Female Entrapment in the Works of Elizabeth Stoddard, Kate Chopin, and Edith Wharton

LONG, Xiang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

in

English (Literary Studies)

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

September 2011

Thesis/Assessment Committee

Professor Jason Gawain Gleckman (Chair)

Professor Michael Gerard O'Sullivan (Thesis Supervisor)

Professor Yuet May Ching (Committee Member)

Professor Stuart Christie (External Examiner)

摘要

本論文從十九世紀中期到二十世紀初期的三位美國女性作家的個人生活和作品中分析女性被束縛而陷入困境這一文學主題。這三位美國女性作家和她們的作品分別是伊莉莎白・斯托達德的《摩根森一家》（1862）、凱特・蕭邦的《覺醒》（1899）和伊蒂絲・華頓的《夏天》（1917）。伊莉莎白・斯托達德的《摩根森一家》（1862）講述了流行於美國十九世紀中期強調女性居家的崇拜主義對其女性人物的束縛。凱特・蕭邦的《覺醒》（1899）主要從婚姻的角度探討其對女性人物所造成的束縛。伊蒂絲・華頓的《夏天》（1917）從經濟的角度出發並探索了經濟困難對其女性人物所帶來的束縛。

本論文認爲三位女作家的作品均反映並指向一個從十九世紀中期到二十世紀初期不同社會背景的女性都會遭遇到的問題，即無論在父權性的家庭之中或是之外，她們均被束縛而陷入困境。根據蘇珊・古芭和桑德拉・吉伯特將女性作家的生活同她們的作品相聯繫的理論，本論文旨在通過研究這三位美國女性作家的生活和作品從而可以更好的理解從美國內戰後到第一次世界大戰這段時間中女性被束縛而陷入困境這一文學主題。

Abstract

This thesis explores the theme of female entrapment in the personal lives and works of three American women writers whose work spans the period from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth-century. The three American women writers and their works that will be examined in this thesis are Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Mogesons* (1862), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917). Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862) explores the entrapment imposed on its women characters by the ideology of the cult of domesticity, which prevailed in the mid-nineteenth century America. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) examines the theme of female entrapment primarily from the perspective of entrapment caused by marriage. Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917) looks at the theme of female entrapment mainly from the angle of financial entrapment imposed on its female characters.

This thesis argues that the three writers' works all reflect and point to the dilemma faced by women of various social backgrounds in America in the period from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, whereby they feel entrapped both within and without the confines of a patriarchal domestic sphere. Drawing on the theory of Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert that links women writers' lives with their works, it is hoped that by exploring the personal lives and works of these three American women writers, one will come to a better understanding of the literary theme of female entrapment in works published by women in the period from post-bellum to World War I America.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my committee members. First of all, to Professor Michael O'Sullivan, my supervisor, without whose help, this thesis would not be possible. I would like to thank him for his guidance, support, and patience during my two-year process of thesis writing. I am also very grateful to Professor Jason Gleckman and Professor Mimi Yuet May Ching, who have provided me with valuable suggestions on how to improve my thesis.

I would also like to express my warm thanks to Professor David Parker, who was my mentor during my first year as a doctoral student, and has helped me expand my horizon in literature. I am also grateful to Professor Timothy Weiss, who has helped me to choose the thesis topic and set up the thesis outline. I am also thankful to Professor David Huddart and Professor Julian Lamb for their advice and encouragement during the three-year doctoral programme.

I would also like to thank my fellow postgraduate students and friends for their stimulating conversations and warm company during the three-year doctor programme. In particular, I would like to thank Lili Jin, who has given me advice on how to write the thesis and eased my anxiety over the doctor programme; and Viona Au Yeung and Mandy Chan, who have been such dear and wonderful friends, and have encouraged and comforted me during the doctor programme.

Finally, I would like to express my love and gratitude for my parents, Xikai Long and Jinwen Jiang, and my U.S. Mom, Joetta Roberts, for their continuing love, support, and encouragement, without which I will not be able to pursue a doctoral degree.

Table of Contents

Introduction

This thesis explores the theme of female entrapment in the personal lives and works of three American women writers whose work spans the period from the middle of the nineteenth-century to the early twentieth-century. The three American women writers and their works that will be examined in this thesis are Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917). The chapter on Kate Chopin will be the centre-piece of the thesis; Elizabeth Stoddard can be viewed as a predecessor to Chopin; and Edith Wharton as a successor.

The term "female entrapment" is understood in this thesis as a dilemma faced by women whereby they are uncomfortable and unfulfilled by either staying inside men's houses or being exiled in the outside world; or to put it another way, it is a dilemma faced by women whereby they feel entrapped both within and without the confines of a patriarchal domestic sphere. In this thesis, it is argued that the three women writers' works testify to this dilemma for American women from the post-bellum period to World War I. The three women writers have adopted an ambivalent stance on the theme of female entrapment, and have intentionally not provided a satisfactory solution to the problem for their women characters. Their ambivalence on this unresolved theme reflects the complex nature of female entrapment.

Before going into any greater depth on the three women writers and their works, it is important, first of all, to look at the theoretical framework for this thesis. In this thesis, arguments made by feminist critics across Europe and North America are viewed

chronologically so as to trace the theoretical development of the concept of female entrapment. In the following paragraphs, the word "entrapment" and "confinement" will be used interchangeably to refer to the same concept.

First Wave of Feminism[1]

The British woman writer and pioneer, Mary Wollstonecraft, wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. In the beginning of her book, she questions why women should be kept under the "specious name of innocence" (9) without self awareness and knowledge. Wollstonecraft sees the entrapment in terms of women's education in her time. She deplores the lack of time and space devoted to women's learning. Wollstonecraft believes that women have sufficient intelligence to acquire knowledge, and that education can enlighten a woman's mind and save her from blind obedience. Under patriarchy, Wollstonecraft argues, women's minds are enfeebled by femininity, and that they are not treated equally as men either. She thinks that books written by men before and in her time view females not as equals. The male writer's aim is to create alluring mistresses rather than cultivate reason and virtue in women. The solution offered by Wollstonecraft lies in imitating manly virtues and talents. She therefore hopes that women may grow more and more masculine. Wollstonecraft's suggestion raises the question: is becoming more masculine the real solution to woman's predicament?

In her book Wollstonecraft also points out that woman does not have professional ambition to engage her attention; therefore, she has to marry advantageously to rise in the world. In order to achieve the goal of marriage, her time is sacrificed, and her person is

"often legally prostituted" (65). This is a very harsh statement concerning woman's choice and position in her time, however, it shows that as early as the eighteenth century, women writers realize that marriage can cause female entrapment and that how a woman spends her time is decided by the pressure from the patriarchal society instead of her own will. Wollstonecraft's book touches on the theme of the quest for woman's identity; nevertheless, she does not express it explicitly. When she writes her book, it appears that she has male instead of female readers in mind. Due to historical limitations,[2] Wollstonecraft views woman solely in the roles of wife and mother. Her argument on woman's education, therefore, aims more at attaining virtue and progress than a sense of self.

Across the Atlantic, Margaret Fuller, American critic and women's rights activist, published *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in 1845. Fuller details woman's entrapment by describing the sad lot of woman's life in a patriarchal society: a woman has to stifle her aspiration and be subjected to man's will; she is looked upon as either "slave" or "child" by man. Fuller traces the patriarchal ideas back to the Bible. In the Bible, woman is made for the purposes of man, and it is woman who causes man to fall. She also looks into history to prove that women have occupied a lower place in society for a long time. Fuller laments the arbitrary restrictions placed by the patriarchal society on women.

Similarly to Wollstonecraft, Fuller tries to prove that intellectually women are as good as men. While Wollstonecraft's book appeals to men, Fuller aims at a female audience. She writes: "What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded" (20).

Fuller hopes that the barriers imposed by a patriarchal society on women can be removed and women can enjoy equal freedom and rights as men. Fuller appreciates the clarity of the mind and the freedom for the soul; therefore, she advocates universal rights, freedom, and equality for both men and women.

Writing about woman's self, Fuller advocates self-reliance for women in the mid nineteenth-century. She believes that for woman, self is the only constant friend; therefore, woman needs to develop self-respect and learn self-help. She is confident that women can fit into any kind of job. By urging women to stand on their own, Fuller believes that they can enjoy the completeness of life. Fuller is very progressive or even radical in her time. She is optimistic about the future for women. Given enough time and space, she declares, woman can leave her mark on historical scenes. Although impressed by Fuller's optimism, one has to note the idealism in her book. Fuller hardly mentions the importance of finance for women. This loophole in her argument is covered by later critics such as Virginia Woolf.

Second Wave of Feminism

Picking up the arguments made by the first wave of feminists, the second wave of feminists explore the idea of female entrapment in detail and further advance feminist theories. In her famous book *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf advances what Wollstonecraft advocated for women over a century before. In order to achieve female artist-hood, she offers the image of a room of one's own, which can be understood both physically as well as metaphorically. The room can refer to a private room at home

where woman can think and write. Woolf writes: "In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question" (79). The room also implies financial security. Here Woolf points out the fact that women have been poor over the centuries. They can neither make money nor keep money legally by law in the past. Woolf recognizes the importance of finance and considers it indispensible toward freedom and the pursuit of art.

Similarly to Margaret Fuller, Woolf emphasizes self-reliance for women. She imagines the tragic story of Shakespeare's sister, who fails to achieve her aspirations due to restrictions set by a patriarchal society. Woolf thinks that women have to face the fact that "there is no arm to cling to" (171). By becoming financially independent, she believes that one day "the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down" (172). Woolf thinks that self-reliance plus financial independence will enable woman to fully tap into her artistic potential and achieve her selfhood.

The Second Sex (1949) establishes the unshakable status of the French writer Simone de Beauvoir in feminist history. Her arguments are helpful in explaining the idea of female entrapment, and are thus given more attention in this introduction. De Beauvoir thinks that marriage can become a form of entrapment for woman. In her writings de Beauvoir traces social and cultural influences on woman's development from childhood to adulthood. She notes that as a little girl, she views the maternal sphere as narrow and stifling, and retains her autonomy. When she reaches the stage of a young girl, she is encouraged by family and society to see marriage as an honourable and less tiring career

than many others. She begins to see man as the essential whereas herself as the inessential. She starts to wait for man to define her future for her.

When a woman reaches adulthood and is married, de Beauvoir stresses that very often she becomes entrapped through conventional marriage. De Beauvoir argues that the tragedy of marriage is that it mutilates woman and dooms her to a life-time repetition and routine. "The first twenty years of woman's life are extraordinarily rich, as we have seen; she discovers the world and her destiny. At twenty or thereabouts mistress of a home, bound permanently to a man, a child in her arms, she stands with her life virtually finished for ever " (De Beauvoir 496). De Beauvoir believes that it is both easy and dangerous for woman to lose her sense of self in marriage. With the economic power in mind, she writes:

> In marrying, woman gets some share in the world as her own; legal guarantees protect her against capricious action by man; but she becomes his vassal. He is the economic head of the joint enterprise, and hence he represents it in the view of society. She takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his "half". She follows wherever his work calls him and determines their places of residence; she breaks more or less decisively with her past, becoming attached to her husband's universe; she gives him her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity being required. (449)

De Beauvoir points out the self-sacrificing tendency prevalent among the married women. Consequently, it is very easy for woman to lose her own identity and become entrapped once she sacrifices her whole self for the family. It seems that for de Beauvoir

selfhood and marriage pose as mutually conflicting. She notes: "She forgets herself in favour of her husband, her lover, her child; she ceases to think of herself, she is pure gift, pure offering" (637). De Beauvoir's argument about this conflict between the love for a man (the other) and the love for a sense of self are quoted by later feminist theorists. Lamenting the loss of self, de Beauvoir devotes lengthy pages to explaining how woman is robbed of her identity due to the restrictions of patriarchy.

De Beauvoir also associates female entrapment with the control of time. She argues that a woman is not in charge of her time, which both her predecessors, Wollstonecraft and Woolf, have briefly touched upon. Wollstonecraft believes that woman sacrifices her time to captivate man for economic and social gains. Woolf argues that woman loses the control of her time because of constant interruptions in her life. As for de Beauvoir, she thinks woman is not in charge of her time in that she is always passively waiting:

> In a sense her whole existence is waiting, since she is confined in the limbo of immanence and contingence, and since her justification is always in the hands of others. She awaits the homage, the approval of men, she awaits love, she awaits the gratitude and praise of her husband or her lover. She awaits her support, which comes from man; ... She waits for man to put in an appearance, since her economic dependence places her at his disposal; she is only one element in masculine life while man is her whole existence. The husband has his occupations outside the home, and the wife has to put up with his absence all day long; the lover – passionate as he may be - is the one who decides on their meetings and separations in

accordance with his obligations. In bed, she awaits the male's desire, she awaits · sometimes anxiously – her own pleasure. (622)

Just note how many times de Beauvoir uses the word "wait". Waiting is associated with the passage of time. When woman passively waits, it seems her own choice to do so; nonetheless, in reality she has no other alternative than waiting. In waiting she becomes entrapped, as she cannot determine when and where things will happen or ever happen. De Beauvoir argues that a woman is waiting practically her whole life. Her justification lies in the hands of others instead of herself. The word, "waiting", exposes the vulnerability of woman. She is powerless, incapable of deciding for her own happiness, and waiting to be saved.

De Beauvoir also associates female entrapment with woman's biology. She writes: "the cycle of each pregnancy, each flowering, exactly reproduces the one that proceeded. In this play of cyclical phenomena the sole effect of time is a slow deterioration" (610). When looking at woman's body, she notes the ambivalence in the way woman regards it. To woman the body is a burden: "worn away in service to the species, bleeding each month, proliferating passively, it is not for her a pure instrument for getting a grip on the world but an opaque physical presence … it contains menaces: woman feels endangered by her 'insides'" (630). For de Beauvoir, woman's body constitutes part of female entrapment in a negative way.

De Beauvoir also feels keenly the confinement of home. She notes that on the one hand woman wants a roof over her head and walls to prevent her being abandoned in the patriarchal world; however, on the other hand, woman longs for her liberty and fears for her confinement at home. "Woman is shut up in a kitchen or in a boudoir, and

astonishment is expressed that her horizon is limited. Her wings are clipped, and it is found deplorable that she cannot fly" (616). The conflicting emotion toward home has been noted by later feminist critics as well. De Beauvoir believes woman's lack of space is caused by the opaque nature of her body and confinement at her home. "Shut up in her flesh, her home, she sees herself as passive before these gods with human faces who set goals and establish values" (609). Body and home can have positive connotations, but de Beauvoir believes that under patriarchy the two lead to confinement that robs woman of her liberty.

Solitude for woman is fully discussed by de Beauvoir. The reason de Beauvoir stresses solitude is that she believes it solves the problem of woman's entrapment. "Enslaved as she is to her husband, her children, her home, it is ecstasy to find herself alone, sovereign on the hillsides; she is no longer mother, wife, housekeeper, but a human being; she contemplates the passive world, and she remembers that she is wholly a conscious being, an irreducible free individual" (631). Solitude is a recurring theme for women writers over generations. The charm of solitude, de Beauvoir explains, lies in that she can temporarily forget her domestic responsibility and the restrictions placed by the society, and simply look upon herself as an unfettered and free human being. De Beauvoir's arguments build solid foundations for the third wave of feminists.

In their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also focus on the idea of female entrapment. Different from de Beauvoir who writes about women in general, Gilbert and Gubar centre on a special group of women -literary women. Gilbert and Gubar think that a woman writer's quest for her own story

symbolizes her quest for self-definition. Speaking against the patriarchal society, they argue that the patriarchal society together with its values and restrictions lead woman to "self-lessness", which is "in some sense sickening" (55). One of the values advocated by the patriarchal society, Gilbert and Gubar stress, is the ideal of femininity. "Learning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns anxiety about—perhaps even loathing of—her own flesh. Peering obsessively into the real as well as metaphoric looking glasses that surround her, she desires literally to 'reduce' her own body" (56). Here Gilbert and Gubar talk about self-starvation and anorexia, and question the ruthless self-suppression that results from conforming to the feminine ideal, which hampers woman's creation of a real self.

Looking into the literary history, Gilbert and Gubar point out the lack of space for development in the literary world for women. They find that women do not have stories or histories. For women writers who did manage to publish, on most occasions they had to publish their works pseudonymously or anonymously, or to acknowledge their female limitations and focus on lesser subjects deemed fit by the patriarchal society. "[T]he literature produced by women confronted with such anxiety-inducing choices has been strongly marked not only by an obsessive interest in these limited options but also by obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them" (64). Lack of space for literary creativity becomes one form of confinement for woman writers.

To assert herself in the face of such confinement, some literary women resort to the defence of silence. Gilbert and Gubar find that there are both heroines and women

writers who suffered from the struggle with her body. "Rejecting the poisoned apples her culture offers her, the woman writer often becomes in some sense anorexic, resolutely closing her mouth on silence ... Thus both Charlotte and Emily Brontë depict the travails of starved or starving anorexic heroines, while Emily Dickinson declares in one breath that she 'had been hungry, all the Years'" (58). By talking metaphorically about the silence resulting from anorexia, Gilbert and Gubar again draw readers' attention to the lack of literary space for women writers.

For Gilbert and Gubar, the image of confinement applies to both the literary space and the individual home. To them the lack of space and freedom in both literary world and individual home is inter-related and inseparable. Together these factors suck the hope and creativity out of aspiring women writers and cause them enormous anxiety. Gilbert and Gubar make forceful arguments on how the individual home can be equated with a prison. They note that literary women like Dickinson, Brontë, and Rossetti were all "imprisoned in ... their father' houses": "It is not surprising, then, that spatial imagery of enclosure and escape, elaborated with what frequently becomes obsessive intensity, characterizes much of their writing" (83). To break away from the confinement of home became a common theme in nineteenth-century literature by women, which is termed as a unique female tradition by Gilbert and Gubar. Gilbert and Gubar believe that the anxiety about space is crucial in understanding women's literature of both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century. The image of the madwoman in the attic is powerfully symbolic. Due to the restrictions of patriarchy, the literary woman suffers from acute anxiety to fully develop her own identity.

Third Wave of Feminism

Building on the ideas proposed by the second wave of feminists, the third wave of feminists further advance the discussion of female entrapment. To most of the second wave of feminists, the female biology and the female body are construed as forms of entrapment. However, to the third wave of feminists, the female body takes on new meanings and become enlightening and liberating to the understanding of self.

Although Helene Cixous published *The Laugh of Medusa* in 1975, she expresses quite radical ideas in her book. She stresses the importance of a woman's body. To Cixous, woman's sense of self is intricately linked to writing through her body. In her book she stresses that woman must write her self. She must write about women and bring women to writing. She talks about writing through the female body by famously claiming: "Write your self. Your body must be heard" (2043). Cixous thinks that history teaches woman to turn away from her body and consider it with shame. She therefore argues that women need to write through their bodies and invent impregnable language to break the silence and partitions. Cixous believes that writing gives women strength, pleasure, and a sense of being in charge. She urges women writers to be fighters, for she believes that writing will emancipate the text of the female self. Cixous's argument has influenced later feminist critics. Apart from fighting for gender equality, feminist critics begin to turn toward the uniqueness of woman to understand female selfhood.

In Julia Kristeva's *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995), she writes about the relationship between the female body and entrapment. Kristeva connects the female self to the female body. Kristeva thinks that pregnancy fundamentally challenges woman's identity. She argues that it is easy for woman to become self-effacing toward her child. In order to preserve an independent and creative self, she stresses that woman should not annihilate her "affective, intellectual and professional personality" in the process of maternity (364). Kristeva does not think women in the past dealt well with the conflict between self and maternity; nevertheless, she is optimistic about the future. Different from de Beauvoir who considers the female body burdensome, Kristeva suggests that woman can preserve her identity in the process of maternity. Kristeva values the complexity of individual woman, and calls for the "formation of a free and flowing subjectivity" (366).

Susan Bordo in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993) concentrates on the relationship between the female body and sense of self. She traces the influence of history in terms of the ideal femininity, and argues that the effect lingers. For Bordo, the self-sacrificing nature of femininity is best exemplified in the control of female appetite for food.

> The rules for this construction of femininity (and I speak here in a language both symbolic and literal) require that women learn to feed others, not the self, and to construe any desires for self-nurturance and self-feeding as greedy and excessive ... that female hunger—for public power, for

> independence, for sexual gratification –be contained, and the public space that women be allowed to take up be circumscribed, limited. (2367-68)

Similar to her predecessors, Bordo feels keenly the relationship between body and self. De Beauvoir explains in her book that woman sees her body as opaque and burdensome. Gilbert and Gubar think that literary woman has to suppress her body physically and metaphorically to conform to the values of the patriarchal society. While acknowledging previous feminists' stances, Bordo, however, comes up with a different, almost opposite perspective. She argues:

> Nonetheless, anorexia, hysteria, and agoraphobia may provide a paradigm of one way in which potential resistance is not merely undercut but *utilized* in the maintenance and reproduction of existing power relations. The central mechanism I will describe involves a transformation (or, if you wish, duality) of meaning, through which conditions that are objectively (and, on one level, experientially) constraining, enslaving, and even murderous, come to be experienced as liberating, transforming, and life-giving. (2364-65)

Bordo points out the dual nature of anorexia. On the one hand, it is sickening and self-harming resulting from internalizing the values of the patriarchal society; on the other hand, however, it represents the triumph of free will and strength for woman. Bordo, therefore, adds a whole new level of meaning to the understanding of the relationship between the female body and the idea of female entrapment.

Bordo also reiterates the theme of home as confinement. Drawing on the historical background of the 1950s and early 1960s, she notes that domesticity and

dependency re-emerged as the feminine ideal. Quoting Betty Friedan, she argues that women of that era were educated by movies and television shows to be "content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home" (2367). For both the second and the third wave of feminists, home loses its positive significance, and is equated with a suffocating dungeon. In *Gender and Colonial Space*, Sara Mills points out that within the nineteenth-century a woman's place is supposed to be domestic and at home. Friedan and Bordo argue that there have not been marked changes in this trend of ideas until the mid twentieth century. The image of confinement and escape therefore becomes pervasive.

Pamela Odih (1999) understands the idea of female entrapment in terms of women's time. For Odih woman's failure to take charge of her own time is crucial to understand her lack of control over self. Similarly to her predecessors, such as de Beauvoir, Odih notes: "A condition and consequence of women's subordinate position in the public sphere, and their ascribed domestic responsibilities in the private sphere, is that of significantly inhibiting their power to make decisions about their own time and also that of encouraging an existence that is discursively tied to the 'needs' of significant others" (11). The division of public and private spheres by genders has been noted by a number of feminist critics. Odih suggests that the idea of woman's place, usually understood as within home, curtails woman's exploration of her self.

