression of identity or ultimately an impossibility beneath the pressures of hegemonic society. Edna experiments with these female roles in *The Awakening*: the “mother-woman” (Chopin 51), the role sanctioned by dominant patriarchal ideology, and the “artist-woman” (Skaggs 348), an alternative role. These roles are both “single avenues,” in that they are singular expressions of identity, and are embodied, respectively, by Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz. Edna further experiments with a highly oppositional role, the “free-woman,” a role of individuality and sexual freedom. This role potentially provides a more fulfilling, developed sense of identity for Edna. However, the role is far

too threatening to dominant societal norms for her to sustain it against vehement ideological pressure.

The role of women prescribed by the dominant patriarchal ideology is defined in relation only to marriage and to motherhood. It is embodied in Adele Ratignolle, whom Chopin terms the “perfect mother-woman” (51). She is “perfect” in that she does not own her selfhood, and is part of the “self-effacing species of nest-makers dominating the island” (Seyersted 134) of Grand Isle. For such women as Adele, the family “possesses” the self, “body and soul” (Chopin 51). Everything about her satisfies the hegemonic ideal of women in her society, from her behavior to her physical attributes. In fact, her body is seemingly designed solely to attract a husband and to bear children. Chopin describes Adele as “the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm,” the “fair lady of our dreams” (51). Chopin asserts that to Edna, Adele resembles “some sensuous Madonna” (55), a pure, yet procreative, sexualized being. She is a pure mother, in some respects, reminiscent of the religious embodiment of motherhood, the Virgin Mary. Adele, a “good subject,” accomplishes the contradictory balance between purity and sexuality that is demanded of the “mother-woman” role. Nineteenth-century Creole cultural ideology advocates a relaxed tolerance of sexual discussion and an indulgence in sensual beauty, but simultaneously demands an irreproachable chastity of its women (Seyersted 135).

Adele, the ideal of Creole womanhood, takes great care to protect her feminine beauty, for it is essential to her identity. She is successfully “hailed” (Althusser 301) in the role of the “mother-woman,” and, hence, has an identity only in relation to her children and husband. Much of this identity is completely immersed in her marriage, and so the continued attraction of her husband is a large priority. She is, to use the terminology of feminist critic Gayle Rubin, an “object” in the “exchange of women” commonly called marriage (542–543). As the “object” received in this “exchange,” she is successfully commodified and must remain beautiful for the pleasure of her husband, the receiver.

Much of what Adele does is to fulfill her husband’s needs. She “puts her husband’s preferences above her own in all things” (Skaggs 347) and is extremely attentive to his every whim. Their marriage is described by Chopin as “domestic harmony” (107). According to Peggy Skaggs, the perfect union of the Ratignolles likely “results more from the extinction of Adele’s individuality than from the fusion of their two identities” (347). The “success” of her marriage is accomplished, in Althusser’s

terms, by Adele's being successfully hailed as an appendage, a person without individuality. For example, at the dinner table, Adele does not discuss her own interests, but rather is "keenly interested in everything her husband says, laying down her fork the better to listen" (Chopin 54). Chopin significantly does not describe a scene in which Monsieur Ratinolle listens to Adele with such attention and devotion.

Adele's identity is immersed not only in marriage but also in motherhood. She has no control over her sexual being and is essentially vulnerable to pregnancy with every sexual encounter her husband desires. She is required to be sexually alluring, but also passive, chaste, and pure, in keeping with Creole cultural ideals. Sex for the "mother-woman" is purely an act of passivity and procreation within marriage (Seyersted 75-98).

Though Adele has little or no control over sexual matters in her marriage, giving birth to children every two years despite risks to her already supposedly ill health, she is extremely devoted to her subsequent role as mother. She never questions or opposes her lack of sexual self-ownership as nineteenth-century feminist ideology does. Her lack of self-awareness and failure to question her position are integral aspects of her interpellation in the hegemonic ideal of womanhood. Rather than question her station or sense of fulfillment, she especially relishes this aspect of her female role. The births of her children are her most savored moments, and therefore, her body is essential to this aspect of her identity. She is preoccupied with her "condition," since her sense of self depends upon her maternal abilities. Adele is always "talking about her condition," which is in "no way apparent" (Chopin 10). Others are only aware of it because of Adele's "persistence in making it a subject of conversation" (Chopin 10). She protects her supposedly delicate health through various precautions, such as avoiding the heat of the sun. She bears her many children, who cling to her skirts and run to her for comfort at every turn. Adele is indeed the perfect embodiment of the "mother-woman" role, in accordance with the hegemonic ideal of women in nineteenth-century society.