Kerstin W. Shands wrote *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse* in 1999. As the book title suggests, it deals exclusively with the idea of female entrapment in terms of space. Building on previous feminists' arguments of space,

Shands also understands the female entrapment in terms of body and home. Shands notes that body is often imagined as a building, "a temporary house for the immortal soul" (38). The woman's body is often equated with the space of femininity: "the inside/outside landscapes of the vulva, the vagina, and the womb, landscapes for which we are curiously lacking in words" (45). Shands argues that if spaciousness and freedom are inter-implicated, then anorectic, bulimic, and anorectic-bulimic conditions are ways of requesting more space or a differently constituted space: "As I have already suggested, there is a desire to break out of the boundaried space of the ideal and idealized female body and what it represents to the anorexic, who confuses or conflates 'body' and 'self'" (51). Shands's view of anorexia as resistance is similar to that of Bordo. Bordo sees anorexia as a triumph of will while Shands views it as a plea for more space.

Concerning the image of home as confinement, Shands expresses her understanding of previous feminists' arguments; nevertheless, she stresses the dual nature of home: "Because of our contemporary focus on hypermobility, other aspects of women's experiences of place and space are being neglected, such as women's fear of expulsion" (86). Shands points to woman's conflicting desire: to have a place of her own and her fear of confinement at home. She explains this ambivalence by quoting Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*: "the equally uncomfortable spatial options of expulsion into the cold outside or suffocation in the hot indoors" (86). Shands has not offered an ideal solution to this dilemma.

By going through the three waves of feminism, it is clear that the forms of female entrapment can be understood both in terms of public and private spheres.[3] The public

spheres can refer to perspectives such as the scarcity of life options available for women, the institution of marriage, and the notion of "a room of one's own"; while the private sphere mainly refers to the female body, and to states such as anorexia and pregnancy. In this thesis I would like to apply these theories of female entrapment, in particular those by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Gubar and Sandra Gibert, and Susan Bordo, to the analysis of works by Elizabeth Stoddard, Kate Chopin, and Edith Wharton so as to examine the theme of female entrapment for both the heroines and the authors.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One is the introduction, and Chapter Five the conclusion. The main body, which consists of Chapter Two, Chapter Three, and Chapter Four, will look at the three women writers and their works respectively. The three chapters attempt to answer three major questions in relation to the idea of female entrapment. First, I would like to explore if the three women writers have ever felt entrapped in their lives in regard to the goal of achieving artist hood. Second, I will examine various forms of entrapment imposed on women characters in the three novels. Finally, I will look for the solutions offered in the novel to free women characters from their entrapment. The three questions will allow us to better understand the literary theme of female entrapment in women's writing in the period from post-bellum to World War I America.

Chapter Two will focus on Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862). Elizabeth Stoddard (1823-1902) is a woman writer who had been forgotten for around eighty years in American literary history. It was not until the 1980s that Stoddard and her novel *The Morgesons* were reintroduced to scholars and students. Elizabeth Stoddard underwent a

very painful struggle for her dream of artist-hood. Her experience strongly confirms Gubar's and Gilbert's argument in relation to the entrapment of women writers in mid nineteenth-century America. Her best-known novel, *The Morgesons*, is about the quests for freedom and selfhood of two sisters of a middle-class family in a conservative town of New England in the mid nineteenth-century. The focus of the chapter explores the entrapment imposed by the ideology of domesticity on these female characters. The forms of entrapment will be explored in two ways; firstly with reference to the 'a room of one's own' notion made popular by Woolf and, secondly, by examining how the female body (passion and hunger) is described. Compared with the sad endings of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Edith Wharton's *Summer*, Stoddard offers a semi-happy ending for *The Morgesons*. Although critics have varying opinions regarding the ending of the novel, Stoddard makes the effort of stressing the equality between two genders within the context of marriage. The author seems to express the view that women characters have to compromise with their circumstances, and that maturity is essential to aid women on their quests for freedom and selfhood in mid nineteenth-century America.

Chapter Three will be about Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899). Similar to Elizabeth Stoddard, Kate Chopin (1851-1904) had also been forgotten for around half a century by American critics and readers. Early in her writing career, she earned a reputation as a local colourist. However, after the publication of her controversial novel, *The Awakening*, she was condemned unanimously by her contemporary critics, which seriously affected her later writing career and resulted in the neglect of her works over half a century by American readers. Chopin and her works were rediscovered by Norwegian scholar Per Seyersted in the late 1960s, and since then there has been a

revived interest in her literary works. The protagonist of *The Awakening* is a married woman of the upper-middle classes in Southern America. She goes through the process of awakening to her own sense of self and struggles to shake off the entrapment largely (not solely) imposed upon by her marriage. In *The Awakening* entrapment will be looked at from both the public and private spheres. The public sphere will be looked at in terms of the scarcity of life options available for women, the institution of marriage, and the notion of "a room of one's own" (physical space and economy); while the private sphere will be examined in regard to the representation of the female body (bodily sensations and woman's biology). The death of the protagonist in the end suggests Chopin's pessimism about the belief that a woman can gain full autonomy and succeed in deciding her own life path in late nineteenth century America.

Chapter Four will look at Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917). Edith Wharton (1862-1937) is the best known author among the three women writers studied in this thesis. Critics tend to turn their attention to her more famous literary pieces, such as *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. *Summer* is more often mentioned in conjunction with Wharton's other novels. To Wharton, however, *Summer* was among her top five favourite pieces of works. And it is also regarded by critics[4] as one of her most outspoken pieces on women's oppression. *Summer* is about a poor working-class woman's dissatisfaction and frustration with her current life situation in a small village in New England. The focus of the chapter is to explore the financial entrapment imposed on the female protagonist. The forms of entrapment are examined in regard to aspects of the public sphere such as the notion of "a room of one's own" and the male gaze; while the private sphere will also be examined through the female body (sexuality and pregnancy).

The sad ending of the novel suggests the lack of options for a young woman of a lower class to escape the financial entrapment in early twentieth-century America.

In this thesis the three women writers' lives and works will be connected and compared. It is argued that their works all reflect and point to the dilemma faced by women of various social backgrounds, whereby they feel entrapped both within and without the confines of a patriarchal domestic sphere in America in the years between the post-bellum period and World War I.

Chapter Two

Female Entrapment and the Cult of Domesticity: Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*

> Oh, the wild, wild days of youth!
> My royal youth;
> My blood was then my king:
> Maybe a little mad,
> But full of truth! (Stoddard 34)[5]

In this chapter, I am going to explore the theme of female entrapment[6] in the personal life and works of Elizabeth Stoddard. I argue that Stoddard's works testify to the dilemma faced by women from the middle class in mid nineteenth-century America, whereby they feel entrapped both within and without the confines of a patriarchal[7] domestic sphere. This chapter looks at female entrapment mainly from the perspective of the ideologies of femininity[8] and domesticity in mid-nineteenth century America. The ideologies of femininity and domesticity are interrelated. Terms, such as ideal femininity, domestic ideal, true womanhood, and so on, are interrelated or even exchangeable against the backdrop of mid-nineteenth century America.

In her article "Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America", Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes Victorian American femininity as "chaste, delicate, and loving" (65). The quality of purity is strongly emphasized, as Sally

Mitchell explains in her book, *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1835-1880*, that "Nineteenth-century thinking and writing about women is informed by the idea of feminine purity" (x).[9] Thus, Victorian Womanhood is often depicted as passionless, "asexual", and "icily aloof from all dangerous impulses" (Walters 65).

In her book, *"Just A Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*, Glenna Matthews stresses the importance and centrality of home in mid-nineteenth century America. "Indeed, by 1850 the home had become a mainstay of the national culture. Many scholars have discussed women's culture in the nineteenth century and have related it to the strength of the cult of domesticity" (Matthews 35). Likewise, Lora Romero in "Fiction and Domesticity" notes: "The cult of domesticity may have become culturally dominant by the mid-nineteenth century" (118).

The "cult of domesticity" is sometimes referred to as "the cult of true womanhood". In *Women in the United States, 1830-1945*, S. J. Kleinberg explains the ideology of the cult of true womanhood as follows:

> Sarah Josepha Hale, editor and author, celebrated the differences between women and men in her 1845 poem, "Empire of Woman", designating the "outward world" for men and reserving the holier empire of wife and motherhood for women. The proliferation of this type of domestic prose and fiction fostered what historian Barbara Welter described as the cult of true womanhood, a belief in the home as woman's natural place and the family as her paramount interest. The household became the middle-class woman's holy sphere; she lived through it and for it ... Pious, pure,

> submissive, and domestic, they, rather than their husbands, had the responsibility of raising the future generation. (Kleinberg 38)

Similar to S. J. Kleinberg, in *Changing American Families*, Judy Aulette also notes that "[b]etween 1820 and 1860 a new definition of womanhood emerged and was widely disseminated in popular magazines, novels, and religious literature and sermons ... According to advice manuals true women were to be judged by four virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (34-36). Aulette explains that in mid nineteenth century, American women were encouraged to adhere to the four virtues mentioned in the "cult of true womanhood" so as to bring happiness both to themselves and society as a whole. Glenna Matthews also points out that in mid-nineteenth century America, there was an outpouring of novels in which "housewives [were] figured in highly positive terms" (6), which helped to spread and foster the notion of the "cult of domesticity" or the "cult of true womanhood".

Lora Romero states that for novels written by women in mid-nineteenth century America, there can be a variety of terms to describe them, such as "the sentimental novel, the female *Bildungsroman*, the domestic novel" (110). Among these domestic novels, Nina Baym in "The Rise of the Woman Author" points out that many of them were quite popular in the market. One of the exceptions, however, was Elizabeth Stoddard: "[a] writer who did not attain popularity, probably because her work disregarded certain formulaic requirements of typical women's fiction, was Elizabeth Stoddard, whose novel *The Morgesons* (1862) is a striking work of gloomy local color, harsh and revealing in its depiction of New England life" (Baym 302-303). Baym here observes an important feature in Elizabeth Stoddard's works, i.e. she did not follow the conventional "formulaic

requirement" of women's domestic fictions. To put it another way, Stoddard did not adhere to the notion of Victorian American femininity or the cult of true womanhood in her works; rather, she challenged the ideology of domesticity in her writing, which may have resulted in the neglect of her works.

Elizabeth Stoddard's novels were reprinted twice in her life time, but she did not receive commercial success with any of her books, nor had she received much serious attention from critics either. She therefore was frustrated and bitter. After her death, Stoddard still remained mostly ignored and forgotten. Jennifer Putzi notes: "For more than eighty years after her death in 1902, Stoddard remained a footnote in American literary history—that is, when she was remembered at all" (xiv). Robert McClure Smith and Ellen Weinauer also point out: "there has been no significant, defining article about her in a major journal in the field such as *American Literature* or *American Literary history*. It is little wonder, therefore, that such 'mainstream' publications as the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988) and the *Columbia Literary History of the American Novel* (1991) offer Stoddard only the most cursory mention, often in passing" (6). It was until the 1980s that Elizabeth Stoddard and her works were reintroduced to scholars and students, and in the latest edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (2008), Stoddard is listed among other canonical writers, such as Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville.

The aim of the chapter is to answer three major questions in relation to the idea of female entrapment. First, by using both critical and Stoddard's own works, I would like to explore whether Stoddard, as a woman author, felt entrapped in her life in regard to her goal of achieving artist-hood. Second, I will examine various forms of entrapment

imposed on women characters in her novel *The Morgesons*. Finally, I will look for the solutions offered in the novel to free women characters from their entrapment. In this chapter, it is argued that Elizabeth Stoddard inhabits an important but often overlooked place in the reaction against the "cult of domesticity". She is therefore an overlooked figure who both questions and challenges this mid-nineteenth century discourse on the ideology of domesticity. The three questions mentioned above will allow us to better understand the literary theme of female entrapment in mid nineteenth-century America.

I. Stoddard and the Anxiety of Female Authorship

This section aims at answering the first question: has Stoddard, as a woman author, ever felt entrapped in her life in regard to her goal of achieving artist-hood? Gubar and Gilbert emphasize the link between women authors' private lives and their literary works. They argue that since "Western literary history *is* overwhelmingly male—or, more accurately, patriarchal" (47), women writers of the nineteenth-century often had to struggle to preserve their independent wills and creativity. It is not surprising that some of the women writers project their own sense of entrapment and anxiety onto their female characters in their literary works. Gubar and Gilbert therefore adopt the phrase of "anxiety of female authorship", and stress that such anxiety is "profoundly debilitating" (51) to both the writers and their creativity. This section of the chapter asks has Elizabeth Stoddard, who was a predecessor of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton, ever felt entrapped

in regard to her goal of achieving artist-hood?[10] Has she ever projected her own feeling of anxiety and entrapment onto her literary creations?

In this chapter, Stoddard's personal quest and struggle for her goal of artist-hood will be placed in the context of the literary background in nineteenth-century America for women writers. It is important to look at the literary background of nineteenth-century America in the first place, as it lays the historical foundation for introducing the two other women writers, i.e. Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton, as well. Compared with Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton who will be discussed in the later two chapters, Elizabeth Stoddard underwent a much more painful struggle for her dream of artist-hood. Since the rediscovery of Elizabeth Stoddard is fairly recent,[11] in this thesis, her personal quest in relation to the issue of the anxiety of female authorship will be looked at in greater depth. Compared with Chopin and Wharton, who were relatively better known in their lifetimes, and who had suffered less in their endeavours toward artist-hood, in this section, it is argued that Stoddard fits more easily into the image of a woman writer, proposed by Gubar and Gilbert, who suffers tremendous pains due to her ambition of becoming a recognized author in a patriarchal society.

In nineteenth-century America women writers generally had not received enough serious attention from male critics and reviewers. They were expected to write as exemplars of their own sex, but not as representative of general humanity. In *Sister's Choice*, Elaine Showalter notes: "By the 1850s, indeed, when women writers were producing most of the best-selling fiction, their work was deplored as a popular dilution of a truly virile American art" (12). Walt Whitman wrote in the *Brooklyn Daily Times* in

1857: "The majority of people do not want their daughters trained to become authoresses and poets."[12] This situation had its historical root in science. Historian Cynthia Eagle Russett argues that "[s]cience itself was andocentric and patriarchal. It did not go to the aid of opponents of social inequality; it was a key source of that opposition."[13] Owing to women's weak frames and biological structure, medical establishments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries insisted that women were deemed unfit to pursue serious scholarship and creative genius.

> No work better, or more vehemently, used science to define the debits of women's education than Dr. Edward H. Clarke's *Sex in Education; or, A Fair Chance for the Girls* (1873) ... Borrowing from scientific theories on the conservation of energy and from Herbert Spencer's ideas on the specialization and differentiation of function associated with evolutionary development, Clarke viewed the womb as the center of woman's energy. Too much energy devoted to thought--especially in the crucial adolescent period, when the reproductive system was not fully developed--undermined women's childbearing powers and caused a host of debilitating nervous ailments. (Cotkin 76-77)

The view that women were biologically unfit for writing persisted even till the beginning of the twentieth-century. In "Gender and Fiction", Elizabeth Ammons points out that some critics, such as Frank Norris, in early twentieth-century still retained the notion that "women lacked the physical and psychological strength necessary for the creation of great art" (267). It would not be surprising that when women writers suffered from depression, they were sometimes blamed for their ambitions to succeed in men's fields.

One cannot ignore the significant role depression played in women's lives in nineteenth-century America and Britain.[14] Stoddard, and some of the women writers of her generation such as Constance Fenimore Woolson, and her successor, Edith Wharton, all suffered from depression.

The idea that women writers cannot attain genius is also partly influenced by the feminine ideal of the nineteenth century. Deborah Barker explains that in the nineteenth century there was the view that laborious learning could seriously weaken the charm a woman exercised over the other sex, thus making her undesirable to men. "The anxiety generated by the image of the original woman artist functioned as a kind of metaphor for anxiety over women's reproductive and creative capacity ... Women's independent ability to create original works could be construed as an allegory for the circumvention of the male role in procreation" (Barker 38). In other words, there was the apprehension that women's creativity may endanger or subvert the patriarchal order. Women's creativity was even associated with a degree of sexual freedom and independence. Consequently, George Sand was considered an inappropriate model for American women writers to emulate. In fact some of Sand's works were not allowed to be printed in America for a while.

Broadly speaking, in nineteenth-century America, men still possessed far more privileges than women. Male writers had easier access to education, social networks, travel, economic freedom, etc. For example, it was not until the mid nineteenth century that the American higher education system finally started to offer opportunities for women.[15] Lacking privileges of these sorts, women writers tended to believe that they needed to suffer in order to succeed. "They [women artists] could not reach the immortal

crown of glory until they have suffered the earthly crown of thorns" (Boyd 128). Stoddard was no exception to this belief. She believed that great suffering was part of the price she paid for immortality. In 1854 Stoddard wrote down her lament for the lack of talented women writers in America: "We have no Elizabeth Browning, Brontë, George Sand or Miss Bremer,"[16] and she hoped that there soon could be American counterparts. One needs to realize that the field of American women writers at the time was not quite as barren as Stoddard had portrayed. There were quite a few American women writers before Stoddard who opened and paved the way for later women writers, such as Margaret Fuller, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, etc.

For American women writers before the Civil War, there was the tendency to regard themselves as mere professionals instead of artists. Elizabeth Ammons notes: "[t]o be sure, most popular mid-nineteenth-century women novelists did not define themselves as artists. Typically, they protested that they were writing merely to make a living; they emphasized that they were not attempting to lay claim to the traditionally male province of high art" (271). Stoddard, however, disagreed with this trend of thinking, and she was not alone. Anne E. Boyd notes: "During and after the Civil War, however, some women writers began to view authorship differently, namely as a central part of their identities, leading to the development of new ambitions as they sought to fulfill their potential as artists" (2). Stoddard stood out among her contemporaries who considered themselves as merely professionals, whether they truly thought so or only used it as an excuse to justify their writing in a traditionally male-dominated field. Stoddard clearly defined herself as an artist.

Marriage and art also seemed to be conflicting pursuits for women writers before and during Stoddard's generation. Domestic tasks were quite burdensome in 19th century America, therefore, it is little wonder that few women would have the time or strength left for literary pursuits. Boyd points out that "[i]n light of these responsibilities, marriage and motherhood were generally viewed as the endpoint of a woman's development" (66). In *Democracy in America* (1840), Alexis de Tocqueville summarizes the condition of American women in the nineteenth-century as follows: "In America the independence of woman is irrevocably lost in the bonds of matrimony: if an unmarried woman is less constrained there than elsewhere, a wife is subjected to stricter obligations" (165). This view testifies to Simone de Beauvoir's later argument on marriage. De Beauvoir describes the self-sacrifice and loss of independence for woman in marriage as follows: "She forgets herself in favour of her husband, her lover, her child; she ceases to think of herself, she is pure gift, pure offering" (637). Stoddard's personal story reiterates the conflict between art and marriage. In other words, marriage poses as one form of entrapment on Stoddard's pursuit of art, a theme which was later discussed in detail by Kate Chopin.

It is important to look at Stoddard's personal quest for her dream of artist-hood. Stoddard's personal life reveals her search and struggle on her way toward a writing career. Her own experiences had influenced her writing, and shed light on understanding women writers of her generation when they faced the same issue. Her maiden name was Elizabeth Drew Barstow. She was born in a small coastal town of Mattapoisett, Massachusetts in May 6, 1823. When she was young, she studied at Wheaton Seminary in Norton, Massachusetts. Later in her life Stoddard described her hometown as barren

and remote from culture and civilization, but she used it as the background for her novels and short stories, and drew inspiration from the place. Stoddard's stable home life came to an end in 1849 when one of her sisters and her mother passed away. Stoddard was restless at the time, and was uncertain how her life path should develop. Her brothers planned to go to California, and she was not sure if she should follow them to the West as well.

> In 1852 she wrote to her friend Margaret Sweat that she also possessed "aspirations," but, "What is there for such women as you and me are? I have decided that an irresistible will compels me to some destiny, but vaguely shaped yet much desired." [17]

Stoddard visited New York in the early 1850s. She attended literary gatherings and met book publishers, journal editors, famous writers, including her future husband, Richard Henry Stoddard. Stoddard and Richard shared their common love for books. Richard had some small fame as poet by then, but Stoddard had not begun her literary career. Nevertheless, she was influenced by the literary atmosphere in New York. Under the influence of her husband and his circle of literary friends, Stoddard began to write poems in 1853, "much of which was well received and published in such venues as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and *Putnam's*" (Smith and Weinauer 4). From 1854 to 1858, she wrote columns for a San Francisco newspaper *Daily Alta California*. Stoddard had written short stories for magazines between 1860 and the early 1890s. Between 1862 and 1867, in particular, she published three novels. Among them, *The Morgesons* (1862), was her first and best known novel.

In her book *Writing for Immortality*, Anne Boyd notes how post-bellum women writers such as Stoddard, Alcott, Phelps, and Woolson tried to figure out how to live their lives as artists while facing issues such as domesticity, marriage, motherhood, and self-sacrifice. Boyd argues that in spite of their many obligations as women, these women writers carved out the time and space necessary for writing in their lives. Marriage with Richard Stoddard initially opened a window of literary opportunities for Elizabeth Stoddard; however, domestic responsibilities, having children in particular, interfered severely with her writing. Stoddard could not have, what Virginia Woolf later suggests, a room of her own. Due to financial reasons the family had moved frequently, creating domestic upheavals each time, which further added to the stress for Stoddard. Stoddard made attempts at gaining solitude for her writing. For example, she sometimes retreated to her hometown for a short stay to be alone for her writing. She tried to carve out the time and space needed to finish her novel amid housework. In one of the letters she wrote to her husband: "At any rate have a woman there to help me. I am never going to do any more housework if I can help it, I am an AUTHOR."[18] The letter clearly indicated her frustration at the conflict between her married life and writing.

Stoddard wrote several poems on the theme of suffering and pains. In her poem "I Love You, But A Sense Of Pain", Stoddard questions: "It is a woman's province, then, / To be content with what has been? / To wear the wreath of withered flowers, / That crowned her in the bridal hours? / Still, I am ours: this idle strife / Stirs but the surface of my life:" (22).[19] Stoddard talks about woman's struggle, restlessness and pain when she desires more in life. In another poem "Nameless Pain", Stoddard again questions if marriage and domesticity are enough for woman's growth.

I should be happy with my lot:
A wife and mother—is it not
Enough for me to be content:
What other blessing could be sent?

A quiet house, and homely ways,
That make each day like other days;
I only see Time's shadow now
Darken the hair on baby's brow!
...
I read the poets of the age,
'Tis lotus-eating in a cage;
I study Art, but Art is dead
To one who clamors to be fed

With milk from Nature's rugged breast,
Who longs for Labor's lusty rest.
O foolish wish! I still should pine
If any other lot were mine. (23)

Stoddard tries to convince herself that she should be content with her marriage, but at the same time, she realizes that marriage is not enough for her. She is bored of the monotonous repetition of domesticity. Boyd points out that Stoddard's "sense of commitment to self and resistance to domestic encumbrance were at odds with her belief that she should be content as a mother and wife" (77). Stoddard is torn between her aspiration and ambition to be a writer, and her duty as wife and mother. She felt that she was pulled in two directions: "toward solitude, self-knowledge, self-reliance, and the power of creativity, on the one hand, and toward her family and wifely duties on the other" (Boyd 78). Different from some of the women writers of her generation, Alcott, for example, who chose singlehood for the sake of her artistic development, Stoddard tried to combine the artist life and wife-hood together. She therefore had to face the constant conflict, and had to give up serious writing in the end.

Almost throughout her entire life, Stoddard had to struggle with self-doubt and self-worth. She wavered between doubts about her ability and her dream of becoming a great writer. Early in her marriage she had low expectations for herself. In her letter to her friend Margaret Sweat, she confessed that she thought she could not be very intellectual since she had to bury herself in housekeeping. However, she was not satisfied to be solely immersed in domesticity, and complained of the lack of mental stimulation in her life: "What shall I do to satisfy my intellect? The devices that fill our woman life are *nothing* to me. I chafe horribly when S. leaves me to go into the world of men. While I remain under cover waiting for him."[20] Clearly the role of wife was not enough to satiate the hunger in her life, and she longed for creativity and stimulation. Richard encouraged and tutored Stoddard to write poems. His literary friends also had an impact on her. Stoddard's marriage had in some ways provided her with a supportive and literary atmosphere not found at her parents' home. Boyd notes that Richard gave Stoddard "some encouragement, space, and time in which to practice her writing" (58). However, the conflict between the roles of wife and author existed and continued. Stoddard tried hard to combine her roles of wife, mother, and author, but in the end she had to give up writing and devoted herself to the care of her husband and son.

As mentioned earlier, critics in the nineteenth century were almost exclusively male, and they tended not to take women writers seriously. Elizabeth Ammons notes that "American women writers have systematically been dismissed, scattered, ignored" (111). Stoddard apparently was also aware of this situation. She wrote: "No criticism assails [women writers]. Men are polite to the woman, and contemptuous to the intellect. They do not allow woman to enter their intellectual arena to do battle with them."[21] Stoddard

eagerly hoped to join in the literary arena. She even confessed that she desired to be compared with great artists such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante. In other words, Stoddard aspired to become a great artist, but she was frustrated that critics did not take her seriously because of her gender.

Stoddard was also influenced by both the works and biographies of European women writers. She considered George Sand "a true prophet of what a woman can be."[22] She especially admired Charlotte Brontë for her powerful pen and brilliant intellect. Stoddard told her readers in her Daily Alta California column that she always had "a Jane Eyre mania."[23] It is not surprising that several critics think that *The Morgesons* was inspired partly by *Jane Eyre*.

Stoddard also attached great importance to economic independence in her career of writing. Some of the women writers before and in Stoddard's time had struggled with the sense of self-denial; however, it never appeared to be the case for Stoddard. Early in her career, she was thrilled when she was contracted as a columnist: "I was the first female wage-earner that I had known, and it gave me a curious sense of independence" (Boyd 41). Stoddard's reaction fits nicely into later Virginia Woolf's argument of economic independence for women writers. In *A Room of One's Own*, the ownership of room or space implies economic freedom:

> And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves. Women, then, have not had a dog's chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own. (163)

Woolf considers economic freedom as the fundamental prerequisite for creating educational opportunity and advancing literary achievement for women writers. The aim of supporting herself financially also motivated Stoddard to continue her writing career.

As mentioned earlier, sadly though Stoddard's novels were reprinted twice in her life time, she did not receive commercial success with any of her books, nor had she received much serious attention from critics either. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf notes the hostility women writers in the past often had to face as follows: "The indifference of the world which Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius have found so hard to bear was in her case not indifference but hostility … the World said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?" (79). In a letter to a friend in 1888, Stoddard lamented: "I would laugh bitterly when I think how I have been ignored, how often in the presence of those who have been lionized whom I *knew* were *not* my superiors I have been passed over and unnoticed. I have almost been crushed" (Putzi xx). According to Jennifer Putzi, Stoddard was quite demanding of her male writer friends. She would even cut off her male literary friends who disrespected her artistic worth. Stoddard desired the attention and appreciation from serious and famous critics and writers to confirm her literary worth; however, she was saddened by the lack of recognition of her literary merit and the failure to become accepted as an equal among her male peers.

The story of Elizabeth Stoddard's literary quest confirms Gubar's and Gilbert's explanation. Gubar and Gilbert note that for women writers in the nineteenth-century, "[i]f she refused to be modest, self-deprecating, subservient, refused to present her artistic productions as mere trifles designed to divert and distract readers in moments of idleness,

she could expect to be ignored or (sometimes scurrilously) attacked" (61-62). In the later part of Stoddard's life, she gave up writing and devoted herself primarily to the care of her husband and son. Although she did not give up writing completely, she never devoted herself again to the serious and passionate pursuit of novel writing. There could have been several explanations for the silence of her pen, such as her family obligations, self doubts of her literary ability, etc. Boyd thinks that "[w]hile personal factors also played a role, it is clear that critical neglect, especially in the absence of popular acclaim, stifled her" (233). Her explanation fits into the Gilbert' and Gubar's argument that the lack of space for literary creativity confines a number of women writers: "[T]he literature produced by women confronted with such anxiety-inducing choices has been strongly marked not only by an obsessive interest in these limited options but also by obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them" (64). Gilbert and Gubar suggest that the ensuing silence on the part of women writers becomes both a result of and a defence against the lack of literary space and opportunities.

Critics tend to find Stoddard's writing style difficult to categorize. Putzi notes: "Stoddard's artistic 'constitution' was certainly distinct from that of any other writer of the nineteenth century, male or female, and, as several scholars have noted, it is impossible (and indeed unproductive) to reduce her body of work to any single literary movement or style. She was neither a strictly romantic nor a strictly realistic writer, a sentimentalist nor a regionalist; rather, she took advantage of shifting American literary tastes to craft a different kind of narrative fiction" (Putzi xii). Because of the difficulty of categorizing Stoddard's writing style, she was put aside and ignored. However, Putzi

points out, such a fate rarely befalls a male writer whose writing style may equally be difficult to summarize, for instance, Herman Melville. In *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, Joyce Warren expresses a similar view: "As long as we continue to regard the works of nineteenth-century American women writers as valuable only in terms of their usefulness to the canonized male authors, we are regarding them in the same way that women themselves were regarded in nineteenth-century American society" (15). She argues that each piece of literary work carries its own weight, and should not always be compared with usefulness to other authors.

Critics have pointed out the connection between *The Morgesons* and Stoddard's personal life. Putzi believes that the novel was loosely based on the author's early life. To put it another way, *The Morgesons* can be understood as semi-autobiographical to some extent. Stoddard has created a strong woman character in Cassandra Morgeson with her quest for autonomy and identity, and she also describes the woman character's experience of confinement and frustration along the way, which in some way mirrors the author's own sense of entrapment and struggle on her own the similar journey.

In conclusion, Stoddard suffers painfully from the anxiety of female authorship suggested by Gubar and Gilbert. She has serious doubts about her own literary worth. Due to the cold reception of her works as well as domestic obligations, she eventually gives up her ambition and dream of being a great artist. Her experience shows the painful compromises women writers have to make in struggling to uphold their creativity in the face of domestic obligations and societal pressures. In other words, Elizabeth Stoddard's experience strongly confirms Gubar's and Gilbert's argument about the entrapment of women writers in mid nineteenth-century America.

II. Multifaceted Forms of Female Entrapment in *The Morgesons*

This section aims at answering the second question: what are the forms of entrapment imposed on the women characters in the novel *The Morgesons*? As mentioned earlier, this chapter looks at female entrapment mainly from the perspective of the ideologies of femininity and domesticity in mid-nineteenth century America. In this chapter, the suffocating sense of entrapment will be explored in terms of the public and the private spheres.[24] In this section, the relationship between the public sphere and female entrapment will be looked at in terms of the notion of "a room of one's own" –an idea introduced into the feminist vocabulary by Virginia Woolf. The phrase "a room of one's own" in this section is used to focus on aspects of cultural enrichment instead of financial security. In *A Room of One's Own*, while stressing the importance of economic independence for women, Virginia Woolf also emphasizes the lack of educational opportunities and cultural stimuli for women. She gives the example of a fictional Shakespeare's sister who is encouraged by her parents and the conventions in the patriarchal society to learn cooking and sewing rather than pursuing an acting career. Woolf laments: "and the reading, even in the nineteenth century, must have lowered her vitality, and told profoundly upon her work…Her mind must have been strained and her vitality lowered by the need of opposing this, of disproving that" (82-83). In *The Morgesons*, the protagonist is also entrapped by the patriarchal and barren culture she lives in, and longs for liberty outside the domestic world. She does not fit into the

puritanical and domestic household to which she is supposed to belong, and finds her life colourless and stifling.

Public Sphere (A Room of One's Own) and Entrapment

The Morgesons is considered by some as a novel on woman's growth. It centres on the growth of its protagonist, Cassandra Morgeson. Cassandra's growth can be divided into three parts: childhood, girlhood and womanhood. The changes of time and space have marked and facilitated her growth. The novel is written in first person narration. As the novel is considered semi-autobiographical, the author's own life will also be examined and paralleled with that of the heroine when analysing the novel.

The story begins when Cassandra Morgeson is around ten years old, living in the New England Village of Surrey, which "was situated on an inlet of a large bay that opened into the Atlantic" (7).[25] Surrey resembles Stoddard's hometown, a place barren of culture. The way Stoddard describes the place reminds readers of the Moor in *Wuthering Heights*. "When an easterly wind prevailed, the coast resounded with the bellowing sea, which brought us tidings from those inaccessible spots. We heard its roar as it leaped over the rocks on Gloster Point, and its long, unbroken wail when it rolled in on Whitefoot Beach" (8). The family is described as puritanical, and lacks the "tradition of any individuality" (8). Cassandra's father is rigidly pious. His two daughters, Cassandra and Veronica, however, are full of individuality. In *Puritan Influences in American Literature*, Emory Elliott stresses that there is the need to fully comprehend New England Puritanism,[26] due to its "pervasive presence in American literature and culture" (xii). The

novel, *The Morgesons*, is no exception, as it is also set against the backdrop of New England Puritanism.

Cassandra Morgeson (Cassy) is naughty and rebellious since childhood. She cannot identify with the puritanical culture she is raised up in. "She [Cassy] grew up with an assertive, independent, rather abrasive character. Her free spirit and lack of reverence for traditional ways inevitably clashed with the latter-day Puritanism still dominant in the region" (Matlack 279). The naughty and rebellious side of her character bears some resemblance to the character of little Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*.[27] Aunt Mercy considers Cassy "possessed" (1). Cassy reads "unprofitable" books (books other than the Holy Bible). When her aunt tries to read the words from the Bible, Cassandra puts her hands over her ears, and "looked defiantly round the room" (6). She finds the religious atmosphere in her mother's winter room "oppressive" (6), and longs to get out. Cassandra defies authority from early on. For instance, she misbehaves purposely at school in order to be expelled. The characterization of Cassy also reminds one of Jane in *Jane Eyre*. Jane is also not interested in the Psalms of the church and feels restless and entrapped at school: "I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer" (Brontë 81). Both Cassandra and Jane long for liberty outside their narrow living space. Pointing to the confinement of what she calls "the feminized space", Lynn Mahoney states that "[d]isturbed by the evangelical bent of her female relatives, Cass finds feminized space equally onerous":

> Virtually all the sites of Cass's early rebellions are female spaces– the kitchen, the school, and her "mother's winter-room." ... In her introductory chapters, Stoddard familiarized her readers with key

> themes -the development of the rebellious Cassandra, religion and feminine influence, and the domestic world of nineteenth-century middle-class women—which dominate the rest of the novel. (37)

Cassandra does not identify with the puritanical environment of her family and community, nor is she comfortable with the feminine domestic world at either home or school.

The creation of the character, Cassandra, shares other similarities with the author's own childhood. Stoddard was independent and wilful when she was a child. She enjoyed novel reading and walking by the sea more than other more appropriate pursuits such as sewing or reading the Bible. Stoddard later recorded: "[R]eading had been laid up against me as a persistent fault, which was not profitable; I should peruse moral, and pious works, or take up sewing, --that interminable thing, "white seam", which filled the leisure moments of the right-minded."[28] Although one cannot look entirely into Stoddard's biography to explain the creation of Cassandra, Stoddard's personal life does shed light on the emotions of her major characters and the social background[29] in *The Morgesons*.

Although set in the puritanical background of New England in the mid nineteenth-century, the protagonist remains impervious to religion. She tells the minister: "I do not want rest; I have no burden" (48). Cassandra's attitude toward religion bears a resemblance to Stoddard's own life. Stoddard had problems with organized religion. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Max Weber, on the one hand, points out the social qualities of churches and sects[30] in North America: "He who stands outside of the church has no social 'connection'" (200); on the other hand Weber also

notes the "intense conformity pressures" (174) from sects. According to Ann Boyd, in the religiously conservative community of Mattapoisett, Stoddard was resistant to organized religion: "She disdained the church her mother regularly attended and she refused to be converted when a revival swept up her fellow students at Wheaton" (55). It is hard to discern why Stoddard was so averse to organized religion. Is it because she was doubtful about the existence of God or that she simply disliked the pressure of conformity to church rules? Concerning the religious aspect of her early life, Stoddard wrote in 1855: "God, my teachers said, did not reside in the natural heart of man, which fact I must learn through some process that my soul refused to understand" (Boyd 55). In her poem "O Friend, Begin A Loftier Song.", she writes: "O friend, begin a loftier song. / Confusion falls upon your mind; / A sense of evil makes you blind; 'What use,' you say, 'is it to be? / I know not GOD, GOD knows not me!'" (38).[31] The stanza quoted here does not necessarily reflect Stoddard's or her friend's attitude toward God. The poem, however, implies sadness and confusion toward youth and God.

The restlessness of the protagonist and her longing for excitement in her life reminds readers of the protagonist, Laura Calton, in "Me and My Son", a short story by Stoddard. Similarly to Cassandra, Laura also has questions about life:

> What made ordinary people contented, she wondered –those who read no novels, had few new dresses, and never came across attractive men? … The monotonous life which surrounded her might be changed for a city life, for the theater, the opera, and those inevitable engagements she supposed one must have in entering society as a married woman. (202-205)[32]

The restlessness shown by Laura not only resembles Cassandra in *The Morgesons*, but also reminds one of Elizabeth Stoddard in her youth. Stoddard depicts herself as "passionate, chaotic, and strong-willed" in her letter to her friend (Mahoney 6). Stoddard's strong passion mirrors that of the romantics, such as the Brontë sisters. Charlotte Brontë, for example, complains of the lack of passion in Jane Austen's novels.[33] Mahoney notes that similar to European romantic writers, such as the Brontës, for example, Stoddard is also interested in exploring the themes of alienation, individualism and passion in her writings.

The protagonist's sense of entrapment in a restricting and puritanical household is further demonstrated in her experience of leaving Surrey against her wishes and attending a seminary for young ladies in Barmouth. Cassandra finds the new place equally barren and colourless. She compares her grandfather's home at Barmouth to a "casket" (28), form of prison. James H. Matlack thinks that Cassandra's grandfather "embodies the grim aspects of the Puritan spirit" and "[l]ife in his house is one long penance" (292). There is little nourishment for Cassy's mind at Barmouth: "My filaments found no nourishment, creeping between the two; but the fibers of youth are strong, and they do not perish" (28). Cassy for the first time begins to be aware that for all the years her life is confined to home, school, and the church. As a young woman, she is not allowed to wander alone in the streets. Without invitation from friends, Cassy is confined to the garden of the house. Gilbert and Gubar think that the comparison between home and prison is not rare for women writers and their female characters in the nineteenth-century: "[A]lmost all nineteenth-century women were in some sense imprisoned in men's houses" (83). They note that the spatial imagery of enclosure and escape occur frequently in women's

writing. There is a parallel between Cassandra's and Stoddard's lives. In *The Morgesons*, Cassandra repeatedly chafes at the restriction of physical, cultural and emotional space. In her own life, Elizabeth Stoddard rejects the idea that domestic tasks should be her main occupation. She feels restricted in the traditional feminine sphere as well. "Stoddard and Alcott, especially, felt "moody" and ill-tempered, not sweet and cheerful, as girls were supposed to be. They noticed that their sisters possessed sunny dispositions in contrast to their own" (Boyd 40). Cassandra in *The Morgesons* is considered "possessed". The restlessness in both Cassandra and Stoddard is suggestive of their sense of entrapment in a patriarchal society.

In the novel Stoddard makes it clear that to escape from domesticity is not realistic for her women characters in the background of mid nineteenth-century America. Elizabeth Stockton thinks that in the novel Stoddard "explores one family's dependence on women's labor and sense of duty" (423). Stockton also notes that Cassandra's mother, Mary Morgeson, reflects "one aspect of the nineteenth century domestic ideal in her performance of household labor" (424). Although Cassandra finds domestic duties confining, she cannot escape from them. After her mother passes away, Cassandra has to take up her mother's role and deals with domesticity. She promises Aunt Merce that she will "reign and serve" over the household, and "give up" herself (215), even though she feels trapped in Surrey and in this life: "But I was imprisoned in the cage of Life the Keeper would not let me go" (211).

> At last I obtained the asylum of my room, in an irritable frame of mind, convinced that such would be my condition each day. Composure came with putting my drawers and shelves in order. The box with Desmond's

flowers I threw into the fire, without opening it, ribbon and all, for I could not endure the sight of them. (217)

Although Cassandra has decided to sacrifice her self for the family, the thirst for freedom and selfhood cannot be easily quenched, as she tells her sister, Veronica: "Everything is changed. I have tried to be as steady as when mother was here, but I cannot; I whirl with a vague idea of liberty. Did she keep the family conscience? Now that she has gone I feel responsible no more" (218-9). Elizabeth Stockton thinks that Stoddard suggests in *The Morgesons* that "[t]he lure of duty is powerful for women ... even though such self-sacrifice is painful and its rewards uncertain" (426). Even though Cassandra voluntarily agrees to cage herself and overtake the domestic duties for the sake of her family members, she longs for liberty at heart.

The subsequent poverty experienced by the Morgeson family further strengthens the confinement on the part of Cassandra toward her domestic duties. Cassandra's father's business fails; consequently, the family becomes poor. Although Cassandra thinks that her dream of freedom is over and that her life will remain restricted and colourless, she realizes that she needs to be content with it.

> My life was coarse, hard, colorless! I lived in an insignificant country village; I was poor. My theories had failed; my practice was like my moods variable. But I concluded that if *to-day* would go on without bestowing upon me sharp pains, depriving me of sleep, mutilating me with an accident, or sending a disaster to those belonging to me, I would be content. (233)

Here the tone of the narrative voice changes. Cassandra is no longer the willful and rebellious girl of the past. She learns the hardship of life, and the courage and endurance it requires. Rather than the rebellious and careless tone she assumes in the past, here Cassandra sounds humble and down to earth. Even Temperance, the maid who watches Cassandra grow up, finds that Cassy's character and attitude toward life has altered very much, compared with the rebellious and outspoken girl she used to be.

On the themes of pain, frustration and thwarted dreams for women, Stoddard has written several verses. In "THE AUTUMN SHEAF", Stoddard writes: "Though many seasons of the falling leaves / I watched my failing hopes, and watched their fall; / In memory they are gathered now like sheaves, / So withered that a touch would scatter all" (20).[34] In the above poem the persona mourns for withered hopes and dreams. In *The Morgesons* the protagonist is also disappointed with her life: "I remain this year the same. No change, no growth or development! The fulfillment of duty avails me nothing; and self-discipline has passed the necessary point" (243). Stacy Alaimo thinks that "duty and discipline have hampered her [Cassandra's] growth, not encouraged it" (34). The inner thoughts of the protagonist reveal her frustration with her present life filled with domestic duties.

Lynn Mahoney notes that Stoddard does not hide her objection to the conventional ideal of womanhood. Questioning the basic values of Victorian womanhood such as its emphasis on virtue and duty: "Stoddard asked her readers: 'Is virtue agreeable?—is duty handsome?' she had studied this image of womanhood and found it 'ugly'" (Mahoney 18). Stoddard has been very outspoken and forward in her argument. From the protagonist's early repulsion to the barren domestic world, to her later assuming

the colourless domestic obligations against her own wish, Elizabeth Stoddard shows the readers the possible entrapment women of middle class America can be subjected to in the mid nineteenth-century.

Private Sphere (the Female Body) and Entrapment

In this section on the private sphere, I will mainly look at the female body and entrapment. In *The Morgesons* Stoddard's view of the female body, and in particular, her views on passion and hunger, will be examined in relation to the theme of female entrapment. Before examining the themes of passion and hunger, it is necessary to reiterate the main idea behind the cult of true womanhood, the ideal of Victorian femininity, and its emphasis on the female body. The cult of true womanhood in the nineteenth-century was built on the notions of four principle virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. The Victorian notion of femininity in the nineteenth-century decrees that woman should be "chaste, delicate, and loving" (Smith-Rosenberg 65). The ideal Victorian womanhood is considered passionless and "asexual" (Walters 65). Moreover, the Victorian culture encourages women to become delicate and fragile. Gubar and Gilbert mentions: "nineteenth-century culture seems to have actually admonished women to *be* ill" (54). Regarding the relationship between the female body and entrapment, feminist critics in the twentieth-century have offered different opinions. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir notes the ambivalence with which a woman looks at her body. She thinks that the body is a burden for a woman: "worn away in service to the species, bleeding each month" (630). Susan Bordo, on the other hand, notes the positive

aspects of the female body. She thinks that the experience of a woman's control over her own body can be "liberating" (2365), and can enable her to achieve a sense of selfhood. In other words, the female body can be viewed in both positive and negative terms, i.e. the female body can be both liberating and confining.

Passion and Entrapment

In *The Morgesons* the author seems to express the view that passion, if not properly dealt with, can lead to entrapment for her women characters. The protagonist experiences illicit passion[35] for her married cousin, Charles Morgeson, at Rosville. "His [Charles's] face was serene, dark, and delicate, but to look at it made me shiver" (69). Charles is also attracted by Cassandra's brave and defiant character. Cassandra is initially unclear about her longing and desire, but at the same time her passion is awakened: "He [Charles] raised his strange, intense eyes to mine; a blinding, intelligent light flowed from them which I could not defy nor resist, a light which filled my veins with a torrent of fire" (86). Stoddard associates the quality of passion with "fire". Cassandra since then has become passionate about Charles. The word "fire" not only suggests the intensity of emotions, but also implies the disastrous consequence Cassandra is going to experience later.

There is not much in common between Cassy and Charles. Cassy thinks that Charles or Alice never read anything other than the newspaper. Therefore, the attraction between Cassy and Charles is hardly intellectual. Ben Somers, Cassy's friend, tells Cassy that he thinks Charles is a "savage": "living by his instincts, with one element of

civilization—he loves Beauty—beauty like yours" (102). The brutality of Charles toward his employees and horses is contrasted with his love for fragile flowers. Cassy's friend, Helen, observes: "The same blood rages in both of you" (110). Sybil Weir thinks that "Stoddard compared Cassandra to a spirited untrained horse to express her rebellion against her repressive society" (432). Cassandra and Charles are both driven by their instincts. Passion is the common trait between them.