Chopin insists that Adele is satisfied in her role. Her satisfaction seems to stem from ignorance of the "life which questions" (Chopin 57). She does not seem to realize her existence in the realm of ideology. Chopin portrays this role, through Adele, as only a partially developed identity. Adele has love and connection in her life but has no sense of "individual selfhood" (Skaggs 348). Her every thought, interest, and utterance is related to her husband and children, or to her "condition," a central concern of her maternity. For instance, Adele continues her girl-

hood interest in music, but only so that she may teach these skills to her children. She has not fully developed her artistic sensibilities; to do so, Mademoiselle Reisz insists, requires a more complete sense of selfhood. As the pianist states, the artist “must possess many gifts” and must have a “soul that dares and defies” (Chopin 61). Adele does not possess such qualities. Her limited sensibilities are made apparent when she lavishes praise on every painting and sketch of Edna’s, despite their amateurish quality. Adele’s concerns are not with art or other entities beyond the narrow scope of the home and family. Even in Grand Isle, when Edna convinces Adele “to leave the children behind” for a walk on the beach, Madame Ratignolle cannot be induced “to relinquish a diminutive roll of needlework” (Chopin 15). She begs that “it be allowed to slip into the depths of her pocket” (Chopin 15). A leisurely stroll beyond the duties of wife and mother is not permissible to Adele, the good subject. Her interests and even relaxation are intertwined with her family, and especially with her maternal role.

This limited existence of Adele embodies a role that Edna experiments with in her marriage to Leonce Pontellier, a man who looks at her “as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property” (Chopin 44). As a female in nineteenth-century society, she is “always already” a “subject” (Althusser 302) of the dominant sexual ideology, that of patriarchy. Her subjection begins as the daughter of a dominating father and continues in her later role as wife and mother. Ironically, this gendered status as a subject of patriarchy is not really a subject position at all. Rather, it places women in an object position, through their subjection to the dominant ideology of gender roles in nineteenth-century society. She is commodified by Leonce during their courtship and later, more completely, in their marriage.

Significantly, the novel opens with Leonce, and the first reference to Edna is made through his appropriating eyes as he views her as “property which has suffered some damage” (Chopin 4). For Leonce, a good subject of patriarchal ideology, Edna “exists as a recognizable individual in reference to her status as valuable property” (Stange 506). This view is evidenced in his first words to his wife in the novel. At Grand Isle, as Edna returns from a walk on the beach with Robert LeBrun, Leonce surveys her appearance and comments that she is “burnt beyond recognition” (Chopin 4). Sunburned skin implies an absence of leisure, a highly distasteful matter to Leonce. His wife, according to dominant ideology, must be an object of his conspicuous consumption, and therefore, a creature of leisure rather than activity. Through his comment, Leonce hails Edna as his

wife and as a “mother-woman.” Edna is interpellated to the role, for she soon succumbs to this hailing. She surveys her hands critically, considering Leonce’s disapproval. She is then “reminded of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach” (Chopin 4). Edna silently reaches for her rings and Leonce “drops them into her palms” (Chopin 4) and she places them onto her fingers.

Stange suggests that Edna’s hands are not her property in this instance of hailing at Grand Isle, but that they are potentially her own. In having “Edna put on the rings herself, Chopin suggests that the chief item of property owned by the proprietary Edna is Edna herself” (Stange 506). She is capable of self-ownership, but is at least temporarily subjected by hegemonic patriarchal ideology. Though the scene foreshadows later resistance to interpellation in that she may remove the rings, it displays more prominently a state of subjection. The “hands Edna places the rings upon” are, at that moment, “not her own” (Stange 506).

Through hailings such as this, Edna is subjected and interpellated by the “ISAs” of marriage and patriarchy, and succumbs to a placement in the “mother-woman” role. Edna is married to Leonce and bears children but cannot give herself over to them completely. She quietly lives a life of outward conformity, becoming a wife and mother, as she inwardly questions such conformity. As Chopin writes, Edna is “not a mother-woman” (9) and is “fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way” (19). If she is secure of their well-being, she rarely longs for them in their absence. She feels free in their absence, unencumbered with the burden “of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her” (Chopin 19). Also, though she marries, she silently feels that marriages are merely “masquerades” which claim to be “decrees of Fate” (Chopin 18).

Edna’s awakening forces her inner questionings to the surface, and ideological conformity becomes a stifling force. Edna does not realize her position in a system of ideology but does feel a growing sense of self-awareness. Otis Wheeler describes this new consciousness as Edna’s “awakening to personhood, to an awareness to being a subject rather than an object” (123). Chopin insists that the role patriarchy requires of nineteenth-century women—that of the “mother-woman”—is not adequate for Edna, for it requires that she remain an object. Soon after this new consciousness begins to emerge, Edna becomes aware of vague feelings of “indescribable oppression” in her role as the wife of Leonce and the mother of Raoul and Etienne (Chopin 8).

Edna’s awakening to herself “as an individual” (Chopin 57) allows

her to temporarily resist the interpellations of patriarchy that create the “mother-woman” role. Her attempts begin while on holiday in Grand Isle when Leonce, who is unable to articulate a certain failure of his wife “in her duty toward their children,” insists that Raoul has a fever and must be attended to (Chopin 9). He realizes that Edna is “not a mother-woman” (Chopin 9). He reproaches his wife for her “inattention, for her habitual neglect of the children,” attempting to hail her as a mother (Chopin 7). Leonce feels this way, for Edna’s children do not cling to her skirts as those of the other “mother-women” do. Leonce senses, in some way, Edna’s unsuitability for her role as mother, and, through this hailing, seeks to shape her into the role. Edna inwardly questions this demand, deeming it unnecessary, for she knows Raoul to be perfectly healthy. She however, only partially resists the hailing of Leonce, for she does get up and observe her son. Edna then returns to her bedroom, refusing to speak to her husband. She later leaves her bed and cries to herself on the porch, feeling more vehemently the beginnings of an “indescribable oppression which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness” (Chopin 8).

These vague feelings, the beginnings of Edna’s awakening, lead to further resistance to various “hailings.” At one point at Grand Isle, she is hailed by her husband as a sexual object. Edna resists this hailing by refusing to go to their bedroom and remaining on the porch for much of the night. Her resistance signifies self-ownership of her sexuality through “refusing to have sex with her husband” (Stange 506). This assertion of sexual self-ownership accords with the ideology of oppositional nineteenth-century feminist discourse. Edna also resists other forms of hailing when she returns to her home in New Orleans. She attempts to resist a hailing to the role of wife, the wearing of a wedding ring. Earlier in the novel, at Grand Isle, she quietly places the ring back on her hand at Leonce’s remonstrance over her appearance. The potential resistance in that earlier incident manifests itself in the later scene. Edna throws her ring to the floor, and stamps “her heel upon it” (Chopin 50). However, “her small heel” does not “make an indenture,” and she places the ring back on her finger (Chopin 51). In doing so, she is once again successfully hailed, and interpellated, as a wife, despite temporary resistance. Yet, Edna does soon gain the strength to successfully resist other forms of hailing. For instance, she blatantly leaves her home on her “reception day” (Chopin 48). Husbands hail their wives by asking them to hold reception days, receiving guests on a particular day of the week. These guests are normally wives of men involved in the

husband's business practices. The reception days, if accepted as a practice of a wife, interpellate her as the wife of her husband. Socialization, through this custom, is entirely for the financial benefit of the family and for the professional ambitions of the husband. The wife has no control over whom she receives and hence has little control over her enjoyment of such socialization. Edna's resistance to the hailings of reception enables her to abandon the "mother-woman" role and experiment with an alternative identity, that of the "artist-woman."

The alternative role of the "artist-woman" is embodied in Mademoiselle Reisz, a gifted pianist. In many ways, her role is the complete inversion of Adele's, that of the "mother-woman." However, it is not oppositional to the hegemonic ideal prescribed for women because it is not overtly threatening to the patriarchal system. It is alternative, rather than oppositional, largely because of its sacrifice of female attractiveness, sexuality, love, and connection. Under hegemonic ideology, women are subordinate to men in a binary relationship. Females are required to be sexual, feminine, and self-effacing, while men are sexual, masculine, and assertive. Only if women are a differentiated, subordinate group may men be dominant over that group. Women may be traditionally feminine, being sexually differentiated from men, or marked as female, only if men are allowed to dominate their collective group. If a woman is outside of the traditionally feminine, and is not marked as sexual, she is not disruptive to the binary relationship of dominance and subordination. Rather, she is outside of the relationship, and if she chooses to advocate autonomous selfhood, she is not threatening to hegemonic ideology.