The dialogue between Cassandra and Charles on the importance of love exposes the maddening passion awakened on both sides, and implies the future entrapment passion places on the protagonist.

> I [Cassandra] took off the ring, and wore my hair the style that I like angers and saddens Charles. One day, he grabs me and asks me "Why do I stay in Rosville?" I asked him to leave me alone.
>
> "Cassandra," he said, with a menacing voice, "how dare you defy me? How dare you tempt me?"
>
> I put my hand on his arm. "Charles, is love a matter of temperament?"
>
> "Are you mad? It is life—it is heaven- it is hell."
>
> "There is something in this soft, beautiful, odorous night that makes one mad. Still I shall not say to you what you once said to me."
>
> "Ah! you do not forget those words –*'I love you.'*" (118)

In the relationship between Charles and Cassandra, the latter still retains her rebellious character. In the above dialogue, when Charles compares love to "life", "heaven" and "hell", one experiences the intensity of passion in both characters. Charles's words also remind readers of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. When talking about his love for

Catherine Earnshaw, he says: "Two words would comprehend my future- *death* and *hell*; existence, after losing her, would be hell" (158). It is unclear whether Stoddard borrows this comparison from Emily Brontë, but Stoddard certainly feels the same need as Brontë to compare the power of passion to life and hell.

Passion, or intensive emotion of longing and love, is a theme Stoddard highly emphasizes in her writing. Stoddard disagrees with the ideal of nineteenth-century femininity that depicts woman as passionless. Immediately following the dialogue between Cassandra and Charles, Stoddard quotes lines from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* through the mouth of Ben Somers (a male character from the novel):

> In such a night,
> Stood Dido with a willow in her hand,
> Upon the wild sea banks, and waved her love
> To come again to Carthage. (119)

Dido is an example of woman who is entrapped by her passion (or unrequited love) for her lover Aeneas. She later commits suicide due to her pain of losing her lover. Stoddard uses this ancient Roman story to foreshadow the later fate of Cassandra, who likewise suffers from her passion for Charles. To Stoddard, pain and passion are interrelated. In her poem "Now That The Pain Is Gone, I Too Can Smile", she writes: "My hand was on your shoulder: I grew wild: / The blood seethed furiously through my heart! ...I longed to kiss you, and I longed to die!" (39). Unlike some female poets who write their poems from a woman's perspective, interestingly, Stoddard wrote quite a few poems from the male perspective. This poem is written from a man's point of view. The passion it describes can be related to the feeling of Charles Morgeson.

Recognizing that Stoddard's discourse on passion plays an important part in her works throughout her career, Putzi notes: "She [Stoddard] recognized and articulated the difference in this regard between her and other women, telling a friend, 'I have stronger passionate powers than most women, therefore I run riot in these matters' —presumably both in life and writing ... Notably it is men ... who are allowed to express passion freely, regardless of its effect on others; women ... must pay dearly for the indulgence of passions" (xxvi). Here Putzi is commenting on *Two Men*, another novel by Stoddard. However, in *The Morgesons*, both Cassandra and Charles paid a dear price for their passion. In a cart-accident, Charles is killed and Cassandra is seriously wounded. She has a fracture and her face is cut, leaving permanent scars.

Stoddard makes it clear that her protagonist does not feel remorse or repentance for her illicit passion. Cassandra realizes and acknowledges her passion for Charles after the latter is dead. She questions Alice's feeling toward Charles, and exposes her own emotion.

> I ask Alice: "Alice, did you love him?"
>
> "My husband!"
>
> Then Alice asks me: "Did *you* love him?"
>
> "Alice!" I whispered, "you may or you may not forgive me, but I was strangely bound to him. And I must tell you that I hunger now for the kiss he never gave me." (122-23)

Without shame or embarrassment, Cassandra expresses her passion and longing for the deceased. Her frank and open confession of her illicit passion shocked the conservative Victorian critics and readers, such as John Eliot Bowen, editor of *The Independent* in

1889. Some of them were unhappy with Stoddard's lack of moral judgment in this scene. Stoddard, however, disagrees with their opinions.

> She [Stoddard] defended Cassandra's transgressions with Charles, particularly her longing for his kiss after his death. "To me this seems more like genuine human nature, than it seems to you, 'cold and outre.'" Stoddard dismissed Bowen's[36] criticism as mere "opinion" and continued to call attention to the turbulent dimensions of female subjectivity, asserting women's sexuality and their rights to its expression. (Mahoney 51)

Stoddard's courage to depict female sexuality certainly appears ahead of her own time. Her stance of truthfulness to female subjectivity[37] has set a daring example for future women writers to follow. Stoddard continues to write fictions "challenging representations of bourgeois women as passionless and self-sacrificing" (Mahoney xvi) amid the criticism from friends and reviewers.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf notes that women writers have to face "the perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue – write this, think that" (112). Woolf thinks that such an admonishing voice impedes women artists' creativity, and they should therefore turn a deaf ear to it. In the case of Elizabeth Stoddard, she is determined not to judge and preach in her novels. Putzi explains why Stoddard does not idealize purity or femininity in her women characters as follows: "She [Stoddard] rejected the notion that writers owed their readers 'an eternal preachment' and attempted instead to depict heroines who reflected the realities of women's lives in the mid-nineteenth century" (xxvii). Commenting on *The Morgesons*, Chad Luck thinks that the novel can be

understood as "a sly subversion of the conventional models of feminine selfhood promoted by mid-nineteenth-century domestic ideology":

> Critics have called attention to the ways in which Stoddard's protagonist, the young Cassandra Morgeson, candidly acknowledges her own sexual desires and bodily appetites. This sort of self-conscious sensual embodiment is rightfully seen as a departure from more traditional domestic fiction which often seeks to downplay female sexual desire and to constrain female interests within the bounds of a heterosexual private sphere. (Luck 37)

Luck here points out an important difference between *The Morgesons* and other domestic novels published in mid nineteenth century America. Stoddard personally disapproves of the didactic tone adopted by popular women novels of her time, such as *Juno Clifford* (1856). She rejects the conventionally ideal womanhood of passionlessness.[38] In one of her reviews on one popular lady novel, *Victoria: or The World Overcome* (1856), she comments: "Miss Chesebro's dogmatic and pious ideal of a woman assails me in reading her book. I object to the position she takes in regard to the reader –that of a teacher. The morality is not agreeable, and quite impossible."[39] Stoddard's criticism of popular women's novels is in tune with her own attitude on writing.

Although Stoddard defends Cassandra's transgression with Charles, she does subject her protagonist to suffering and pain after her illicit passion. Although Cassandra is recovered physically, "[b]ut I felt cold at heart, doubtful of myself, drifting to nothingness in thought and purpose. None saw my doubts or felt my coldness" (126). Cassandra tells Ben that she has "no mind" (127). To be numb with one's emotion is also

a strategy to cope with loss and grief. Putzi thinks that "Stoddard's own female characters feel passion and hunger, anger and frustration, and often consider the duty that a woman owes to herself in addition to the one she owes to her family. Stoddard refused to sentimentalize her female characters, preferring her readers to be unsettled by their unattractive humanity" (xxvii). Stoddard's refusal to engage in didacticism and her adherence to presenting passion and truth are shared by some later women writers, such as Kate Chopin.

The plight of the protagonist suggests that in a patriarchal society a woman is most likely to suffer if she does not follow the conventional moral code and is determined to look for a self undefined by tradition.[40] In the novel Cassandra's mother remarks: "Should women curse themselves, then, for giving birth to daughters?" (133). Her mother's reply reflects her sadness at Cassy's suffering. Cassandra's experience also reminds one of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* who shares a similar transgression.[41] Both Hester and Cassandra are involved in an adulterous relationship.[42] Both have loved, suffered and paid a dear price for their passion. One distinct difference between Cassandra and Hester is that the former does not have a physical relationship with her lover, whereas the later does, and gives birth to a child named Pearl. Because of the more serious nature of Hester's offence, she is openly punished, humiliated, and ostracized. Everyday Hester has to wear a red capital letter A on her bosom, which symbolizes the adultery she has committed. Cassandra, on the other hand, is left with a permanent scar on her face, which reminds her of the incident each time she looks into the mirror. The scarlet letter and the scar not only remind the bearers of the past, but are also shown openly to others for speculation. Despite the suffering, neither Hester nor Cassandra

repents for their deeds.[43] For example, Hester refuses to tell the crowd the father's name at the scaffold.

> "Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven's mercy!" cried the Reverend Mr. Wilson, more harshly than before ... "Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast."
>
> "Never!" replied Hester Prynne, looking, not at Mrs. Wilson, but into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman. "It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!" (Hawthorne 67)

Hester shows unusual determination at the scene on the scaffold. Cassandra, on the other hand, feels neither remorse nor regret over her passion for Charles. Realizing that Alice may not forgive her, she nevertheless candidly tells Alice that she "hunger[s] now for the kiss he [Charles] never gave me" (123). The scarlet letter and the scar separate both heroines from the rest of the people, and draw them to inward contemplation. In other words, the scarlet letter and the scar, symbolizing past experiences, help to shape the identities of the two protagonists. The unconventionality and stubbornness demonstrated by both heroines opens up unique aspects of womanhood. Mahoney thinks "Stoddard further undermined the conventionally moralistic potential of this episode by making it clear that Cassandra, rather than repenting her illicit love, grows and matures as a result of it" (42). In other words, although once blinded and confined by her passion, the protagonist does not have to remain condemned all her life, which marks a difference between *The Morgesons* and conventional plots of fallen women who are usually not

given a second chance. In the novel, Cassandra eventually recovers from her past pains, and moves on to embrace her growth.

Hunger and Entrapment

Appetite and body become an important theme for Stoddard in her novel. Hunger, which is depicted in the novel, both confines and liberates the woman character. For example, when Cassandra enters into adolescence, Stoddard describes the physical changes of her body: "What an appetite I had, too!" (47). Cassandra's voracious appetite and womanly-shaped body are contrasted with her sister's meagre frame and refusal of food. In the beginning of the novel, Veronica (Verry), as a child, is described as being "never hungry" and "impish": "She was a silent child, and liked to be alone" (13). The impish side of Veronica and the fits she throws from time to time reminds one of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*. Different from the heroines in Jane Austen's novels, such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, in which strong and affectionate bonds exist between sisters, the sisters in *The Morgesons* are aloof from each other. It is told from Cassandra's perspective how she and Verry "grew up ignorant of each other's character" (13). As the whole novel is told from Cassandra's perspective, readers may not get a fully objective portrayal of Veronica. Verry may indeed have paid much more attention to Cassy than the latter thinks; however, on the whole Verry and Cassy have orbited in independent circles since their early childhood.

It is clear in the beginning of the novel that Veronica suffers from what modern medical terminology would label, anorexia.[44] She barely eats when growing up.

Temperance, the house servant, has to coax her into eating from time to time. "Before mother left her room Veronica was taken ill, and was not convalescent till spring. Delicacy of constitution the doctor called her disorder. She had no strength, no appetite, and looked more elfish than ever" (26). There are several places in the novel where Veronica's eating problem is depicted. For example, when Cassy comes back from the seminary in Barmouth, Verry declares to the family that she will "live entirely on toast" (51). The choice of whether to eat or not becomes Veronica's way of asserting herself in the family. She determines what she will become by exercising her free will. In other words, Verry does not have to follow the ideology of domesticity. It needs to be stressed, however, that Verry's frail body is different from the ideal of Victorian femininity. The ideal of Victorian femininity encourages women to be thin or even ill so as to appear attractive to the opposite sex. In the case of Veronica, however, her meagre frame and illness jus 'fy her exercising of her own will in life. Due to her eating disorder, Veronica frequently falls sick. She therefore adopts the status of an eternal invalid. Veronica's choice is not so rare. In nineteenth-century America, it is not unusual for some women to become eternal invalids at home. One of the famous examples is Alice James, sister of Henry James, who became an eternal invalid due to the repression of her ambition to move outside domesticity. "Alice's illness served several purposes of this kind. It provided her with an escape route - a way out of having to choose between a safe [and] boring life of devotion to others and a dangerous assertion of intellectual competence" (Strouse 121-122). Claiming the status of eternal invalid helps women to cope with their lives, especially in the scenarios of failed hopes and thwarted ambitions.

Anorexia and ensuing illness both confine and liberate Veronica. Due to her illness, Veronica has to remain in bed at home most of the time; however, at the same time, she also gains strength and power from her illness. Her sister observes: "Verry was educated by sickness; her mind fed and grew on pain, and at last mastered it" (59). Before Cassandra leaves for Rosville, she asks Verry not to fall sick again. Verry replies: "I need all the illnesses that come." (67). Verry identifies with her illness. Illness becomes her constant "friend". It occupies her time and sustains her in her life. To put it another way, illness is part and parcel of her existence. Verry's condition matches what Susan Bordo explains in her book:

> The young woman discovers what it feels like to crave and want and need and yet, through the exercise of her own will, to triumph over that need. In the process, a new realm of meanings is discovered, a range of values and possibilities that Western culture has traditionally coded as "male" and rarely made available to women: an ethic and aesthetic of self-mastery and self-transcendence, expertise, and power over others through the example of superior will and control. The experience is intoxicating, habit-forming. (2372)

Bordo explains the fascination anorexia holds for its victims and why it is difficult to break away from it. By feeding on anorexia and subsequent illness, Veronica extends her influence on other family members and exercises greater freedom with her will, as the whole family allows her to have her own way since she so easily falls sick. Anorexia, therefore, also gives her power to determine her own life.[45]

Furthermore, in the novel anorexia is also associated with enlightenment for the character. Verry gains a new understanding of herself each time she recovers from her illness.

> The darkness in her nature broke; by slow degrees she gained health, though never much strength. Upon each recovery a change was visible; a spiritual dawn had risen in her soul; moral activity blending with her ideality made her life beautiful, even in the humblest sense. Veronica! you were endowed with genius; but while its rays penetrated you, we did not see them. (59)

This is Cassandra's later reflection on Veronica's illness. Illness, in this case, has become a source of self understanding and education for Veronica. Contrary to the strong and womanly body Cassandra has, Veronica retains a young girl's fragile body frame by starving herself. She intentionally hampers her own growth and therefore remains a child. Helen, Cassandra's schoolmate, thinks Verry "stopped in the process of maturity long ago. It is her genius which takes her on. You [Cassandra] advance by experience" (150). Helen may indeed be correct in her observation of the sisters.

Because of the freedom, enlightenment, and power Verry gets from her illness, she never recovers from her eating disorder. Anorexia continues throughout her process of growing up. There is only one time when Verry's condition improves. It is after Ben Somers proposes to her: "The light revealed a new expression in Verry's face -an unsettled, dispossessed look; her brows were knitted, yet she smiled over and over again, while she seemed hardly aware that she was eating like an ordinary mortal" (147). However, the improvement does not last long, and later Verry falls sick again, which

suggests Ben's naivety of believing marriage can fundamentally alter a person, including himself. Anorexia is so ingrained in Veronica's existence that it is not possible to get rid of it.

Critics have examined the theme of self-imposed starvation in Stoddard's works. Smith and Weinauer think that "the correlation in Stoddard's work between female health and textual circulation, between (sickly) 'deviant' women and silenced texts, suggests that, for Stoddard, women's bodies and women's writing can never be separated ... Stoddard's virtual obsession with appetite –the ingestion and consumption of food, starvation and hunger– signals her ongoing concerns with female agency, power, and voice" (12). Helene Cixous famously asserts in *The Laugh of Medusa* (1975) to women: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (2043). Cixous thinks that history teaches woman to turn away from her body and consider it with shame. She therefore argues that women need to write through their bodies to break the silence. Smith and Weinauer's express a similar view as Cixous: "[T]he acceptance or refusal of food serves as a way to represent the negotiation of a female process of self-growth ...the works of both authors[40] represent a complicated and contrasting effort by women to manipulate both cultural limitations and their own bodies to achieve a self ultimately both appetitive and volitional" (13). In the case of Veronica, anorexia, which should be a confining illness, however, is crucially linked to the development and empowerment of self. Anorexia is a constant companion that she leans on when growing up. It gives her power to control her own body, lifestyle and destiny; as well as to exert influence over those close to her. In a sickly and twisted way, the power over one's appetite confines one to a life-long illness,

and liberates and empowers a woman to assert her autonomy and will against a patriarchal society at the same time.

III. Solutions to End Female Entrapment

This section aims at answering the third question: what solutions have been offered in the novel to free women characters from their entrapment? In *The Morgesons*, Stoddard offers two possible solutions for her women characters to resolve their difficult situations. The solutions are solitude and marriage.[47] In the novel Stoddard quite objectively describes both the positive and negative aspects of solitude and marriage for her women characters, and she seems to maintain the view that the two options can either liberate women from their present entrapment or plunge them deeper into their confinement.

Stoddard expresses a complex attitude toward solitude. On the one hand, solitude can liberate a woman from her domestic world temporarily and help her to reflect upon life. On the other hand, solitude can also cause one to sever vital connections with the outside world and becomes entrapped voluntarily. In *The Morgesons* Cassandra likes to walk alone by the shore. Her feelings toward the sea are depicted quite often in the novel: "A habit grew upon me of consulting the sea as soon as I rose in the morning. Its aspect decided how my day would be spent" (142). Stoddard was heavily influenced by transcendentalism. She had read works by Emerson and Thoreau, and even tried to imitate Thoreau's example by living alone for a short period of time. "Her [Stoddard's]

pessimistic view of the cruel universe led her to look to the sea as a symbol of the alternating and arbitrary forces of good and evil" (Boyd 55). In Stoddard's short story "Out of the Deeps", she writes: "We are such complicated creatures ... and circumstances so arrange our consciences that all reasoning is baffled" (140). This statement summarizes Stoddard's attitude toward her creation of characters. She acknowledges the complexity of life and is determined to portray the wide spectrum of emotions human beings are apt to experience. Smith and Weinauer point out that "virtually every character in *The Morgesons*, whether major or minor, maintains a troubled relation to desire" (12). Stoddard believes that it is essential to depict the inner turbulence, confusion and desires felt by her characters. The self-discovery of hidden emotions in solitude contributes to the character's growth, and helps her to gain a clearer perspective of her selfhood.

Cassandra's maturity is born out of her suffering in solitude. Like Veronica, Cassandra starts to withdraw from people and prefer solitude. "It already seemed to me that I was like the room. Unlike Veronica, I had nothing odd, nothing suggestive" (143). By comparing her life to a blank room, Cassandra identifies her life with her place.

> Cassandra's return home is colored by internal, psychological changes, unlike her departure from Barmouth. Things seem different to Cass not because they are but because 'the relation in which *I* stood to them' was altered. Cass looks for stability by taking 'possession' of her 'own' room. She pursues self-development in her own space and avoids the feminized middle-class chambers of her mother. (Mahoney 43)

Mahoney here is referring to Woolf's idea of a room of one's own. However, it needs to be pointed out that in the latter part of the novel, Cassandra in a sense is confined at

home. Since her mother passes away, she has to assume the duty of taking care of the entire household instead of travelling around as she does in the past. Due to the restriction of space, Cassandra finds that her youth grows dim, and she becomes silent. Alice Morgeson comes to Surry and asks Cassandra:

> "What has become of that candor of which you were so proud?"
>
> "I am more candid than ever," I answered, "for I am silent." (153)

Silence is an attitude toward life. Disappointed and numbed by life, Cassandra thinks that silence describes her present state most accurately. A female character's silence, in this case Cassandra's for example, can be linked to the silence of women writers. Gilbert and Gubar write about woman's silence in *The Madwoman in the Attic*: "Rejecting the poisoned apples her culture offers her, the woman writer often becomes in some sense anorexic, resolutely closing her mouth on silence" (58). By talking metaphorically about the silence resulting from anorexia, Gilbert and Gubar draw readers' attention to the lack of literary space for women writers. Stoddard's silence in her later life exemplifies the restrictions mentioned by Gilbert and Gubar. Under the restricted circumstances, silence becomes a choice of resistance against patriarchy and confinement for both women writers and their female characters.

Solitude becomes conducive to self-growth for the protagonist in that she uses solitude for reflection and growth after her family members all move out of the house. "The day they [Verry and Ben] moved was a happy one for me. I was at last left alone in my own house, and I regained an absolute self-possession, and a sense of occupation I had long been a stranger to. My ownership oppressed me, almost, there was so much liberty to realize" (248). Solitude is one of the important themes for women characters in

the novel, and is associated with the development of self. Putzi thinks: "Like many romantic writers, Stoddard focused on the development of the individual soul; marked by family and societal relationships, her characters remain solitary, romantic figures, responsible only to themselves for their own intellectual and emotional self-fulfillment" (xxv). Putzi reiterates the connection between the development of the individual soul and the necessity of solitude. De Beauvoir[48] looks at solitude for the growth of woman in a positive light:

> Enslaved as she is to her husband, her children, her home, it is ecstasy to find herself alone, sovereign on the hillsides; she is no longer mother, wife, housekeeper, but a human being; she contemplates the passive world, and she remembers that she is wholly a conscious being, an irreducible free individual. From the depths of her solitude, her isolation, woman gains her sense of the personal bearing of her life ... she has the leisure and the inclination to abandon herself to her emotions, to study her sensation and unravel their meaning. (631-637)

In the novel Cassandra gains the power of perception into her self and strength for her life from solitude. She is in some way nurtured by solitude, though the process is not as romantic or idyllic as de Beauvoir has depicted, as Cassandra suffers and becomes silent due to her disappointments in life.

In the novel solitude is portrayed as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it helps Cassandra to reflect and to grow, yet on the other hand, it inhibits Verry's maturity. Compared with Cassandra who feels bored at home in Surrey and looks into the outer world to search for herself ,Veronica, on the other hand, never takes a strong interest

outside her home in Surrey. She willingly confines herself to her own room to avoid the interference on her own life from the outside forces. For example, she occasionally goes on trips to another city, but she only stays there for a short period of time. She purchases goods in big cities, and brings them home to decorate her bedroom. In essence, her bedroom and her home in Surrey remain the centre of her universe throughout the entire novel.

Veronica's preference for solitude in her bedroom is marked early in the novel. When Cassandra obeys her mother's will and goes to a seminary in Barmouth, Veronica clearly informs her family that she will not follow her sister's path. She asserts that she will know enough without going to school. In fact given her poor health and peculiar character, her parents are unlikely to press her to go either. Veronica therefore grows up without friends of her own age, and seems just fine in her isolated situation. The piano, in addition, becomes her company: "her fingers interpreting her feelings, touching the keys of the piano as if they were the chords of her thoughts" (56). Private space at home becomes part of Veronica's identity.