Such is the position of Mademoiselle Reisz in the nineteenth-century system of ideology. For instance, unlike Adele, the embodiment of the hegemonic ideal of female beauty, Mademoiselle Reisz is not at all feminine in her appearance. She is described by Chopin as "a disagreeable little woman," altogether "homely," with a "small weazened face" (70–71). Her appearance is of little importance to her, for her style of dress is drab, unchanging, and unfashionable. In her hair is a perpetual bunch of unattractive, wilted violets. She is neither feminine nor sexual and is, rather, an alternative female, hardly female at all according to the dominant ideology. For these reasons as much as for her musical abilities, she is deemed eccentric in her society, labeled as "other."

Mademoiselle Reisz is also given this label because of her strong sense of selfhood. She has a place in her community as an artist of some renown. Her strong sense of self is intricately bound to her musical artistry. The little pianist tells Edna that "to be an artist includes much;

one must possess many gifts—absolute gifts—which have not been acquired by one's own effort. And moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul" (Chopin 115). She further explains to Edna that the "courageous soul" is "the brave soul. The one that dares and defies" (Chopin 115). Mademoiselle Reisz realizes that she contradicts the patriarchal ideal of the feminine and that a role such as hers requires strength to live beyond societal expectations for female existence. She channels this strength into her music, and in turn, receives courage through her artistry as well. Mademoiselle Reisz maintains independence and artistic strength so that she may soar to greater artistic heights. She lives alone with her music, her art as her sole companion. As Peggy Skaggs states, "an identity built altogether upon selfhood and art is inadequate" (352), for it isolates the gifted pianist from human contact and from societal engagement, preventing her from experiencing substantial love and friendship. The pianist's "sense of her own continuity and self-sameness in time is secure, but the place of her own in the community is indeed a lonely one" (Skaggs 352). In other words, the "artist-woman" has a strong sense of self, but a life lacking in love and connection with others. The role does not threaten the rule of patriarchy, for it requires ostracism from sexuality, love, and femininity, and a divorce from community, in exchange for individuality.

This autonomous existence of Mademoiselle Reisz stems from what critic Jules Chametzky terms as her "renunciation of the flesh, and of conventional human relationships" (222). Because she sacrifices connection and love for individualism, and is essentially desexed, her identity is only partially developed. This sense of incompleteness in the role of the "artist-woman" is evident in Mademoiselle Reisz's obvious loneliness. She is disagreeable with almost everyone, seemingly because "only through music can this homely, lonely little woman express herself and communicate with people" (Skaggs 351), and few respond to music with the passion that she demands. In fact, Edna and possibly Robert are the only people who satisfy her enough in this respect to be deemed worth the effort of intimacy. Mademoiselle Reisz initially takes to Edna because of Edna's passionate response to her music, telling her that she "is the only one worth playing for" (Chopin 72) among the party at Grand Isle. The pianist recognizes the potential artist and bountiful imagination and passion within Mrs. Pontellier. Though "the disagreeable little woman" is somewhat connected to Edna, Chopin insists that Edna is unsure "whether" she "likes" Mademoiselle Reisz "or not" (114). The pianist associates with few people, her divorce from community and ac-

ceptance of being labeled as “other” being part of her interpellation to the alternative role of the “artist-woman.” Mademoiselle Reisz is hailed as the “artist woman” through societal labeling, such as the stigma of unconventionality, eccentricity, and “homeliness.” Her acceptance of such labels allows for the successful hailing, or her interpellation, to the alternative role of the female artist.

Edna first meets the artist at Grand Isle. During this time, Edna has already begun to feel a sense of oppression in her role as “mother-woman,” and desires some sort of change in her existence. Mrs. Pontellier becomes aware of the tiny woman as she plays at the piano. When Mademoiselle Reisz plays a selection from Chopin, Edna feels a “tremor down her spinal column,” and begins to tremble and to weep, “the tears blinding her” (Chopin 26). Edna’s artistic sensibilities are stimulated through this musical experience, and again, when Mademoiselle Reisz verbally acknowledges Edna as a potential artist. The little pianist finishes her playing, bows, and proceeds to “pat” Edna “on her shoulder” (Chopin 26). She tells Edna that she is “the only one worth playing for” (Chopin 26), for Edna’s sensibilities deeply feel the delicate artistry of music. This experience begins Edna’s interpellation to the role of the “artist-woman,” for Mademoiselle Reisz’s hailing awakens her dormant artistic nature and solidifies her desire for a role beyond that of wife and mother.