Veronica not only shuns the possible experience of meeting strangers in the outer world, she withdraws from family members as well. For instance, she refuses to attend her grandfather's funeral. The reason she gives is: "As she had been allowed to stay away from Grand'ther Warren living, why should she be forced to go to him when dead?" (57). Another example is that Veronica clings to isolation whenever she falls sick. "The weeks that she was confined to her room, preyed upon by some inscrutable disease, were weeks of darkness and solitude … she preferred being alone most of the time. Thus she acquired the fortitude of an Indian; pain could extort no groan from her" (59). Readers are told that

"Veronica's habits of isolation clung to her; she would never leave home" (60). By immersing herself in books, the piano and the garden, Veronica imagines a world for herself where no one else enters or could share with her: "Home, father said, was her sphere" (60). Verry differs from the madwoman in the attic. The latter desperately wishes to get out; Verry, however, willingly shuts herself in. She lives like a hermit by confining herself in her room—her own space.

The solitude at the bedroom becomes such an important part of Veronica's identity that she cannot give it up in spite of major changes in her life. Although she accepts Ben's proposal, she does not let Ben enter her inner world, and continues to "shut herself up in her room" (160). When mother passes away, she is appalled and asks Cassandra incessant questions like a frightened child. During the week of her mother's funeral, Veronica requests to be kept away from everyone: "Veronica alone would see no one; her room was the only one not invaded" (209). Veronica draws peace, security and freedom from her isolation in her own room. However, it is exactly the isolation in her room that inhibits her growth socially.

Veronica remains essentially childlike. She refuses to grow and mature, and instead wishes to continue her life as a young girl without changes.

> Veronica was the same as before; her room was pleasant with color and perfume, the same delicate pains with her dress each day was taken. She looked as fair as a lily, as serene as the lake on which it floats, except when Fanny tried her. With me she never lost temper. But I saw little of her; she was as fixed in her individual pursuits as ever. (228-29)

Although engaged to Ben at the time, Verry lives a separate life from Ben. Ben has sailed for Switzerland and plans to stay there for a short period of time; Verry, however, is not least bothered by it. Ben cannot bring out the maturity in Verry through their relationship. In essence Veronica resembles a delicate plant that cannot survive if removed from the original environment. To put it another way, the solitude Verry so eagerly seeks both saves her from the intrusion of the outside world, and condemns her to a life of self-imposed imprisonment at home and immaturity in her life.

Concerning the second option, marriage, Stoddard also expresses a quite complex view toward the issue in her novel. While acknowledging the possible bliss and happiness a woman can reap from her marriage, she also notes that marriage alone cannot work to solve all the problems for her women characters. Most importantly, Stoddard places her emphasis on the values held by people toward marriage rather than the institution of marriage. To put it another way, it is not just the form of marriage, but the person in marriage who does not judge the other person according to the Victorian ideal of femininity and domesticity, and is also willing to grow and mature.

In the novel Cassandra experiences passion for the second time for Desmond Somers, Ben's brother, in Belem. Desmond understands Cassandra's past and he is not repelled by the scars on Cassandra's face. Desmond tells Cassandra: "It was in battle … And women like you, pure, with no vice of blood, sometimes are tempted, struggle, and suffer" (183). Desmond, however, has his own wounded history of passion. It is partly due to his past that he can relate to Cassandra, and does not judge her as a "fallen

woman" by the standards of Victorian femininity or the cult of true womanhood. Desmond wears a woman's ruby ring on his watch-ribbon.

> I [Cassandra] pointed to the ring. Dropping his [Desmond's] eyes, he said: "I loved her shamefully, and she loved me shamefully. When shall I take it off—cursed sign?" And he snapped it with his thumb and finger.
>
> I grew rigid with virtue.
>
> "You may not conjure up any tragic ideas on the subject. She is no outcast. She is here to-night; if there was ruin, it was mutual." (199)

Different from conventional tales of the fallen women who are often ostracized from their communities, the woman in Desmond's past does not suffer from such a tragic fate. Mahoney thinks that Desmond's past and his attitude toward Cassandra reflects that he "simultaneously rejects images of fallen womanhood and embraces female sexuality" (46). In other words, Desmond does not adhere to the cult of true womanhood to judge the other gender harshly. The understanding and sympathy Desmond shows to Cassandra suggests that he does not want to either be victimized or to victimize others. Cassandra's readiness for marriage this time is demonstrated through her perception of her love for Desmond. She recognizes that different from her passion for Charles last time, this time her love for Desmond is mature. Although Desmond in some way resembles Charles in temperament and influence, Cassandra realizes that she and Desmond can comprehend each other without "collision": "I love him, as a mature woman may love" (226).

Stoddard seem to express the view that the adherence to the ideal of femininity cannot lead to a successful and equal relationship between the two genders. It should be

noted that another male character, Ben Somers, also loves Cassandra, but due to his lack of courage, he chooses Veronica instead. He confesses to Cassandra:

> You have been my delight and misery ever since I knew you. I saw you first, so impetuous, yet self-contained! Incapable of insincerity, devoid of affection and courageously naturally beautiful. Then, to my amazement, I saw that, unlike most women, you understood your instincts; that you dared to define them, and were impious enough to follow them. You debased my ideal, you confused me, also, for I could never affirm that you were wrong; forcing me to consult abstractions, they gave a verdict in your favor, which almost unsexed you in my estimation. I must own that the man who is willing to marry you has more courage than I have. Is it strange that when I found your counterpart, Veronica, that I yielded? Her delicate, pure, ignorant soul suggests to me eternal repose. (226)

Note the adjectives Ben uses to describe Cassandra and Veronica. Cassandra is considered opposite to the feminine ideal, for she is "courageous", "impious" and "almost unsexed". On the other hand, Veronica is "delicate", "pure" and "ignorant", therefore, she can offer "eternal repose" to Ben. Stoddard seems to suggest that the reason Ben is not suited for Cassandra lies in his patriarchal attitude. Ben still expects a woman to adhere to the example of the feminine and domestic ideal in the nineteenth-century, which explains his later failed marriage with Veronica.[49]

Cassandra's recovery from the past and growth in the present is symbolized by her breaking off the self-imposed silence in the end. She finally decides to break her silence and gives her life a new direction. She musters the courage to tell Desmond the

name of her former lover, Charles Morgeson. Her act suggests her healing from the past wound and her determination to share her past with her true love. She also questions herself: "had I not endured a 'mute case' long enough?" (243). She is determined to break away from the fetters of the past. Mahoney suggests that Stoddard "created rebellious heroines who were not anomalies, but models of female development, and she forcefully condemned women who chose submission over self-assertion. She had little patience with weak or foolish women whom she believed allowed themselves to be victimized or even represented as victims" (55). In other words, Cassandra assertively acknowledges her yearning for growth and self-development toward the end of the novel.

Stoddard gives Cassandra and Desmond two years for their separate and individual growth. Desmond returns home from Spain after two years, and looks old: "He was so spare, and brown, and his hair was quite gray! Even his mustache looked silvery" (250). The description of Desmond indicates the suffering and pain he goes through to quit his addiction to drinking. Sybil Weir thinks that Cassandra "can do nothing but wait, hoping Desmond will come to her, hoping Desmond will conquer his alcoholism. She has learned that she must stand alone, establishing values by the test of her own experience without the support of the existing social institutions" (435-36). In other words, Stoddard designs the two years of separation as a period for the protagonist to grow and become able to stand on her own feet. At the end of the novel, Cassandra and Desmond become a couple. Cassandra regains her former courage to express her passion for Desmond, and this time she will no longer suffer from ill-fated consequence.

Critics have held different views regarding the ending of the novel. Sandra Zagarell thinks that Cassandra in the end has attained a love "at once equal and

complete" (xix). Smith and Weinauer think that in the difficult negotiation between romance and autonomy, Cassandra has compromised her independence in marriage while developing "a self-possession through that very compromise which alters the terms of conventional heterosexual relations" (145). Stacy Alaimo, on the other hand, views the ending as Cassandra's "descent into ladyhood" (29): "Though Cassandra's inheritance of the house should empower her, the close identification between Cass[andra] and her house suggests she has internalized her external entrapment within the domestic realm" (35). Likewise, Elizabeth Stockton thinks that "[t]he conclusions of Stoddard's novels understandably disappoint modern readers. Because she provides powerful critiques of domesticity and of marriage law, her heroines' marriages can seem like a capitulation to the prevailing culture ... With her ending, Stoddard does not seem to be envisioning a practical solution for women's lack of self-possession" (428, 438). In other words, Cassandra has not truly broken free from the entrapment of domesticity. Despite different opinions regarding the ending of *The Morgesons*, the union between Cassandra and Desmond marks a big step toward equality between the two genders in marriage.

Moreover, there is a comparison of the two marriages toward the end of her novel. Although the union between Cassandra and Desmond can be considered as successful, Stoddard depicts Veronica's union with Ben as a failure, which reflects her view that marriage is not always the proper dose to liberate woman from her entrapment in various scenarios. Veronica's hesitancy toward marriage is described as follows: "She thought it strange that people should marry, and could not decide whether it was the sublimest or the most inglorious act of one's life" (236). Also, Verry decides to wear a black silk dress

for her wedding. Veronica's hesitancy comes from the uncertainty she feels toward the changes of her life.

> Veronica embarks on married life with much greater ambivalence and far less faith in the future. As Verry prepares for Ben's arrival, Cassandra "observed that she put in order all her possessions, as if she were going to undertake a long and uncertain voyage." Verry meticulously arranges her room, putting all her personal items away to make way for Ben, who is to move in with the Morgesons. Veronica's reluctance to give up her room reflects her greater misgivings about relinquishing her identity. (Mahoney 47)

Mahoney here stresses Veronica's ambivalence and uncertainty toward the upcoming marriage. Verry appears reluctant to give up her autonomy.[50] On the other hand, Ben Somers is not certain about his choice of wife either. He asks Cassy: "Will she never understand me?" (160). Cassy's answer is: "Veronica probably will not understand you, but you must manage for yourself" (160). The uncertainty on both the bride's and groom's parts are representative of ill forebodings for their union.

Partly due to Veronica's self-imposed confinement, her refusal to enter into adulthood and to connect to others, and partly due to Ben's adherence to the ideology of domesticity and the ideal of femininity, in the end, Veronica and Ben fail to understand and save each other in their marriage. Veronica retains her past way of an isolated life even after her marriage, whereas Ben falls back into his addiction to alcohol. The couple give birth to a stunted child that symbolizes the destined failure in their union.

> Veronica is lying on the floor watching her year-old baby. It smiles continually, but never cries, never moves, except when it is moved. Her face, thin and melancholy, is still calm and lovely. But her eyes go no more in quest of something beyond. A wall of darkness lies before her, which she will not penetrate. Aunt Merce sits near me with her knitting. When I look at her I think how long it is since mother went, and wonder whether death is not a welcome idea to those who have died. Aunt Merce looks at Verry and the child with a sorrowful countenance, exchanges a glance with me, shakes her head. If Verry speaks to her, she answers cheerfully, and tries to conceal the grief which she feels when she sees the mother and child together. (252)

The child is underdeveloped and undernourished. It is emotionally crippled at birth. Veronica's eating disorder and Ben's drinking addiction could be the causes. In the novel Veronica determines her own life course, but her choice is not without problems. Sybil Weir thinks that "[b]ecause of her refusal to immerse herself in life, Veronica dies spiritually at the novel's end" (430). With the tragic ending, Stoddard suggests that the path of avoiding maturity and clinging to isolation does not necessarily liberate a woman or offer her a feasible solution to achieve her independence. Marriage cannot cure a woman of her rejection of growth and maturity.

Readers may find Veronica's character morbid, and indeed some critics and even friends from Stoddard's literary circle at the time found her novel disturbing. Mahoney explains: "Stoddard clearly preferred a literature of strong emotions and passion, and she admired works that explored the 'extremes of the human heart, its morbid passions and

sufferings'" (21). Stoddard stresses that she wants to write about the truth, therefore, the portrayal of Veronica shows the author's determination of presenting characters as originally and truthfully as she can.

In conclusion, the experiences of women characters in *The Morgesons* and Elizabeth Stoddard's personal quest on the journey for artist-hood inform readers of women's struggles against the entrapment imposed by a patriarchal society through such notions as the feminine ideal and the emphasis on domesticity for women in mid-nineteenth century America. Although the society remained largely patriarchal, women of that era made huge efforts to break the confinement and to seek self-development. Whether the protagonist in *The Morgesons* has truly broken free from her entrapment is debatable, but Stoddard raises the themes of free will and autonomy for women in her works, and these themes are further explored by later women writers, such as Kate Chopin, in their works.

Chapter Three

Female Entrapment and the Institution of Marriage:

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

The far, faint voice of a woman, I heard,
'Twas but a wail, and it spoke no word.
It rose from the depths of some infinite gloom
And its tremulous anguish filled the room.
Yet the woman was dead and could not deny,
But women forever will whine and cry.
---Kate Chopin, from "The Haunted Chamber"[51]

This chapter will explore the theme of female entrapment in the personal life and works of Kate Chopin. The term "female entrapment" understood in this thesis describes a dilemma faced by women where they are uncomfortable and unfulfilled both inside and outside men's houses, what, I argue, is the principle marker of a hegemonic patriarchal order in the period in question. This chapter argues that Chopin's works testify to this dilemma faced by women in late nineteenth-century America. The situation was, I argue, particularly severe for women of the upper-middle-class, who felt entrapped both within and without the confines of this patriarchal domestic sphere. Compared with Stoddard's *The Morgesons*, the intensity of entrapment felt by the protagonist in Chopin's *The Awakening* appears stronger. Chopin explores the theme of female entrapment in *The*

Awakening mainly from the perspective of marriage and she adopts an ambivalent stance on this theme[52] in that she has intentionally not provided a satisfactory solution to the problem for her protagonists.

Ever since the revival of interest[53] in Kate Chopin and *The Awakening* in the late 1960s, critics have analysed the novel in various ways. Many of them look at the novel from the perspective of female sexuality.[54] For example, Per Seyersted and others perceive the novel's stance on woman's sexuality as pioneering and daring instead of corrupting, as suggested by critics in the past: "She was something of a pioneer in the amoral treatment of sexuality" (Seyersted 198). The novel certainly can be understood in terms of woman's sexuality;[55] nevertheless, if one solely looks through the lens of female sexuality, one may overlook other important aspects. To avoid concentrating solely on the theme of female sexuality, there are also critics who adopt other approaches to the study of the novel. In recent collections of critical essays on Chopin's works, such as *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Kate Chopin—Updated Edition* (2007), and *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin* (2008), editors have included a number of critical essays on Chopin from a variety of angles. For example, Susan Castillo looks at race and ethnicity in Chopin's fictions, while Maureen Anderson looks at Chopin's works from the angle of Southern pastoral tradition.

In terms of the theme of female entrapment, there have also been a number of critics who look at *The Awakening* from this angle. Tracing back chronologically, in 1956 Kenneth Eble briefly mentions the confinement of the protagonist in her marriage in *The Awakening*. In 1992 Dorothy H. Jacobs looks at the theme of confinement by comparing *The Awakening* with Ibsen's plays such as *A Doll's House* and *Heddar Gabler*. In 2003

A. Elizabeth Elz approaches the theme of female entrapment through the metaphor of birds used in the novel, and compares the novel with *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather. In this thesis, the theme of female entrapment will be looked at in a comprehensive manner. The forms of female entrapment will be considered as multi-faceted, and will be extended to both the public and private spheres.[56] The value of this research lies in the depth at which the theme of female entrapment will be analysed.

The aim of the chapter is to answer three major questions in relation to the idea of female entrapment. First, I would like to explore whether Chopin, as a woman author, has ever felt entrapped in her life in regard to her goal of achieving artist-hood. Second, I will examine various forms of entrapment imposed on women characters in her novel *The Awakening*. Finally, I will look for solutions offered in the novel to free women characters from their entrapment. The three questions will allow us to better understand the literary theme of female entrapment in late nineteenth-century America.

To understand the idea of female entrapment, we need to first of all examine the notion of Victorian femininity[57] or the ideal femininity in the nineteenth-century, which gives rise to the dilemma of female entrapment in nineteenth century America. The ideal image of Victorian womanhood is closely linked to the image of "the angel in the house". Looking historically, the image of "the angel in the house" stems originally from one poem written by Coventry Patmore in 1854.[58] Patmore considers his wife Emily to be the perfect example of a Victorian woman, and lists her virtues such as purity, passivity, innocence, selflessness, and meekness in his poem "The Angel in the House". For example, "She leans and weeps against his breast, And seems to think the sin was hers."[59] In her book *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction*, Jane Wood notes that the very

title of Patmore's poem, 'The Angel in the House', "crystallized the idealizations into the familiar stereotype" (9).

The idealization of Victorian womanhood can be understood on two levels. First, it encompasses virtues expected of Victorian women. "Woman, Victorian society dictated, was to be chaste, delicate, and loving" (Smith-Rosenberg 65). The quality of purity is strongly emphasized. "Nineteenth-century thinking and writing about women is informed by the idea of feminine purity" (Mitchell x). Similarly, Ronald Waters also describes the Victorian woman as "asexual", "icily aloof from all dangerous impulses, loomed like a white-clad mountain amid the world's moral debris" (65).

It should be noted that the women who failed to follow the above notion of Victorian femininity would be condemned. "[M]odesty, timidity and selflessness were claimed on the one hand to be essential parts of women's natures, and women who violated these claims were called unfeminine and unnatural" (Jordan 53). Ellen Jordan explains that for middle-class Victorian women, "[i]f they hoped to maintain an image of themselves as 'ladies', or even as 'true' women, they had to accept the sphere defined for them by the myth, and live within its prescriptive boundaries, no matter how high the price paid" (Jordan 55-56). Jordan's argument leads one to reflect upon the sense of anxiety and feeling of entrapment if a woman was uncomfortable or unwilling to follow the Victorian notion of femininity. Moreover, Jordan touches upon an important idea for Victorian society, i.e. the separate spheres for men and women.

Secondly, the idealization of Victorian womanhood glorifies the roles of wives and mothers for women. The idealization of the "angel in the house" serves the very purpose of setting separate spheres for the two genders. Jane Wood notes that "[t]he

idealization of woman as the morally pure, passive, 'angel in the house' worked to make a virtue of a society prescription and thereby served an expedient need … contributing to the formulation of what was perhaps the most powerful and pervasive stereotype supporting the strategic notion of separate spheres" (9). British writer Anna Jameson summarized the virtue of woman in 1843 as: "Her sphere is home, her vocation the maternal … she is the refiner and the comforter of man; it is hers to keep alive all those purer, gentler, and more genial sympathies" (Jordan 51). Jordan argues that Victorian women were created as noble and angelic beings for the "purpose of serving husband and family" (52). The role as wife for Victorian woman is highly stressed and glorified. "A woman is nobody unless she be a lady. This was the role that Victorians assigned to the female sex … Americans expected women to reign at home … She was homemaker as well as culture giver, but first and last she was loving and beloved wife" (Filene 7-8). So what about women who were not comfortable with the roles of wives and mothers? What if a woman aspired for more outside her household in Victorian America? These questions can lead to the possible situation of female entrapment in late nineteenth-century America.

To sum up, in this thesis the notion of Victorian womanhood is understood in terms of the virtues and roles required on the part of women. Jane Wood gives a good account as follows: "The idealized image of the 'angel in the house' gave rise to numerous variations on the enclosed space, the inner sanctum which both preserved woman's moral purity and ensured her dedication to the appointed task of service and humility" (23). Wood touches upon the idea of "the enclosed space" associated with the image of "angel in the house". "The enclosed space" can be understood as restrictions

caused by the separate spheres for the two genders. Pointing out that Patmore's poem of 'the Angel in the House' "provided a name for the ideal, all-encompassing image of Victorian womanhood which combined the perfection of purity, spirituality, love and beauty", Siv Jansson also notes that the image of the angel "has, however, also come to represent submission, immobility and confinement" (31). Both Wood and Jansson here point to the important connection between the image of the angel in the house and the confinement it renders for women in terms of enclosed space and stifled autonomy.

In early twentieth-century, British writer Virginia Woolf wrote an essay attacking the idealized image of the angel in the house. Woolf describes the image of the angel in the house in her essay "Professions for Women" (1931) as follows:

> She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it---she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel.[60]

Woolf attacks the idealized image of Victorian woman, and claims in her essay that she tries her best to kill the angel in the house. Hence she famously claims: "Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer". What Woolf essentially says is to liberate women in general from the stereotypes of "the angel in the house", and to give them opportunities so that there can be women writers and artists

emerging from the female population. By "killing the angel in the house", Woolf hopes to liberate women from their confinement, and to encourage and nurture women artists. Woolf therefore sees the notion of perfect Victorian womanhood glorified by Patmore as cumbersome and destructive to younger generations of women.

In their book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert also touch upon the image of the angel in the house. Different from Woolf who is writing about women in general, Gubar's and Gilbert's argument mainly centres on literary women. Apart from mentioning the angel in the house, they have also stress its opposite image: the madwoman in the attic. According to Gubar and Gilbert, both images are extreme and are products of the male texts. In other words, neither of the two images is acceptable or truthful in depicting a woman's individuality. Gilbert and Gubar, therefore, emphasize the importance of literature written by women that challenge the stereotype of the angel in the house.

In their book, Gilbert and Gubar also stress the idea of female entrapment or confinement. They argue that in the nineteenth-century women artists are trapped in men's houses[61] and in the institution of patriarchy; therefore, "[d]ramatizations of imprisonment and escape are so all-pervasive in nineteenth-century literature by women that we believe they represent a unique female tradition in this period" (85-86). They also point out that women writers tend to use houses as primary symbols of female imprisonment: "heroines who characteristically inhabit mysteriously intricate or uncomfortable stifling houses are often seen as captured, fettered, trapped, even buried alive" (83). In Gilbert and Gubar's book, "entrapment" and "confinement" are used interchangeably to refer to the condition that women writers or their female characters are

robbed of their freedom and become trapped physically in men's houses, psychologically under patriarchy, and literally in the male texts. Gilbert's and Gubar's argument and definition of female entrapment provide theoretical support and guidance for this thesis.

In this chapter, Gilbert and Gubar's argument on female entrapment will be applied to examine Kate Chopin's works. I argue that Chopin's works testify to the dilemma faced by women whereby they feel entrapped both within and without the confines of a patriarchal domestic sphere in late nineteenth-century America. Chopin's ambivalent stance on providing the solution to end female entrapment reflects the complex nature of this dilemma. In addition, *The Awakening* will be linked to Chopin's short stories, and will be related to two other women writers' works, i.e. Stoddard and Wharton, to further explore and understand the theme of female entrapment in the works by American women writers from the period of post-bellum to World War I.

I. Chopin and Anxiety of Female Authorship

This section aims at answering the first question: has Chopin, as a woman author, ever felt entrapped in her life in regard to her goal of achieving artist-hood? As mentioned earlier, Gubar and Gilbert emphasize the link between women authors' private lives and their literary works. They argue that women writers of the nineteenth-century often had to struggle to preserve their independent will and creativity; and some women writers projected their own sense of entrapment and anxiety onto their female characters in their literary works. So in the case of Kate Chopin, has she ever felt hampered or entrapped by this male-dominated literary background in which the Victorian notion of

womanhood still prevailed? Has she projected her own feeling of anxiety and entrapment onto her literary creations?

Ann Douglas Wood notes that in nineteenth century America it was considered unladylike for women to aspire to self-expression through writing, therefore, women writers often had to mask their ambition: "In masking and hallowing their activity, these women writers reached the paradoxical point where, by a mysterious transmutation, they were somehow hardly writing at all" (Wood 7). Nancy Walker explains the conservative notion of true womanhood in nineteenth-century as being "timid", "dependent", "instinct" and "childlike" (9). Economic necessity, therefore, was the better and more acceptable excuse for women's literary endeavours. To put it another way, to aspire to literary immortality was still not encouraged on the part of women.[62] Women writers often had to hide their artistic ambitions.

Around mid-century when Kate Chopin was born, the position of the woman writer was something of a paradox. On the one hand, many popular novels were written by women; on the other hand, however, there was still a stigma attached to a woman writer.[63] As it is mentioned earlier in the chapter on Elizabeth Stoddard, "[b]y the 1850s, indeed, when women writers were producing most of the best-selling fiction, their work was deplored as a popular dilution of a truly virile American art" (Showalter 12). There was anxiety about women who dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to art and consequently neglected their essential responsibilities as wives and mothers. Walker observes that critics were on alert over "any evidence that a female author had overstepped the bounds of decorum" (14). Moreover, although women writers were

sometimes praised for their creativity, most of them were not considered to be on an equal footing with male writers. In *Kate Chopin: A Literary Life*, Nancy Walker notes that in December of 1877, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the *Atlantic Monthly*, many writers were invited to attend. However, among the guests, not a single woman was invited to the celebration, despite the fact that there were already a quite number of women writers, such as Louisa May Alcott, who had published their works in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Elaine Showalter notes that in the 1870s, women's fiction "was a series of female Declarations of Independence" (166). In the 1890s, the phenomenon of the New Woman occurred. The New Woman sprang from women's activism at the time. The traditional woman was fulfilled by home and children, and she "merged her identity with that of her husband" (165), the New Women, however, "rejected conventional female roles, redefined female sexuality, and asserted their rights to higher education and the professions" (Showalter 210). The New Women asked for more opportunities and freedom for women outside the domestic sphere, and were concerned about acquiring autonomy for the new generation of women.

The New Woman challenges the traditional angelic image of woman being a selfless being, wholly devoted to the needs of others. The image of angel in the house "led to the idea of a woman being associated with an instinctive, well-nigh angelic devotion to the needs of others, and thus a moral 'influence' which elevated and refined those around her. So complete was her selflessness that some commentators were troubled by the very idea of feminine sexual desire" (Adams 8). In particular, the New

Woman challenges the traditional sexual double standards. Showalter thinks that the New Women's attitudes toward female sexuality were revolutionary. She explains that while "most American New Women believed that men should be as sexually chaste as women, they also saw women's relative passionlessness as constructed rather than natural" (211). In fact, women novelists had written about the female passion a lot earlier than the emergence of the New Woman. Stoddard, for instance, touches upon the theme of female passion in her novel, *The Morgesons*, almost half a century before the advocacy of the New Woman.

By the time Chopin started to write, regional tales or sketches were quite popular, which provided her with ample room and opportunities for publishing. The term "local colour" stresses the careful "observation of everyday life, faithful delineation of real human experience, and sympathy for ordinary individuals" as demonstrated from the works of many women writers.[64] Although Chopin and other writers of her generation benefitted from the great public demand for local colour stories, she did not wish to be considered solely as a local colourist.[65] Chopin's response could stem from her hope for a wider audience and her fear of restricted understanding on her literary works.

Kate Chopin's personal life sheds light on understanding her philosophy of life and her works. Surprisingly, though Chopin explores the theme of entrapment in her works, especially in regard to the restrictions imposed by marriage and motherhood on women in the late nineteenth-century, her private life did not appear to suffer from such a contradiction, which leads one to wonder at the discrepancy between her private life and her literary creations.[66] Her maiden name was Katherine O'Flaherty, and she was born on February 8, 1851[67] in St. Louis, Missouri. Her father was a successful Irish businessman,

and her mother was of French descent. Chopin's father died of an accident when she was only five years old; therefore, she was practically raised in a household full of widowed women, consisting of her mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. French was used at her household, which explained Chopin's familiarity with the language. The fluency in French later proved to be useful for expanding her literary horizon by enabling her to read the works of French writers firsthand.

Chopin attended Sacred Heart Academy in St. Louis when growing up. At school, she kept a commonplace book of quotations and diary entries. She wrote her first story, "Emancipation, A Life Fable", before she was twenty years old. In June 1870 Chopin married the twenty-five-year-old Oscar Chopin, the son of a French-Creole family from "Natchitoches [Nak-i-tush] Parish in northwestern Louisiana" (11),[68] and moved to New Orleans, where Oscar invested in the cotton business. Chopin fell in love with the city, and observed people's lives there. She later used Louisiana as the background of many of her literary works, including *The Awakening*.

Chopin apparently gained much satisfaction from her both her marriage and motherhood. Life with Oscar seems happy for Chopin. In Chopin's diary, she claimed to be very happy during her honeymoon. According to Per Seyersted, Chopin was very much in love with Oscar, and "she and her husband always preferred each other to other company" (38). Barbara Ewell also thinks that "by every account, Oscar and Kate were a fond and loving couple" (14). Chopin, the young wife, was "completely happy with her home, her husband, and in the eager expectation of … her first child" (Seyersted 39). There is no account suggesting that Chopin did not enjoy motherhood. In her personal writing, Chopin described the birth of her child as: "The sensation with which I touched

my lips and my fingers to his soft flesh only comes once to a mother. It must be the pure animal sensation; nothing spiritual could be so real so poignant."[69] Despite her satisfaction with marriage and motherhood, she nevertheless questions both in her literary works.

There is the suggestion that *The Awakening* was written based on some of the private experiences of the author. For example, Chopin's preference for roaming in the streets and shunning the formal claims of the society also remind readers of Edna Pontellier, the protagonist in *The Awakening*. Although at the time women's freedom of movement was restricted, Chopin roamed in New Orleans unchaperoned. Chopin explained her attitude toward walking was as follows: "I always feel so sorry for women who don't like to walk; they miss so much so many rare little glimpses of life; and we women learn so little of life on the whole."[70] Chopin's early biographer, Daniel Rankin, for example, thinks that although Chopin was completely happy with her marriage, she "continued her frustrated reasoning and that the shifting moods of Edna Pontellier of *The Awakening* are those of the author."[71] In addition, after the death of her husband, Chopin was allegedly involved with a married man,[72] which may have provided her with material for writing on triangular relationships in *The Awakening*. Therefore, the novel in some sense can be read as semi-autobiographical.

Different from Stoddard, it appears that Chopin did not go through the struggles between domestic duty and artistic aspiration experienced by the former a few decades earlier. From *Kate Chopin: a Critical Biography* by Per Seyersted, one learns that Chopin seemed content as a wife and mother, fulfilling domestic duties when her husband was alive, and harboured no thought of becoming a literary figure. It was after the death of her

husband that she started to write short stories, primarily due to the strong encouragement of Dr. Kolbenheyer,[73] and partly motivated by the financial rewards from writing. But writing was never the main source of income for Chopin, and she did not have to rely on the money from publishing stories as Stoddard did.

Similar to Stoddard though, Chopin initially also lacked confidence in her own writing. In the beginning of her writing, she thought she had written "very diffidently" (52).[74] Chopin considered her first productions "crude and unformed", and hoped to "study to better her style" (52). It should be noted that Chopin did not find her obligations as a mother and hostess an obstacle to her writing. According to Seyersted, Chopin "preserved her emotional and intellectual independence" while attending to her numerous domestic duties and obligations (61).[75]

Chopin started to write short stories from 1888. She wrote dozens of short stories and sketches. Her works was published in magazines such as *Atlantic Monthly*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Youth's Companion*. Her major works were included in two short story collections *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1895). Chopin also published two novels, although some biographers suggest that she had written a third novel which she later destroyed herself. *At Fault* was published in 1890 at her own expense; while her most controversial novel, *The Awakening*, was published in 1899.

Different from Stoddard who openly declared her literary ambition, Chopin, however, masked her literary aspiration. Chopin's practice was not rare. On the phenomenon that women writers in the past often resorted to masking their literary ambitions, Gubar and Gilbert explain: "If she refused to be modest, self-deprecating, subservient, refused to present her artistic productions as mere stifles designed to divert

and distract readers in moments of idleness, she could expect to be ignored or (sometimes scurrilously) attacked" (61-62). Per Seyersted also offers another explanation for Chopin's modesty. He thinks Chopin was raised with the Creole notion that publicity was a bad thing for a woman, and a woman should be satisfied with her home instead. Therefore, to the outsiders, Chopin was careful to present herself as a satisfied mother who often wrote short stories with the company and noises of her children and other family members in the living-room. Whatever Chopin's real motive was, the truth was she did have a study room of her own, and she took time to revise her works. Although not publicly professing her literary ambition, Chopin took art and her works seriously, and hoped very much that her books would succeed. "Kate Chopin did everything she could to further her local and national success, while retaining her womanly modesty and hiding her secret aspirations from everyone except Kobenheyer" (Seyersted 67). Similarly, from her research on Chopin's life, Ewell concludes that "as a writer of considerable intellect and power, Chopin approached her work quite seriously, even when she had to mask that intent with indifference" (21-22).

Before looking at *The Awakening* in depth, it is important to look at the critical reception of Chopin's most important novel in the historical context. When *The Awakening* was first published in 1899, the critical reception at the time was horrible. Critics unanimously condemned the novel. For example, below is one review on the novel.

> Miss Kate Chopin is another clever woman, but she has put her cleverness to a very bad use in writing "The Awakening" (5). The purport of the story can hardly be described in language fit for publication ... The worst of

such stories is that they will come to the hands of youth, leading them to dwell on things that only matured persons can understand, and promoting unholy imaginations and unclean desires. It is nauseating to remember that those who object to the bluntness of our older writers will excuse and justify the gilded dirt of these later days.[76]

--Reprinted from the *Providence Sunday Journal*, 4 June 1899, 15.

The Awakening was generally viewed as a morally unhealthy book, and its protagonist, Edna Pontellier, received little sympathy. Due the "unhealthy" content of the novel, Chopin's reputation as a writer was tarnished.

Chopin obviously was frustrated and sad at such a reception. She later issued an explanation on defence of herself:

> Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was then too late.[77]

Here, Chopin's tone is sarcastic. Her statement was published in the August issue of *Book-News*; however, by the time, *The Awakening* had already been condemned nationally.

> Had she [Edna Pontellier] lived by Prof. William James's advice to do one thing a day one does not want to do (in Creole society, two would perhaps be better), flirted less and looked after her children more, or even assisted

> at more *accouchements*—her *chef d'oeuvre* in self-denial we need not have been put to the unpleasantness of reading about her and the temptations she trumped up for herself. [78]
>
> --Reprinted from *The Nation* 69 (3 August 1899):96

There were even rumours that for fear of the corrupting influence from *The Awakening* on the minds of young bourgeois housewives, the novel was banned and taken off the shelf in several states; and Chopin was shunned in the literary circle as well.[79] However, later biographers tend to dismiss such rumours.

Chopin did not write or publish much after the hostile reception of *The Awakening*. There is the theory among early biographers[80] that the hostile reviews had extinguished Chopin's literary aspiration, and in effect silenced her pen. Commenting on past generations of women writers in general, Virginia Woolf writes: "What genius, what integrity it must have required in face of all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society, to hold fast to the things as they saw it without shrinking" (112).[81] Although later critics on Chopin suggested that the hostile reviews had not been as damaging on Chopin as people previously imagined, Nancy Walker thinks that "[a]lthough the critical reception of *The Awakening* did not cause Chopin's death, or even end her work as a writer, it delayed by at least half a century the wide readership that now attends her work" (27). Although it is unclear regarding the detrimental effect of hostile reviews on Chopin, she almost disappeared from public memory and readership for half a century. As for the main reason why Chopin was practically neglected and forgotten for the next half a century, Nancy Walker thinks that the frank treatment of the protagonist's sexuality is the main reason for the ensuing silence on Chopin.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the only critical essay that focused on Kate Chopin in depth was a study done by Daniel Rankin in 1932.[82] In 1956 Kenneth Eble wrote "A Forgotten Novel: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" and published it in *Western Humanities Review* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1956).[83] Eble comments on the novel as follows: "The nature of its [*The Awakening*'s] theme, which had much to do with its adverse reception in 1899, would offer little offense today" (76). He therefore advocates for the restoration of *The Awakening* among "novels worthy of preservation" (82).

In the second half of the twentieth-century, there is a revived interest in Chopin's works. In 1969 Norwegian scholar Per Seyersted published two books on Chopin: *Kate Chopin: a Critical Biography* and *The Completed Works of Kate Chopin*.[84] Seyersted considered Chopin as a "rare, transitional figure in modern literature", "a link between George Sand and Simone de Beauvoir" and "too much of a pioneer to be accepted in her time and place" (199). When the American critic, Emily Toth, published *Unveiling Kate Chopin* in 1999, celebrating one hundred years after the publication of *The Awakening*, Chopin is already being counted as among the first rank of American authors. *The Awakening* appears on many college students' reading lists. Chopin's novel has become so widely read that it was even adapted into two motion pictures.

In sum, Chopin, as an author, had not suffered much from the pain and anxiety of conflicts between the roles of wife, mother, and artist, as Stoddard did. Nevertheless, she is not totally immune from the "anxiety of female authorship". As mentioned above, she initially lacked confidence in her own writing, and she had to mask her ambition as a woman writer by resorting to her femininity.[85] The one-sided disapproval of *The Awakening* certainly affected her as well. Chopin realizes that in her era women have to

face and undergo the pains and confusions caused by their traditional roles as wives and mothers, and their yearnings for independence, free will, and creativity. She therefore carefully probes the issue that she deeply sympathizes with in her short stories and novels.[86]

II. Multifaceted Forms of Female Entrapment in *The Awakening*

This section aims at answering the second question: what are the forms of entrapment imposed on the women characters in the novel *The Awakening*? Perhaps few novels in nineteenth century America have depicted a woman's yearning for freedom from the confinement imposed by society, family, and other factors more strongly than *The Awakening*. In this chapter, the suffocating sense of entrapment will be explored in terms of the pubic and the private spheres,[87] and with the emphasis on the institution of marriage.

Public Sphere (Political Context) and Entrapment

In this section, the relationship between the public sphere and female entrapment will be looked at in terms of scarcity of life options available for women, the institution of marriage, and the notion of "a room of one's own" (physical space and economy) that I have dealt with also in relation to Stoddard. The protagonist is Edna Pontellier, a woman of twenty-eight years old. She grew up in the old Kentucky bluegrass country.

"She was an American woman, with a small infusion of French which seemed to have been lost in dilution" (6).[88] Edna marries Léonce Pontellier, a forty-year-old business man of Creole background. The Pontelliers belongs to the upper-middle class, and have a comfortable home with servants in New Orleans. At the beginning of the novel Edna is a mother of two children of four and five years old.

The Scarcity of Life Options and Entrapment

On the theme of the scarcity of life options available for women, Chopin creates three types of women in her novel. Aside from Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of the novel, Chopin describes two other feminine types for her women characters. One devotes her life completely to marriage and motherhood, and this type is embodied by the character of Adèle Ratignolle. The last type devotes her energy completely to art, as in the case of Mademoiselle Reisz. Although both women characters offer insights into Edna's character regarding how she can live out her life, she eventually rejects both models of womanhood.[89]

Chopin describes Adèle Ratignolle in the novel as "mother-woman", and she defines the phrase "mother-woman" as referring to those who "idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels"(12). In other words, the mother-woman effaces herself for the sake of her family. Just as Siv Jansson has summarized about the qualities of the angel in the house: "womanhood combining the perfection of

purity, spirituality, love and beauty", Adèle is a typical example; in the first place, Adèle has the ideal feminine grace and charm that captivates men and women alike:

> There was nothing subtle or hidden about her charms; her beauty was all there, flaming and apparent: the spun-gold hair that comb nor confining pin could restrain; the blue eyes that were like nothing but sapphires; two lips that pouted, that were so red one could only think of cherries or some other delicious crimson fruit in looking at them ... Never were hands more exquisite than hers, and it was a joy to look at them when she threaded her needle or adjusted her gold thimble to her taper middle finger. (12)

Adèle not only displays her femininity in her outward appearance, but also in her movement and gestures as well. For example, she sometimes complains of faintness to her friends. Chopin makes it clear in the novel that the doctor has forbidden Madame Ratignolle to lift "so much as a pin!" (18). Fragile, sickly, and delicate, Madame Ratignolle lives fully up to the Victorian notion of femininity. Gilbert and Gubar note that "nineteenth-century culture seems to have actually admonished women to *be* ill" (54). Women of upper- and upper-middle-class were often portrayed as either sick or frail. In the novel Edna is drastically different from Madame Ratignolle. Compared with the delicate frame of Adèle, Edna is healthy and robust. In other words, Edna does not fit exactly into the Victorian ideal of femininity as shown by Madame Ratignolle.

Moreover, Adèle's life centres entirely on her husband and children. Her husband and children are her essential duty in life. Adèle worships her husband and agrees with him in everything completely. For example, at dinner table, Adèle is keenly interested in

everything her husband says. She lays down her fork to listen more attentively, chimes in, and takes the words out of his mouth. "The Ratignolles understood each other perfectly. If ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union" (81-6). So what about Chopin's stance toward the institution of marriage? In the novel Chopin has been quite radical and outspoken in the case of Edna, but she does acknowledge the domestic bliss felt by the Ratignolles. Therefore, Chopin may harbour a complicated view toward marriage, and adopt an ambivalent stance toward marriage. Adèle also adores her children, and considers them her primary duty. She has been married for seven years, and has a baby about every two years. In this respect, Madame Ratignolle bears some resemblance to Chopin's own life.[90] Madame Ratignolle is always talking about her condition, namely, her pregnancy, and persists in making it the subject of conversation.

The notion of independence is non-existent to Madame Ratignolle. It seems that Adèle does not need private time alone devoted to satisfying her own needs and desires, as Edna does. During her pregnancy, she will work on knitting outfits for her children. Adèle plays the piano well, but she has no ambition of advancing at it, as Mademoiselle Reisz does. "She was keeping up her music on account of the children, she said; because she and her husband both considered it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive" (36). In other words, art means little to Adèle if it is not to fulfil the function of serving family members or decorating her home.

Adèle's way of life, however, is not possible for Edna. Although captivated by Adèle's beauty and enjoying her company, Edna finds Adèle's life suffocating for her. She feels no longing for the domestic harmony enjoyed by the Ratignolles, as she realizes

that it is not fitted for her. When Adèle suggests to Edna that she should spend more time with her husband so as to be more united, Edna responds with a blank look in her eyes: "Oh! dear no! What should I do if he stayed home? We wouldn't have anything to say to each other" (105). On the subject of children, Edna tells Adèle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children.

> "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me."
>
> "I don't know what you would call the essential, or what you mean by the unessential," said Madame Ratignolle, cheerfully; "but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that--your Bible tells you so. I'm sure I couldn't do more than that." (72)

Adèle fails to understand Edna here. As Deborah Barker explains, Adele is willing to give herself to her children "body and soul", Edna, however, is not willing to follow suit "for either her children or her art" (72). Different from Edna, Adèle is comfortable in being totally consumed by her roles of wife and mother. Edna, however, does not agree. She begins to awaken to her sense of selfhood and autonomy. She starts to realize that she cannot give up her self for anyone, even her own children. Consequently, she feels pity for Adèle. The narrator comments: "She [Edna] was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle,--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"

(86). What is "life's delirium"? For Edna it symbolizes freedom and autonomy. Clearly, Edna disagrees with Adèle's blind contentment to life, and she cannot devote her life entirely for her husband and children as Adèle does. Therefore, although similar in class and social background, Adèle's model is unfitted for Edna to adopt.

Contrary to Madame Ratignolle who devotes her whole self to duty and family, Mademoiselle Reisz sacrifices her whole energy to the pursuit of art. Her outward appearance forms a stark contrast with the sensuous and delicate beauty of Madame Ratignolle:

> She was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others ... She was a homely woman, with a small weazened face and body and eyes that glowed. She had absolutely no taste in dress, and wore a batch of rusty black lace with a bunch of artificial violets pinned to the side of her hair. (37-38)

Mademoiselle Reisz is not attractive physically, and has a disagreeable personality, too. She completely lacks the delicate femininity exhibited by Madame Ratignolle. Why does a woman who devotes herself wholeheartedly to art have to be hideous and disagreeable? Deborah Barker thinks that Mlle. Reisz "remains a childlike anorexic figure who has developed her art at the expense of her physical desires. Her cramped apartment suggests the physical deprivation of her life" (72-73). The anorexic figure of Mademoiselle Reisz reminds one of Veronica in *The Morgesons*. Gubar and Gilbert argue that "[r]ejecting the poisoned apples her culture offers her", woman writers and their heroines in the

nineteenth-century are often in some sense anorexic (57-58). Nancy Walker notes that the description of Mme Reiz "echoes the many unflattering portraits of the nineteenth-century 'bluestocking', so devoted to her writing that she neglects both her femininity and her proper female role" (2). Walker suggests that the depiction of Mademoiselle Reisz may reflect Chopin's own anxiety at creating such an unconventional figure. One can even go further by suggesting that Chopin may find it impossible to create a character combining Adèle's beauty with Mademoiselle Reisz's talent and choice of life.[91]

Like the protagonist in some of Chopin's short stories, Mademoiselle Reisz chooses singlehood for the sake of her art. She does not have a family, nor does she desire one either. Consequently, Mademoiselle Reisz is not bound by any obligation to family members. She can spend her own time according to her own fancy. The drawback of being totally on her own is that Mademoiselle Reisz cannot live a comfortable life as Edna or Madame Ratignolle does, with the income from a husband. She has to rely on her own limited resources. But small as it is, she has a place of her own, and she is the master of her place. The place is "dingy", but has a "magnificent" piano in it (94). The reward of singlehood for Mademoiselle Reisz is that she can dedicate herself entirely to her piano and music. She is not encumbered by domestic duties such as taking care of family members or social duties such as receiving guests and callers. She is indeed autonomous, and conducts her life according to her own will. In other words, she is not entrapped by domestic responsibilities.

Art is supreme for Mademoiselle Reisz. She defines the qualities of an artist as follows: "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" (97). Mademoiselle Reisz considers "courageous soul" an essential quality for an artist. She believes that the brave soul needs to dare and defy tradition. Indeed, Mademoiselle Reisz herself both dares and defies the conventional path for a woman, such as marriage and approval by others, in order to be an autonomous person wholly dedicated to her art.