Edna subsequently not only resists the hailings of the “mother-woman” role, but begins to engage in practices of the alternative “artist-woman” identity. First, she begins to paint and sketch, seeking artistic fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment. Her sketches are amateurish, for Edna merely dabbles in the arts, despite her innate artistic sensibilities. Edna senses that her abilities are limited and looks to others for encouragement, seeking assurances that confirm her artistic status. She visits Mademoiselle Reisz, who she feels is a fellow artist, for advice and counsel. She also looks to Adele, who has no sense of artistry due to her interpellation as a woman with no interests outside of the family. The beautiful Creole merely views such work as a minor diversion, and praises Edna’s efforts. She assures Edna that her “talent is immense,” and Edna feels an uncontrollable “sense of complacency” at the praise (Chopin 53). Though Edna realizes the dubious value of Adele’s compliment, “realizing its true worth” (Chopin 53), she welcomes the praise and allows it to fuel her desire for further fulfillment in her role as “artist-woman.”

Edna’s greatest artistic success occurs when her father visits her in New Orleans. She sketches his portrait, exerting control over the man who has largely enforced the dictates of patriarchal ideology upon her since child-

hood. Her father, a strict, unyielding product of patriarchal dominance, has been a considerable influence on his daughter's personality. His controlling demeanor partially forces Edna into her dual existence of outward conformity and inward rebellion. The colonel enforces hegemonic ideology through his stern adoption and advocacy of its practices, such as those of his Presbyterian religious affiliation. Though she rebels against him in marrying Leonce, a Catholic and a Creole, she is interpellated by hegemonic ideology through engaging in the custom of marriage itself. Edna's father attempts to continue enforcement of patriarchal ideology even after Edna's marriage. He hails Leonce as a dominant husband during his visit. When Leonce becomes concerned over Edna's unusual behavior and worries over her neglect of her household duties, the colonel offers him advice. He tells Leonce that "authority" and "coercion" are the only "ways to manage a wife" (Chopin 68). This manner of "management" is how the colonel believes patriarchy must maintain its ideological dictates, and is, hence, also how he has raised his daughters. Through drawing her father's portrait, Edna achieves power, though fleeting, over her father, feeling "companionable" toward him, rather than subordinate as she had in childhood (Chopin 65). Due to her experimentation with the "artist-woman" role, she temporarily resists the dominating influence of her childhood patriarch.

As Edna sketches the colonel's portrait, he sits "rigid and unflinching, as he had faced the cannon's mouth in days gone by" (Chopin 65). When his two grandchildren enter Edna's atelier, he motions them away with only slight movements, for he is "loath to disturb the fixed lines of his countenance, his arms, or his rigid shoulders" (Chopin 65). "Before" Edna's "pencil," the colonel is immobile and under her influence (Chopin 65). In a sense, she hails him as an object, a vessel through which she may achieve artistry. The colonel is placed in an object position, a model for her artistic product; Edna, in turn, is in a subject position as an artist. The colonel has helped to shape her, interpellating her to dominant patriarchal ideology. In this fleeting sketching session, Edna symbolically shapes and controls the colonel through her art, simultaneously rejecting the hailings of patriarchal ideology and advocating the artistic fulfillment encompassed in an alternative discourse, the ideology of the "artist-woman."

Through this experience, Edna is successful in using art to shape and control her world. However, this victory is fleeting. Edna does not have the discipline to develop her talents as an artist or the equally demanding discipline to endure and accept the ostracism necessary to be

individualistic. The role of the “artist-woman” requires an enormous amount of discipline, as evidenced by Mademoiselle Reisz’s words. The little pianist recognizes Edna’s lack of discipline and realizes that Edna may never fully develop as an artist. She tells Edna that she has “pretensions,” for though she considers herself an artist, she does not yet realize what such a role entails (Chopin 109). She tells Edna that to be a female artist, one must have the strength to “soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice” (Chopin 79). She feels Edna’s shoulder blades for her “wings” and finds that she has none.

Edna cannot function in the alternative role of the “artist-woman,” for she cannot exist without love, sexuality, and connection. In this role, Edna is interpellated to be eccentric and isolated. She tries an autonomous existence in her move to what Chopin terms a “pigeon-house” (134). Her children are sent to visit relatives, and her husband is absent due to business obligations. Upon his return, under the guise of a renovation of their home, Leonce moves to a hotel and explains away Edna’s “scandalous” behavior. For a time, Edna lives in the illusion that she is indeed autonomous, a free, single woman without the burden of her role as wife and mother. However, it is only an illusion, for her husband and her children are temporarily absent, rather than suddenly nonexistent. This temporary state of autonomy is echoed in Chopin’s name for Edna’s small new home, a “pigeon house” (134). Pigeons are not free, soaring birds; they fly away, but always return. Edna breaks with her familial connections and responsibilities—part of the “mother-woman” role—but she does not fully escape them. She does not possess the strength or the desire to live a completely autonomous life, which would be necessary, according to Mademoiselle Reisz and according to patriarchy, to develop her selfhood and her artistry. The “artist-woman,” an alternative, but clearly not an oppositional role, allows the autonomy Edna desires, but not the emotional and sexual freedom she craves.