Chopin admired the works of her predecessors such as Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman. Both Jewett and Freeman had written short stories about strong-minded women characters who value their independence and choose careers over marriages. Chopin wrote several short stories on a similar theme, such as "Wiser than a God" and "The Maid of Saint Phillippe". Chopin often places the quest for free will within the context of marital issues. The frequent links between women's independence and marital choices are understandable, as in nineteenth century America, women's fates were often if not always shaped and sealed by their marital status and situations.

Mademoiselle Reisz's choice of art over marriage reminds one of Chopin's short story "Wiser than a God" which was written before *The Awakening*. In the story, the female protagonist, Paula Von Stoltz, chooses the career of pianist over the prospect of marrying George Brainard, the man she loves dearly. Paula questions George: "Is music anything more to you than the pleasing distraction of an idle moment? Can't you feel that with me, it courses with the blood through my veins? That it's something dearer than life, than riches, even than love?" (46). Allen Stein thinks that Paula realizes that "marriage to him [George] would trap her in the dubious comforts of a well-off domesticity and destroy her most cherished aspiration as an artist" (111). It is not easy for the protagonist to sacrifice a possible happy union with her loved one for the sake of pursuing her dream

of music. The narrator of the short story, however, makes it clear in the story that marriage and career aspirations are not compatible.

It is through the music played by Mademoiselle Reisz that Edna starts to awaken. Her music has a mesmerizing effect on the latter, and continues to exert such power when Edna comes back to listen to her play. In some sense, Mademoiselle Reisz becomes both a mentor and confidante to Edna. "It was then, in the presence of that personality which was offensive to her, that the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna's spirit and set it free" (120). Mademoiselle Reisz's music inspires Edna to search for her sense of self, to become an artist, and to accept her longing and love for Robert Lebrun.

However, Mademoiselle Reisz's existence is not appealing to Edna, either. Like Madame Ratignolle's blind contentment to domestic duty and bliss, Mademoiselle Reisz is blinded by her complete devotion to art. Showalter summarizes the dilemma between art and motherhood as: "artistic fulfillment required the sacrifice of maternal drives, and maternal fulfillment meant giving up artistic ambitions" (12). Mademoiselle Reisz's fails to realize that her life is likewise compromised and unbalanced as Madame Ratignolle. Chopin mentions three times in the novel the "shabby lace and the artificial bunch of violets" (38, 95, 121) she wears on her head. By stressing the artificial flowers, the narrator suggests that in some way Mademoiselle Reisz's life is lacking. She leads a dry and wizened life. Moreover, to defy social tradition, she fails to notice her rudeness and inconsideration to others. There is no love in her life, one essential element that Edna cannot give up. Deborah Barker notes that Edna and Mademoiselle Reisz display different attitudes toward art: "Edna is not willing to accept Mlle. Reisz's belief that the artist must sacrifice the self for art. From the start, Edna has shown an unconventional

attitude toward her work. In the reader's first encounter with Edna as a painter, Edna establishes her own criterion as an artist, which she maintains throughout the novel" (73). It is not very certain that Edna has a set of criterion as an artist, as suggested by Barker, for initially she harbours doubts about her own skill and talent as a painter, and tries to seek opinions from others. Although in awe of Mademoiselle Reisz's divine art, Edna is unwilling to follow in her footsteps. Ann Heilmann thinks "[a]lthough Edna divests herself of her old self, consolidating her break with the past with her affair with Arobin, she has no new identity that would constructively enable her to strike out on an independent life effectively and permanently. Instead, she experiments with two contrasting female roles exemplified by Madame Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz the passionate mother and the artist—but ultimately rejects both" (96). Failing to find satisfaction in either the model of Madame Ratignolle or that of Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna decides to embark upon her own path of life. However, her later experience suggests that she cannot carve out a third way for herself, i.e. to pursue art, love and autonomy at the same time. Her failure will be discussed in the later part of this chapter.

Entrapment and the Institution of Marriage

Although in her own life Chopin followed a conventional path similar to most of the women in her own era, i.e. to get married and have children, she expressed a quite complex view toward marriage in her works. Chopin is obviously aware of the image of the angel in the house, as she creates the character of Adèle Ratignolle, who fully embodies such an image. However, at the same time, she also creates the problematic

character of the protagonist, who subverts the traditional image of an angel. As mentioned before, Chopin seems to neither fully support nor condemn the institution of marriage. She therefore adopts an ambivalent stance.

Before looking at Edna's feeling of entrapment in her marriage, one needs to know how she ends up in her confined marital life. Chopin offers some details to explain Edna's past passions and her present marriage. Before Edna's marriage to Mr. Pontellier, she is secretly in love with a tragedian. "It was when the face and figure of a great tragedian began to haunt her imagination and stir her senses. The persistence of the infatuation lent it an aspect of genuineness. The hopelessness of it colored it with the lofty tones of a great passion" (26). Edna's love is immature and one sided. Infatuation may be the more appropriate description of her state. Amidst Edna's secret passion for the tragedian, she meets Léonce Pontellier. Chopin describes their marriage as purely accidental: "resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate" (27). It is hard not to ignore the narrator's ironic tone here. With blind impulse and little sophisticated understanding of the reality of marriage, Edna accepts Léonce. It is not hard to perceive the narrator's tone of disapproval at this union; therefore, the later problems and disruption of this marriage do not come as too great a surprise.

Edna initially follows the conventional ideals of the Victorian era, i.e. becoming the angel in the house. She thinks that she can lead a life as a devoted wife and mother just like other women. In *Gender and Colonial Space*, Sara Mills points out that within the historical context of the nineteenth-century in the West, a woman's place was generally assumed to be in the domestic sphere at home: "women should take the major role in childrearing and household-management" (52). After her marriage, Edna grows

fond of her husband, "realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution" (27). However, at the same time Edna also realizes that she has assumed the duty of a married woman without knowing the reality. In Chopin's words, Edna has blindly assumed a responsibility "for which Fate had not fitted her" (27). Nancy Theriot in *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-century America* notes that mothers usually prepared their daughters to fill in their proper domestic roles in marriage. Mothers taught daughters to "curb their ambition and confine their activities within the narrow field of domestic service" (71). Edna's mother died young, and Edna is "self-contained" as a child (25). Without a proper model to observe and learn from, it would not be too surprising that Edna makes the mistake of entering into an unsuitable marriage and is unprepared for its duty as well.

In the beginning of the novel, Chopin informs readers that Edna becomes a possession owned by her husband, Léonce Pontellier, after her marriage. Léonce highly values his possessions. The narrator points out to the readers that Edna belongs to Mr. Pontellier's possessions, for he looks at his wife "as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property" (3). Here the word choice of "property" is worth noting, for under the American historical context, black slaves were considered as properties of their white masters rather than white women. Sally Mitchell notes that in nineteenth-century Britain, "women also were property ... in the eyes of the courts, she had no separate existence; any legal action she entered had to be taken jointly with her husband, and under his name ... For a woman to control her own body—to dispose of it or authorize its use as she saw fit—interfered with the property rights of her husband or father" (xi). Mitchell here is

referring to the British laws in the nineteenth-century, and she expresses a similar idea that women were sometimes considered as "property" in the nineteenth-century. De Beauvoir mentions in *The Second Sex* that in marriage woman becomes man's "vassal": "She takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his 'half' " (449). By noting that Edna's status as one beautiful piece of her husband's possessions, Chopin expresses the similar view half a century earlier that it is quite possible for woman to become man's "property" or vassal in marriage in nineteenth-century America.

Before Edna's awakening,[92] she behaves just like a conventional married woman of her own class. For example, she smiles and waves when her husband leaves for business, and exclaims happily like a child when she receives money from her husband to buy gifts. However, when Edna starts to awaken, she has a series of confrontations with her husband. These confrontations are crucial to sense the growing dissatisfaction the protagonist feels toward her marriage and prevailing doctrine of self-sacrifice on the part of wives. Theriot notes that "[t]he necessity of female self-sacrifice, womanly submission, and the equation of self with gender role was part of the gender script" for middle-class women (62). After her initial awakening, however, Edna does not want to submit to her husband's will all the time any more. In her first confrontation with her husband, she insists on staying outside on a hammock instead of sleeping inside the house as requested by her husband. "This is more than folly," he [Léonce] blurted out. "I can't permit you to stay out there all night. You must come in the house instantly" (47). Léonce uses the word "permit" as if giving an order. Different from previous cases in which Edna would submit to his command, this time Edna insists on her own free will. "Edna began to feel

like one who awakens gradually out of a dream, a delicious, grotesque, impossible dream, to feel again the realities pressing into her soul" (48). In the process of awakening, Edna starts to shake off her responsibility and leans more toward her autonomy. She follows her impulse, and frees her "soul of responsibility" (49). The grip of domestic duty, required to fulfil the role of the angel in the house, has been loosened upon her. In this respect, Edna is similar to Cassandra Morgeson; both follow their instincts.[93] It seems that both Stoddard and Chopin believe that free will is essential to the discovery of self.

Edna's second confrontation with her husband reveals her inner revolt against the inequality of marriage in a patriarchal society where a woman's free will is often trampled upon. Nancy Theriot notes that in nineteenth-century America "[y]oung women learned, from the culture at large and from their own family situations, to expect little emotional support or understanding from men. The role of the male in the family involved work, or worldly orientation, and patriarchal control within the household" (67-68). During her second stage of awakening, Edna finds the duty of receiving guests on Tuesday afternoon troublesome. She has to wear a formal reception gown and remain in the drawing-room the entire afternoon receiving visitors. Previously Edna has "religiously" followed this practice for six years of her marriage. But now she decides to ignore such a practice. Lawrence Thornton accurately summarizes Edna's rebellion against the practice as: "for her, marriage has come to seem like only one more convention within the myriad social forms that have become oppressive to her" (94). The act of stamping her heel on her wedding ring is symbolic, showing Edna's anger and the oppression she feels within the bounds of marriage. "Once she stopped, and taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel

upon it, striving to crush it" (80). During her process of waking up, Edna gradually rids herself of her reserve, and becomes honest with her own emotions. She dares to display a range of emotions such as anger and passion, and to rebel against conventions and rules that govern a married woman. Blind submission to her husband's will is replaced by the exercising of her free will. In other words, Edna is no longer the passive and submissive angel in the house.

Mr. Pontellier uses the conventional moral codes to reprimand Edna. He thinks it "the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family" (87). However, Edna is unrelenting. Mr. Pontellier can only make sense of his wife's changes by assuming she may be "mentally unbalance". The narrator comments: "He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world" (87). Here Chopin does not take sides with the prevailing Victorian notion of woman's duty to family and community, or to condemn Edna's wilfulness and lack of sense of responsibility; rather, she points out that Edna is breaking away from the bondage of Victorian ideology and learning to become truthful to her own self day by day. Notice in the lines quoted above, Chopin uses the word "we" instead of "she". Here Chopin is not only talking about Edna, but about women in general. She is honest and daring to point out that to some women, marriage may not be the suited path of life, such as in the case of Edna Pontiller.

Chopin is not the first woman writer to have raised questions about the suitability of marriage for certain portions of the female population. Nancy Theriot points

out that women writers such as Catharine Sedgwick and Elizabeth Oakes Smith have also noted the unhappiness in some marriages in nineteenth-century America. Sedgwick notes that her sister's marriage is not "congenial", while Smith observes that many women are not "content" in their marriage (Theriot 69). Going through Chopin's short stories, Allen Stein argues that there are only two options for wives in Chopin's stories, neither of which is appealing: "They can submit, yielding to a husband and, indeed, to an institution that deny them anything approximating autonomy of thought, desire, or action, or they can rebel, only to find their rebellion short-lived and futile, as nothing in their experience or social context encourages the sort of personal latitude and growth for which they long" (8). Although Stein is commenting on Chopin's short stories, his opinion fits Edna's experience in her married life as well.

Chopin is careful to suggest that there is still confusion and uncertainty in Edna's understanding of selfhood in her second stage of awakening. Recognizing that she has deviated from the acceptable model of life for a married bourgeois woman, Edna reflects upon her sense of self as follows:

> "One of these days," she said, "I'm going to pull myself together for a while and think--try to determine what character of a woman I am; for, candidly, I don't know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can't convince myself that I am. I must think about it." (126-127)

Edna realizes that according to Victorian morality that emphasizes the sacred roles of wife and mother, she has broken the moral codes by abandoning her domestic duty, searching for liberty and self, and developing affairs outside marriage. At the same time,

however, Edna fails to foresee the harsh pressure from the society on her yet. "Chopin ... reveals the limits of the late nineteenth century's definitions of selfhood. At its base, such a self affirms an ego, an I, that is only and always in control. Such a self is ever subject, never subjected to its responsibilities and relations to others, as women inevitably are" (Ewell 164). Ewell accurately summarizes the difficulty women generally face in the late nineteenth-century. When women are traditionally considered as selfless, the quest for selfhood is bound to be arduous and confusing.

Edna's claim to autonomy is also reflected in her changed view toward marriage. In the beginning of the novel, she is thinking of buying a gift for her sister's wedding. After her first stage of awakening, Edna forms a radical view toward the institution of marriage. She considers marriage hideous, as robbing a woman of her freedom; and refuses to attend her sister's wedding. She now considers wedding "one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth" (102). Ann Heilmann thinks Edna's "staunch refusal to attend her sister's wedding completes this process of externalized feminist rebellion, for it calls into question not simply her own marriage but the very principle of marriage" (95). Edna's father is a figure of patriarchy, who believes authority and coercion are needed to manage a wife. In the novel, "The Colonel [Edna's father] reproached his daughter for her lack of filial kindness and respect, her want of sisterly affection and womanly consideration" (109). Chopin, obviously, is averse to the view presented by the Colonel, as she adds a line sarcastically in the later part of the paragraph: "The Colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his own wife into her grave" (109).

A woman's loss of her free will in the context of marriage is a theme that Chopin has paid particular attention to. Before writing *The Awakening*, Chopin published several

short stories centring on a woman's loss of free will. "The Story of an Hour", Chopin's most well-known short piece, fully emphasizes the suffering at the loss of free will and the desire for freedom for her married woman character. The protagonist, Mrs. Mallard, feels monstrous joy over the news of her husband's death. "She said it over and over under her breath: 'free, free, free!' " (353). On this part of the story, Richard Fusco comments: "Chopin presents us with an uncensored account of emotions and desires that a human being often hides from others—and sometimes suppresses within himself/[herself]" (153). The quoted paragraph above shows Mrs. Mallard's awareness of the lack of autonomy caused by her marriage. Barbara Ewell explains that "[a]s Chopin often insists, love is not a substitute for selfhood; indeed, selfhood is love's precondition. Such a strong and unconventional assertion of feminine independence likely explains *Century*'s rejection [of publishing the story]" (89).

Chopin's opposition to the likely loss of free will in the institution of marriage can also be compared with Henrik Ibsen's plays. There is similarity between the protagonists in *The Awakening* and *A Doll's House*. In Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House* (1879), the protagonist, Nora Helmer, refuses to be the doll for her husband and father anymore, and leaves her marriage. Chopin had read Ibsen's works and was familiar with *A Doll's House*. Like Nora, Edna starts to wake up and refuses to be the doll for her husband or father anymore.

> *A Doll's House* dramatically establishes primary sources of confinement, foremost among these insistence upon the duties of a wife and mother. Concurrent and supportive factors are authoritative males, societal reinforcements, and the solitude of the woman. With some variations,

> especially in intensity, Ibsen explores the impact of these restrictions upon his female protagonists. (Jacob 81)

At the end of the play, Ibsen's Nora chooses her freedom and authenticity over her duties as a wife and mother. "You're [Nora's husband] not to feel yourself bound in any way, and nor shall I. we must both be perfectly free" (Ibsen 231). Chopin's Edna follows a similar path. She is determined to follow no one's will except her own. Both Edna and Nora in the end regard the institution of marriage as one form of confinement, and choose to walk away from this institution, regardless of their future outcomes.

Edna also refuses to be confined by her duty as a mother. While emphasizing that Edna is not a mother-woman, Chopin does not describe Edna as the opposite, i.e. a cold-hearted woman, who has little emotion toward her children. Edna is genuinely fond of spending time with her children. "She lived with them a whole week long, giving them all of herself, and gathering and filling herself with their young existence" (145). However, by the time Edna returns to the city, the thoughts of her children are gone. We are told clearly by the narrator that "She [Edna] was again alone" (146). Children are only part of Edna's existence, and she cannot devote herself totally to them. The refusal to be a devoted mother goes against the Victorian notion of womanhood. Therefore, such characterization and sentiment could not very well be accepted by Victorian critics and readers.

> The parallel between the experiences of Edna Pontellier, as she breaks away from the conventional feminine roles of wife and mother, and Kate Chopin, as she breaks away from conventions of literary domesticity, suggests that Edna's story may also be read as parable of Chopin's literary

> awakening. Both the author and the heroine seem to be oscillating between two worlds, caught between contradictory definitions of femininity and creativity, and seeking either to synthesize them or to go beyond them to an emancipated womanhood and an emancipated fiction. Edna Pontellier's "unfocused yearning" for an autonomous life is akin to Kate Chopin's yearning to write works that go beyond female plots and feminine endings. (Showalter 8-9)

Ann Wood notes that in nineteenth-century America, if women writers wanted to succeed in the market, the contents of their books should be proper and stay "feminine" (6). Chopin, however, does not want to be restricted in her artistic endeavours. She wants to write the truth instead of contrite "feminine" content. The claim for selfhood and autonomy in the novel goes against the ethos of adherence to duty and the spirit of self-sacrificing required on the part of women in nineteenth-century America. The novel, therefore, was considered unhealthy for wives and mothers of Chopin's time. While not openly condemning the institution of marriage, Chopin does point out the sense of suffocation experienced by her women characters.

As mentioned earlier, the idea of the New Woman entered into history around 1890s. Given the "shocking" content of *The Awakening*, there are people who try to look at Chopin as a New Woman writer. But according to several biographers, Chopin can not really be regarded as a feminist. She stayed away from political organizations for women's movement[94] in general. Moreover, according to Per Seyersted, Chopin herself would probably "regarded the New World feminists as unrealistic" (102). Likewise, Nancy Walker agrees with Seyersted by stating that there is little evidence suggesting

that Kate Chopin had ever considered herself as a New Woman. Walker, however, stresses that Chopin did depart significantly from the domestic novel of her predecessors in that *The Awakening* "questions both the fulfillment of marriage and the universality of woman's maternal instinct" (20). In other words, Chopin has realized the possible confinement marriage can impose on women, and thus raised questions about it. Nevertheless, her attitude toward the institution of marriage remains ambivalent in that she has neither openly glorified nor condemned it.

A Room of One's Own: Physical Space, Economy and Entrapment

In her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf advocates the idea of a room of one's own for women in general. The image of a room of one's own can be understood both physically as well as metaphorically. The room can refer to a private room at home where a woman can think and write freely. The room also implies financial security. Woolf points to the fact that women have been poor over the centuries. They can throughout history neither make money nor keep money legally by law.[95] Woolf therefore stresses the importance of financial security, and considers it indispensible for forming a female self. She claims: "[G]ive her a room of her own and five hundred [pounds] a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half that she now puts in, and she will write a better book one of these days" (142). Woolf thinks that self-reliance plus financial independence will enable a woman to fully tap into her artistic potential and achieve her identity.

In *The Awakening*, Chopin describes the protagonist's longing for more physical space (physical space other than her home) in the beginning of the novel. Chopin sets Edna's first stage of waking up in the background of Grand Isle, which is an island away from her home in New Orleans. "Sailing across the bay to the *Cheniere Caminada*, Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening--had snapped the night before when the mystic spirit was abroad, leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails" (51-52). Here the chains can refer to duties as mother and wife for Edna. As she is away from home, in particular from husband and children, Edna feels "free to drift". B. Ewell thinks that a central theme of Chopin's novel is to show how hard it is for an individual, especially female, to achieve personal integrity within conventional restraints. She may be right to claim that Edna poses as the "uncertain figure" (143) of the conflict between self and society. The experience at the island foreshadows Edna's longing for more room for the development of self.

The dénouement of Edna's second stage of awakening is marked by Edna's plan of moving out of her big house. The idea of moving away appears more like a caprice than a well-thought-out plan to Edna. Mademoiselle Reisz feels confused at Edna's desire to move away, so does Edna herself. However, instinctively, she longs to leave her husband's house.

> Neither was it quite clear to Edna herself; but it unfolded itself as she sat for a while in silence. Instinct had prompted her to put away her husband's bounty in casting off her allegiance. She did not know how it would be when he returned. There would have to be an understanding, an

> explanation. Conditions would some way adjust themselves, she felt; but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself. (123)

Instinctively Edna feels moving away is the way she can belong to herself. She can truly own her self and space. Deborah Barker thinks Edna's plan suggests her wish to seek alternative space of femininity: "She desires the 'little glimpses of life denied to most women' " (75). In the novel Edna walks unchaperoned in the alleys of New Orleans to see and explore the city and life. She asserts her independence by finally moving to the pigeon house and eventually has a place of her own.

Moving into the pigeon house symbolizes a crucial step Edna takes toward her independence. Edna does not consult her husband's opinion on the matter. She simply quits her home on Esplanade Street and moves into the little house around the block. "A feverish anxiety attended her every action in that direction. There was no moment of deliberation, no interval of repose between the thought and its fulfillment ... Within the precincts of her home she felt like one who has entered and lingered within the portals of some forbidden temple in which a thousand muffled voices bade her begone" (129). Occupying a place of her own provides Edna with a strange sensation. The longing in her heart urges her to move out, and to be solely on her own in a little house fills her with a curious sense of fulfilment. The narrator is careful to note that the urge of moving comes from the protagonist's inner drive instead of any deliberate or lengthy thoughts. The act itself is instinctive. Earlier the narrator compares Edna to a sleek animal waking up. It seems that urge to have a place of her own comes more from instinct and sensibility than reason.

Chopin explores the theme of "a room of one's own" some twenty years earlier than Virginia Woolf. In the novel, Chopin penetrates Edna's feeling toward her pigeon house as follows:

> The pigeon house pleased her. It at once assumed the intimate character of a home, while she herself invested it with a charm which it reflected like a warm glow. There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to "feed upon opinion" when her own soul had invited her. (144)

Here Chopin explicitly talks about Edna's choice between duty and autonomy. Edna relieves "herself from obligations", grows stronger and freer, and lives as "an individual". She is no longer bounded by social opinions, but follows her heart's yearnings. There are some differences between Chopin's and Woolf's notions of a room of one's own. To Chopin, a room of one's own enables one to find and realize selfhood. To Woolf, however, she emphasizes more the literary endeavour a woman can achieve in an independent space: "a locker on the door means the power to think for oneself" (160). Woolf thinks that the freedom to think and write is essential to produce good literary works. Despite the different focus of emphasis, both Chopin and Woolf realize the necessity of individual freedom and space for woman, and in particular the woman artist, to better understand self and improve her art.