To live in the role of the “artist-woman,” an alternative to hegemonic patriarchal ideology, requires Edna to renounce all love and connection in favor of a strong sense of selfhood. This role and the hegemonic role of the “mother-woman” are limited expressions of identity. They are, to use Gilman’s term, “single avenues of expression and attainment” (79), and lead Edna to seek further roles. While living in the “pigeon house” (Chopin 134), Edna experiments with a third role, that of the “free-woman,” oppositional to the demands of patriarchy. Significantly, this role is not embodied by any other female character in *The Awakening*. This absence implies the virtual impossibility of the role’s existence, at

least in Edna's society. This role is threatening to the hegemonic patriarchal ideology, for it allows a woman to be freely sexual and individualistic, in accordance with the goals of feminist ideology. As an oppositional role, it rejects not only the hailings that create the confining, dispossessed "mother-woman" role, but also those that create the desexed, lonely "artist-woman" alternative. The "free-woman" chooses her sexual partners and answers only to her individual consciousness. She is an empowered subject, rather than an exchanged object, and achieves autonomy and self-ownership, the project of nineteenth-century feminism.

Edna's adoption of the "free-woman" role partially overlaps with her experimentation with the alternative "artist-woman" identity. Both roles reject the interpellation of females as objects, rather than as subjects. Edna begins her venture as an economic subject with her realization of earning power in the sale of her sketches, and also with her move into the "pigeon house." She leaves the home purchased with the wealth of her husband, the acceptance of which hails her as an object, and enters a home of her own choosing. She leaves Leonce, and supports herself "on the income from her art and from a legacy of her mother's" (Stange 509). Like the "artist-woman," Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna rejects the demands of hegemonic ideology, which requires women to be supported, rather than to support themselves. However, Edna's purposes for economic autonomy undergo change when she chooses to abandon the "artist-woman" role and begin her experimentation with the role of "free-woman." As an "artist-woman," Edna seeks autonomy in her own home as an abode of reflective isolation, for the role requires eccentricity and isolation. Such dictates mitigate the rebellion inherent in seeking such autonomy, economic and otherwise. As a "free-woman," Edna is more visibly and symbolically independent. She comes to own property in her purchase of the "pigeon house," as opposed to being property herself, the focal interpellation of the "mother-woman" role. Edna possesses property not only because she believes she does not "belong to another than herself" (Chopin 76), but also because she must prove this belief to be a concrete actuality. As a sexual and an autonomous being, she is threatening to patriarchy and is conspicuously rebellious against dominant ideology. In asserting self-ownership, Edna aligns herself with oppositional, rather than alternative, ideology.

Stange contends that Chopin "connects Edna to the feminist drive for women's property rights" (509). Edna's adoption of the oppositional "free-woman" role is aligned with this aspect of nineteenth-century feminist ideology. As an owner of her selfhood, she becomes an economic

subject who may also own objects, such as her “pigeon house.” Edna finds that the house pleases her, and with its ownership she feels a sense of “having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual” (Chopin 89). The property adds “to the strength and expansion of herself as an individual” (Chopin 89). This connection of self-ownership to the ownership of property is addressed in the nineteenth-century feminist push for the Married Woman’s Property Acts. Prior to the passing of property reform laws, beginning in the late nineteenth century, women were not allowed to own property of their own, or to engage in business contracts of any kind, and were required to turn over any earnings to their husbands. The Married Woman’s Property Acts institute “reforms in the late part of the century that gave married women the rights of ownership” (Stange 509). The most advanced and liberated forms of such laws were passed in Kentucky in the nineteenth century, “granting married women not only the right to own separate property and make contracts, but the right to keep their earnings” (Stange 509). Stange therefore proposes that Edna significantly is born of “old Presbyterian Kentucky stock” (Chopin 66), and is linked to the oppositional ideology of late nineteenth-century feminism.

Edna’s economic autonomy in her role as “free-woman” culminates with her dinner party, “a very grand affair” (Chopin 82). The affair is given in her husband’s home, where she displays the material wealth of the house as he often would. The economic prosperity of the “Pontellier household is conspicuously displayed and offered” to Edna’s guests (Stange 512). The table is “extremely gorgeous” in appearance, “an effect of splendor conveyed by a cover of pale yellow satin under strips of lace-work” (Chopin 83). There are “wax candles in massive brass candelabras,” an abundance of “silver and gold,” and “crystal which glittered like the gems which the women wore” (Chopin 83). Since Edna appropriates the male role of her husband, she is symbolically the “host,” rather than the “hostess,” of this scene of luxury and opulence. She, as an autonomous “free-woman,” appropriates her husband’s role as a “conspicuous consumer,” rejecting the interpellation of the “mother-woman” role, which requires that she be an object of “conspicuous consumption” (Stange 512). Edna, therefore, not only rejects hegemonic ideology through the act of the dinner party, but advocates oppositional discourse as well.

The dinner party also allows Edna to assert her emergence into the economy as a subject, rather than an object. These are vital aspects of the economic portion of the “free-woman” role. The party is a “sending off” of sorts, a definitive and highly public farewell to her former position

as an economic object. Edna terms the occasion her “birthday” (Chopin 83). Stange suggests that Edna is indeed reborn, emerging as a participant in the economy, one who recognizes her potential economic power (512).

Edna’s recognition of not only her economic and professional power, but also her sexual power, comes to fruition in her role as the “free-woman.” Her realization of the power in her own body begins at Grand Isle, where she achieves a growing sensual awareness. On the island, Edna’s strict Presbyterian upbringing initially clashes with the more relaxed sensuality of the Creole culture in which she is immersed. Before that summer, she had “never been thrown so intimately among them” (Chopin 10). For instance, she is shocked by the open discussion of Madame Ratignolle’s “accouchements, withholding no intimate detail” (Chopin 11). During this vacation, Edna gradually grows accustomed to such open sensual discussion, and her repression slowly is mitigated.

The lessening of Edna’s sexual repression is inextricably linked to her realization of the power she possesses in her own body. As noted, at Grand Isle, she feels the music of Mademoiselle Reisz with her emotional and physical being. However, Edna more fully experiences her physical prowess when she learns to swim later that summer. Edna attempts “all summer to learn to swim,” and feels “a certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand nearby that might reach out and reassure her” (Chopin 27). One night, this feeling of dread vanishes, and she wades out into the gulf “alone, boldly and with over-confidence” (Chopin 27). Edna “shouts for joy,” and “a feeling of exultation overtakes her, as if some power of significant import had been given her soul” (Chopin 27). She feels powerful and accomplished, fairly intoxicated with her newfound strength. Her physical achievement inspires a growing sense of self-awareness, both spiritual and physical, and an expanding confidence in herself.

This newfound power continues to develop as Edna’s sensual awareness blossoms into a sexual awareness. When Mrs. Pontellier’s vague feelings of “oppression” (Chopin 8) ensue, she instinctively resists her husband’s hailings of her as his sexual property. Edna’s sexual awareness forces her realization of her “sexual value” in marriage (Stange 506). By withholding sex from her husband, she is resisting a hailing that creates the “mother-woman” role, and also is asserting her sexual power. The achievement of women’s sexual power is a central goal of oppositional nineteenth-century feminist ideology, and a vital aspect of Edna’s role as the “free-woman.” Through her adoption of the “free-woman” role, Edna asserts her power as a sexual subject. As Stange suggests, “the free-

dom to withhold oneself has its complement in the freedom to give oneself" (509). After Edna leaves Leonce and moves into her own abode, she, according to Stange, "declares herself free to have sex with whomever she chooses" (509), and asserts herself as a sexual subject (Chopin 107).

Critic Bert Bender argues that Chopin's depiction of Edna's sexual power refers to Darwin's theory of sexual selection (459). Chopin reviewed Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, in which the great naturalist denies the myth of constant love and asserts that only men play an active role in sexual selection. Darwin argues that women take a passive and modest role in sexual relations and that males are physically and mentally superior to females. Chopin's review disagrees with Darwin over both contentions and especially with his idea of the nature of female sexual selection, arguing that women play an active, rather than passive, role (Bender 460–464). Chopin argues against Darwin's theory of the passivity of female sexuality in both her critical review of *The Descent of Man* and in her fiction. Many of her female characters, such as Edna in *The Awakening*, and Calixta in her short story, "The Storm," actively control their sexuality.

In her role as "free-woman," Edna plays an active role in sexual selection, in accordance with the oppositional feminist ideology of sexual self-ownership. She freely chooses to have a sexual relationship with Alcée Arobin and delights in the physical pleasures of the affair. His touch "inflames her," though it is "not love which holds this cup of life to her lips" (Chopin 80). She does not feel "shame or remorse" for her actions, but rather, a certain regret that she does not love him (Chopin 80). Edna chooses him based upon mutual sexual attraction. She chooses Robert as well, prompted by deeper romantic emotions. In both relationships, Edna appropriates the Darwinian male role of active sexual selection, rejecting interpellations to be passive.

In her oppositional role as "free-woman," Edna advocates sexual self-ownership, in accordance with nineteenth-century feminist ideology. However, she does not entirely espouse the feminist movement's notion that maternity is inextricable from female sexuality. As the "free-woman," Edna engages in sexual affairs much as a man in her society might do, considering only sexual gratification and attraction. Also, Edna feels that motherhood is a role for which "fate had not fitted her" (Chopin 19). Ironically, however, the pull of her maternal role ultimately forces her to abandon the oppositional "free-woman" role and traps her in the hegemonic ideal of the "mother-woman."

Edna's experimentation with the oppositional role of the "free-

woman" is fleeting. She briefly engages in romantic affairs with two men, while maintaining economic and artistic independence in her "pigeon house" (Chopin 134). However, Edna realizes that the two men, even Robert who claims to be in love with her, view her as an object, rather than as a subject, in accordance with patriarchal ideology. Robert tells her "goodbye" because he "loves" her and implies that he could not "have" Edna unless Leonce "sets her free" (Chopin 101). She realizes that Robert accepts tradition and that he does not truly understand her. He does not realize that she belongs to herself, and soon after she discovers this she loses hope for a fulfilling female role. Not long after this despair begins, her opposition to patriarchal ideology ends. Edna's role as "free-woman" ceases during a horrific vision of childbirth. She is called to the side of Adele Ratignolle as she experiences the birth of her fourth child. She sees Adele's "agonizing moments" of pain, and "with an inward agony, with a flaming outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature," Edna witnesses "the scene of torture" (Chopin 104).

In these thoughts, Edna reveals her oppositional inclinations toward the hailings that form the "mother-woman" role. However, as Edna bends down to kiss Adele in farewell, she is hailed as a mother through a pleading entreaty. Adele realizes, in a superficial sense, that Edna has been engaging in free practices oppositional to the acceptable norms of society and begs her to think of the effect of such behavior on her children. Exhausted from the rigors of childbirth, Adele whispers, "Think of the children, Edna. Oh, think of the children! Remember them!" (Chopin 104). Through this plea, a hailing, Edna is interpellated as a mother and can no longer resist this hegemonic societal demand of the only fully sanctioned nineteenth-century female role.

Edna ultimately realizes that she cannot exist beyond the interpellation of motherhood. She tells Dr. Mandelet that she is not "going to be forced to do things," and that "nobody has any right" to force demands upon her (Chopin 105). However, she tempers this statement by stating that "only children, perhaps," have the right to demand anything of her (Chopin 105). The role of the "free-woman" overtly rejects such maternal feelings, yet she still has them. However, Edna has been awakened to herself "as an individual" (Chopin 57), so she cannot exist in the limited role sanctioned by hegemonic ideology, that of the "mother-woman," either. This is a "single avenue of expression and attainment" (Gilman 79), as is the "artist-woman" role. Edna knows, however, that thoughts of her children will continually interpellate her to the maternal aspect of the "mother-woman" role. She sees her children as "antagonists

who had overcome her" and seek "to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days" (Chopin 108). Still, she strongly feels that she cannot "sacrifice herself for her children" (Chopin 108), the requirement of the dispossessed female role dictated by nineteenth-century patriarchal ideology.

Edna finds "a way to elude" the interpellation of motherhood and to escape from ideology (Chopin 108). She returns to the site of her awakening at Grand Isle. Rather than succumb to the interpellations that create limited female roles, "single avenues" (Gilman 79) sanctioned by patriarchal ideology, Edna gives herself in suicide to the vast expanse of "the sea" (Chopin 57), an image of endless openness and possibility but also one of chaos and dissolution. In life, under the irresistible realm of ideology, Edna could exist only in a female role of limitation. In death, she symbolically enters the realm of nature as she wades into "the sea," and becomes enfolded in its vast space of innumerable waves. Heroically, Edna escapes oppressive ideology, but tragically, does so only in death.

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