Edna's move, or newfound independence, however, is not without its problems. Although having some resources of her own, Edna's income is not enough to provide her with a comfortable life at the small house. She has to rely on her husband's resources. Edna gives an extravagant farewell dinner before her moving with her best of everything--"crystal, silver and gold, Sevres, flowers, music, and champagne to swim in" (131). She tells Arobin: "I'll let Léonce pay the bills. I wonder what he'll say when he sees the bills" (131). In other words, there is not enough financial basis for her independence. Her new found autonomy is only partial. Sadly Edna fails to perceive it. Similarly in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878), Anna's husband, Karenin, accuses Anna of having a lover while still eating her husband's bread.[96] Both Leo Tolstoy and Kate Chopin seem to point out that without adequate economic resources, the fulfilment of self for a woman is unachievable.

Edna asserts her regality or dominance as an independent person during her farewell dinner before her departure. It is a luxurious dinner. Amid the sumptuous feast, Edna behaves as if she is a queen. She wears a magnificent cluster of diamonds sparkling in her hair, over the centre of her forehead. Edna makes no effort to hide that the diamonds are a birthday present from her husband. Even though Edna tries to carve out a totally new space for herself, she seems reluctant to fully relinquish the former comforts associated with her husband. This leads one to question Edna's new independence. Is it real or only superficial? Chopin gives out detailed descriptions of Edna's outfit during the dinner, which reflects the character's inner world: "The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her ... There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread

her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" (138). Similar to Stoddard, Chopin pays attention to the details and descriptions of women's appearance. Although the approach of describing a woman's outward appearance to reflect her inner world and thoughts is not new, interestingly both Stoddard and Chopin resort to this method. The last sentence, "the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" is crucial here. It reflects Edna's feeling at the moment. She is going to rule, look on, and stand alone in her new place. The autonomy and authority she has over the new chapter of her life makes her elated, gives her a sense of being in control, and makes her feel almost like a queen. The sentence also reminds one of Sylvia Plath's famous lines from her poem "Sting" (1962): "They thought death was worth it, but I / I have a self to recover, a queen" (66). Plath's poem was written over half a century later than Chopin's novel. Both pieces of works are concerned with the discovery of a woman's selfhood. Both Chopin and Plath refer to a woman's independence and self-rule to that of a queen. Plath's poem gives readers hope of success; whereas in Chopin's novel, the protagonist's feeling of queen-ship is temporary and fleeting.

Chopin suggests that Edna's feeling of being in control is only temporary and unreal. Amid her guests, Edna, however, is still assailed by a sense of hopelessness. "But as she sat there amid her guests, she felt the old ennui overtaking her; the hopelessness which so often assailed her, which came upon her like an obsession, like something extraneous, independent of volition" (138). Here the tone of the narrator is depressing, which implies pessimism toward Edna's success of attaining an autonomous self.[97] By

mentioning the recurring and inescapable hopelessness, the narrator implies Edna's eventual failure of procuring her independence and happiness.

Private Sphere (The Female Body) and Entrapment

The relationship between the female body and entrapment is explored from the following two angles: bodily sensations and woman's biology. It should be stressed that the female body can be viewed both in positive and negative terms, i.e. the female body can be both confining and liberating. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir notes the ambivalence with which a woman looks at her body. She thinks that the body is a burden for a woman: "worn away in service to the species, bleeding each month" (630). Susan Bordo, on the other hand, suggests the positive aspect of the female body. She thinks that the experience of a woman's control over her own body can be "liberating" (2365), and enable her to achieve a sense of selfhood.

Bodily Sensations and Entrapment

Chopin associates Edna's awakening with bodily movements and sensations, such as swimming, sleeping, hunger, etc. In the beginning of the novel, readers are told that Edna has attempted to learn swimming all summer without any success. She has received instructions from both men and women, and sometimes even from children. However, Edna is impeded by a certain dread of water, and she does not feel safe "unless there was

a hand near by that might reach out and reassure her" (41). But one night, she suddenly wishes to go to the beach. The narrator tells readers that "[i]n short, 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. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight-- perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman" (19). From the above sentences, one can see that the female protagonist is viewed by the narrator as an autonomous individual who needs to reflect upon her own connection within herself and with the universe.

Edna gains a sense of control over her body through acquiring the art of swimming. On the very night after hearing Mademoiselle Reisz's music, she ventures into the ocean alone like a tottering child.

> But that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence. She could have shouted for joy. She did shout for joy, as with a sweeping stroke or two she lifted her body to the surface of the water. A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. (41)

The ability to swim gives Edna a new found confidence in her own capacities. She finally conquers her fear, leaves her comfort zone, and learns the joy of swimming solo. Chopin

describes the whole process vividly, and notes that Edna begins to wish to "swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (41). Later in the novel, Edna does venture into territory not treaded or not wished to be treaded by other women, such as in her pursuit of an independent selfhood and love outside her marriage.

Chopin carefully preserves and emphasizes Edna's independence in the act of swimming. After learning how to swim, Edna does not join other people in the groups; instead, she swims out alone, "intoxicated with her newly conquered power" (42). She feels that she is gradually waking up to some newly gained strength and territory. Ann Heilman thinks "Edna's midnight swim is much more than a victory of physical coordination. It establishes her sense of self-ownership, physical, mental and spiritual, which in turn triggers two fundamental insights that determine her progression from disengaged wife to autonomous subject" (87). The symbolic connection between swimming and self-determination is crucial. It explains the reason why Chopin spends lengthy paragraphs dwelling upon the subject of swimming for the protagonist. Swimming both marks and aids the protagonist's progress toward her autonomy.

In Edna's initial stage of awakening, one character cannot be ignored, i.e. Robert Lebrun. He facilitates Edna's awakening and understands the sensation and emotion the latter undergoes. Robert is a young fellow of Creole background. He devotes himself gallantly to a fair dame or damsel each summer at the Grand Isle. This summer, he devotes himself to attending to Edna. On the night when Edna begins to awake, she confides in Robert: "A thousand emotions have swept through me to-night. I don't comprehend half of them ... It is like a night in a dream. The people about me are like some uncanny, half- human beings. There must be spirits abroad to-night" (43). Edna

cannot understand her emotion or sense of self at the time; the narrator, however, informs readers that Robert has penetrated her mood and understood. In the silence between Edna and Robert when they are alone, the narrator suggests: "No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire" (46). Commenting on the function of Robert, B. Ewell thinks that Robert serves as catalyst to Edna's awakening. The scene with Edna and Robert sitting in silence suggests that change have occurred within the protagonist without her clear awareness. Here Chopin associates the spiritual awakening with bodily sensations, such as swimming. In other words, to Chopin, the body and soul is inter-connected. Bodily sensations can lead to the awakening of soul.

Apart from swimming, the narrator also lists other bodily sensations that further lead to Edna's awakening, in particular sleeping and hunger. Chopin literarily let her protagonist sleep and wake up to find herself a changed person. Due to physical exhaustion, Edna takes a rest and a nap at a resident's house on the island.

> She looked at her round arms as she held them straight up and rubbed them one after the other, observing closely, as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh. She clasped her hands easily above her head, and it was thus she fell asleep. She slept lightly at first, half awake and drowsily attentive to the things about her ...When Edna awoke it was with the conviction that she had slept long and soundly... Her eyes were bright and wide awake and her face glowed. (55-57)

Chopin does not shy away from talking about the sensations of the flesh. Commenting on the Victorian culture, Gilbert and Gubar note: "Learning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns anxiety about—perhaps even loathing of—her own flesh" (54). In the paragraph quoted above, Edna examines the texture of her flesh "as if it were something she saw for the first time". Toward the end of the novel, similar moments occur when Edna examines her own body again. To Chopin, flesh or body is something to be appreciated instead of loathed. She thereby associates the body with the sense of selfhood. Edna is both literarily and metaphorically awakened from a dream, i.e. her past. When she wakes up, she is a new person with bright eyes and glowing face. Barbara Ewell argues that "[f]undamental to Edna's self-awakening is the recognition of her physical being" (144). This again touches the inseparableness of body and soul. Edna has gained a new understanding and recognition of both her body and her autonomy. The narrator suggests that although Edna only takes a short nap, her attitude and outlook on life have undergone tremendous transformations.

Apart from bodily sensations such as sleepiness, Chopin also writes about hunger for her protagonist. Similar to Stoddard, Chopin likewise associates the physical hunger with spiritual yearning. Hunger follows the protagonist through her entire stage of wakening up till her death.

> When she had completed her toilet she walked into the adjoining room. She was very hungry. No one was there. But there was a cloth spread upon the table that stood against the wall, and a cover was laid for one, with a crusty brown loaf and a bottle of wine beside the plate. Edna

bit a piece from the brown loaf, tearing it with her strong, white teeth. She poured some of the wine into the glass and drank it down. (55-56)

Chopin describes in detail Edna's hunger for food. Some suggests that the loaf and wine Edna consumes in the above paragraph resemble the act of Holy Communion; therefore, it can be viewed as a passage of rite to the newly awakened self. Susan Bordo notes that the self-sacrificing nature of femininity is best exemplified in the control of female appetite for food. "The rules for this construction of femininity (and I speak here in a language both symbolic and literal) require that women learn to feed others, not the self, and to construe any desires for self-nurturance and self-feeding as greedy and excessive" (2367). Here Bordo associates the female appetite for food metaphorically to the desire of self-nurturance and hope in life.

In *The Awakening*, Chopin repeatedly emphasizes Edna's hunger during her process of waking up. During the mid-length of the novel, Edna is hungry again after one dinner. "She rummaged in the larder and brought forth a slice of Gruyere and some crackers. She opened a bottle of beer which she found in the icebox" (115). Chopin links Edna's restlessness and excitement with her hunger for food. "She [Edna] wanted something to happen--something, anything; she did not know what" (116). In addition, toward the end of the novel before Edna's suicide, she once more returns to Grand Isle. Before going to the water, she sends Victor Lebrun to fetch her some food, for she is very hungry. It seems hunger accompanies Edna's whole process of awakening till her death. The act of hunger for food betrays Edna's hunger for hope in life. Earlier the narrator mentions that Edna hopes for something to happen, yet she does not know what exactly

she longs for. Edna's hope for the fulfilment of love and freedom cannot be realized. The insatiable hunger accompanies her till her disillusionment and death.

Similarly, in one of Chopin's short story "A Respectable Woman", Chopin also associates her character's emotion with hunger. "With her sharp white teeth she tore the far corner from the letter, where the name was written; she bit the torn scrap and tasted it between her lips and upon her tongue like some god-given morsel" (399). In this short story, Chopin tries to describe her female character's passion for her ex-lover by literally letting the character eat pieces of her lover's letter as if it were food that could satiate her hunger for passion. In other words, Chopin is comfortable to establish the link between hunger and emotional expression for her fictional characters. As mentioned earlier, the female body can be viewed by feminist critics as both confining and liberating. The bodily sensations described by Chopin here confirm the liberating side of the female body.

Female Biology and Entrapment

One can also inspect Chopin in regard to woman's biology so as to understand the relationship between the female body and entrapment in her work. In this section, three aspects of female biology will be examined: mental illness,[98] sexuality, and pregnancy. First, mental illness plays an important part in contributing to the entrapment of the

protagonist. As early as the beginning of the novel, one can get a sense of the protagonist's unstable mood. Although retaining an image of a happy wife, Edna sometimes bursts into tears for no apparent reason. The omniscient narrator tells readers that Edna at the time cannot very well understand her own emotions:

> The tears came so fast to Mrs. Pontellier's eyes that the damp sleeve of her *peignoir* no longer served to dry them. She was holding the back of her chair with one hand; her loose sleeve had slipped almost to the shoulder of her uplifted arm. Turning, she thrust her face, steaming and wet, into the bend of her arm, and she went on crying there, not caring any longer to dry her face, her eyes, her arms. She could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. (9)

The narrator offers some clue to Edna's depressed mood. As readers, we learn that "[a]n indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood" (9). The "indescribable oppression" in the above sentences quoted from the novel can be linked to Edna's lack in autonomy to exercise her free will. Edna's condition can be attributed to the modern medical term depression. According to Dianne Hales, "the disease of depression persists and deepens over several weeks or months. No bad mood feels quite so miserable, lasts so long, or seems so endless …depression affects the body as well as the mind, trapping its victims in a bleak cocoon of hopelessness and helplessness" (18). In *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler notes that for women,

"depression" rather than "aggression" is often their response to disappointment or loss in life (102).

Being a full-time housewife, Edna's depressed mood fits into Betty Friedan's description in her book *The Feminine Mystique* which was written more than half a century after *The Awakening*. Friedan's calls the illness or neuroses as "the problem that has no name".

> I talked to women who had spent years on the analyst's couch, working out their "adjustment to the feminine role," their blocks to "fulfillment as a wife and mother." But the desperate tone in these women's voices, and the look in their eyes, was the same as the tone and the look of other women, who were sure they had no problem, even though they did have a strange feeling of desperation. (Friedan 21)

The women Friedan refers to are middle-class housewives who lived in American suburban areas in the middle of the twentieth century. Friedan points out that these women are not sure about their identity, namely, "who am I" (21). One of Friedan's arguments sounds extremely like the comments on Edna's feeling in *The Awakening*: "How can any woman see the whole truth within the bounds of her own life? How can she believe that voice inside herself, when it denies the conventional, accepted truths by which she has been living?" (31). Therefore, in her book, Friedan calls people to pay more attention to the voice within women who are not fulfilled solely by the roles of wife and mother: "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home" (32). Friedan suggests work or career as a solution to the despondency and depression suffered by these suburban wives, and she also argues that work can help housewives

define their identities other than wives and mothers. In *The Awakening*, Edna turns to painting, which can be construed as a type of part-time work or career. By turning to art and moving out her home, Edna starts to embark on a quest for self. From another angle, Chopin has touched "the problem that has no name" half a century ahead of Friedan. To put it another way, the problem Chopin describes in her novel has persisted across the centuries.

By leading her life according to her caprice and free will, Edna feels both liberated and confused. There are days she feels very happy and days she is very unhappy. And she does not know the reasons for her mood swing. Chopin describes Edna's state as follows:

> She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day ... And she found it good to dream and to be alone and unmolested. There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why,-- when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. (88-89)

Edna is awakened from her ignorant and conforming mind. But such enlightenment comes at a cost. By waking up to the beauty and hope of life, Edna also has to face the possibility of despondency and futility of life. Edna's alternating state between happiness and unhappiness shows both the benefits and curses of enlightenment. Edna's eyes are

opened by her awakening and the newly gained knowledge, but it breeds discontentment and grief as well.

In Edna's process of waking up, Mr. Pontellier's apprehension over her, from another angle, confirms her change and quest for autonomy. Mr. Pontellier is so disturbed at his wife's change that he goes to seek the family physician, Doctor Mandelet. Mr. Pontellier is conscious that something is wrong with his wife, but he is unable to pinpoint the problem. "'Yes, yes; she seems quite well,' said Mr. Pontellier ... 'but she doesn't act well. She's odd, she's not like herself. I can't make her out, and I thought perhaps you'd help me'" (100). Chopin herself had been intimate friends with her family physician; therefore, it is not surprising that Doctor Mandelet has been portrayed as an understanding physician who comprehends Edna better than the rest of the people in the novel.

> "Pontellier," said the Doctor, after a moment's reflection, "let your wife alone for a while. Don't bother her, and don't let her bother you. Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism--a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife, due to some cause or causes which you and I needn't try to fathom. But it will pass happily over, especially if you let her alone. Send her around to see me." (101-102)

Doctor Mandelet at first cannot but fall into the "conventional wisdom" of viewing women as a "peculiar and delicate" sex and prone to unsteady moods and changing whims. Nevertheless, he is wise to suggest Mr. Pontellier that he should try to give his wife enough space. In the nineteenth-century, a considerable number of women were diagnosed as having mood disorders or even committed to hospital, as suggested by E. Showalter in *The Female Malady*. Jane Wood also notes that the term "hysteria" rose to a new prominence in nineteenth century America: "[h]ysteria, the archetypal female nervous disorder, rose to a new prominence in the nineteenth century as a condition whose clinical criteria could be modified in order to diagnose all the behaviors which did not fit the prescribed model of Victorian womanhood" (12). Is a woman mad if she does not conform to the conventional ideology of her time? Chopin does not use medical science as a means of persecution in the novel for her women characters, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman does in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892); nevertheless, she points out the psychological changes of a woman when she tries to disregard social conventions in order to discover her authentic self.

Edna's alternating mood is symbolically associated with the weather, which may lead one to suspect if it has something to do with seasonal affective disorder (SAD).[99]

> When the weather was dark and cloudy Edna could not work. She needed the sun to mellow and temper her mood to the sticking point ... On rainy or melancholy days Edna went out and sought the society of the friends she had made at Grand Isle. Or else she stayed indoors and nursed a mood with which she was becoming too familiar for her own comfort and peace of mind. It was not despair; but it seemed to her as if life were passing by,

> leaving its promise broken and unfulfilled. Yet there were other days when she listened, was led on and deceived by fresh promises which her youth held out to her. (112-113)

The narrator's pessimism toward her protagonist's chance of success is shown in the paragraph quoted above. Although these sentences appear in two thirds of the novel, one can already foresee the tragic ending of the story. Edna's mood alternates between hope and despondency. Edna's despondency reminds one of the two sisters in *The Morgesons*. Feeling that she has failed in her quest for selfhood, Cassandra falls into despondency while facing the sea. Veronica, on the other hand, suffers illness and mood swings intermittently in her growing up.

Edna's mood, if taken seriously, may also be labelled by using the modern medical term bi-polar depression.[100] This leads one to question why they were so many mental illnesses among women in the nineteenth-century. Elaine Showalter points out that in nineteenth century Britain, mental illness was so much more common among females than males that the illness was termed as "the female malady". According to Phyllis Chesler, most women committed to asylums in nineteenth century America were not "insane" (62). It is difficult to explain exactly why mental illnesses were found more prevalent among women than men. However, one explanation can be linked to the pervasive feeling of entrapment and vulnerability felt by women. Unable to change the worlds they are trapped in, both Edna and Cassandra suffer from hopeless despondency. Indeed, *The Awakening* and *The Morgesons* show one difference sometimes occurring between male and female writers, i.e. women writers tend to dive deeper into the emotional realms of their female characters.[101] The unstable moods imply problems with

Edna's present state of life. In the novel the narrator suggests that Edna is not striving toward accomplishment; rather, she draws satisfaction from the process of working itself. Without a clear purpose and blindly following her own caprices, Edna has not benefitted greatly from the autonomy she gains toward a clear understanding of selfhood.

Robert's return from Mexico further aggravates Edna's unstable mood. His return both gives Edna hope and quickens her death. The disappointment with Robert's failing to call on her causes Edna to fall prey to her oscillating moods. "Each morning she awoke with hope, and each night she was a prey to despondency" (160). Edna believes she has the right to choose the man she loves without moral judgment or the duty caused by her marriage.

> The morning was full of sunlight and hope. Edna could see before her no denial--only the promise of excessive joy ... She felt she had been childish and unwise the night before in giving herself over to despondency. She recapitulated the motives which no doubt explained Robert's reserve. They were not insurmountable; they would not hold if he really loved her; they could not hold against her own passion, which he must come to realize in time ... But how delicious it would be to have him there with her! She would have no regrets, nor seek to penetrate his reserve if he still chose to wear it. (159)

Edna fails to realize that her despondency is not entirely caused by the absence of Robert; it is also due to her confusion about the world and her place in it. Edna tries to use love and passion to dilute her despondency toward life, which only plunges her into deeper despair in the future. The narrator comments that all sense of reality has gone out of

Edna's present life, and she abandons herself to Fate, "and awaited the consequences with indifference" (160).

One of the ultimate and most devastating consequences of depression is to attempt suicide and the possibility of death.[102] Edna, ultimately, chooses this solution. Edna is set free by her awakening, yet her awakening leads her to depression. One can argue that depression may have existed before Edna's awakening, but her awakening certainly worsens her condition, making it unbearable for her, which finally leads to her voluntary choice of death. Is Edna's death a triumph of her free will against the entrapment she feels, or is it a consequence of her depression and hopelessness? Chopin remains ambivalent about offering a definite answer, which is consistent with the ambivalent stance she assumes in her works.

Apart from writing on entrapment caused by mental illness, Chopin has also touched upon woman's sexuality in her novel. Unlike Chopin's contemporary critics who criticized the novel for its immorality, Chopin in effect does not present sexuality as a way out of the present predicament for women characters in her novel. Thus, it can be assumed that Chopin does not think that the liberation of sexuality or lust can liberate woman from her confinement; instead, it can plunge woman deeper into her confusion and disillusionment. In the novel, Edna is blinded both by her infatuation with Robert and her lust with Arobin.

Infatuation traps Edna in her own daydreaming. When explaining to Mademoiselle Reisz's her love for Robert, Edna says: "Because his [Robert's] hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his

nose is a little out of drawing; because he has two lips and a square chin, and a little finger which he can't straighten from having played baseball too energetically in his youth" (125). Here Edna talks about her love as if she were sixteen. Blinded by her infatuation, Edna fails to notice the ordinary calibre of Robert. In other words, Edna fails to realize that Robert is in essence no different from her husband in that he too follows conventional Victorian ideology regarding marriage and women. Edna's failure in discerning the incompatibility between herself and Robert as well as her ignorance of reality and social pressures doom her quest for love.

Moreover, Edna falls prey to the temptation of Arobin. Chopin purposely introduces the character of Arobin in two-thirds of the structure of the novel, in order to disrupt Edna's new-found solitude and autonomy. Alcée Arobin is a notorious womanizer. "He was a familiar figure at the race course, the opera, the fashionable clubs. There was a perpetual smile in his eyes, which seldom failed to awaken a corresponding cheerfulness in any one who looked into them and listened to his good-humored voice" (113). Before meeting Edna, he has had other affairs with married women. Arobin tries to seduce Edna with sugar-coated comments and sensuality, which the narrator sarcastically comments as: "Alcée Arobin's manner was so genuine that it often deceived even himself" (119).

It should be noted that before writing *The Awakening*, Chopin also wrote several short stories on the theme of triangular or extra-marital affairs, such as "A Respectable Woman". As mentioned before, Chopin's courage to pick up these topics may be in part influenced by her reading of French writers, such as Flaubert and de Maupassant. Chopin's short stories have led her to contemplate the emotional aspects of married

women, and prepared in particular for unveiling the complicated aspects of Edna's emotional life in *The Awakening*.

The character, Arobin, in someway reminds one of another notorious womanizer, Rodolphe Boulanger, in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). Both men are similar in age; both are shrewd, lustful, and experienced in seducing women. Being familiar with French literature and language, Chopin has read some of Flaubert's works. In *The Awakening*, the narrator comments: "Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse" (119). This suggests Edna's confusion toward relationships, and implies her future ruin. Edna falls prey to sensuality induced by Arobin, although she knows Arobin means nothing for her. Edna longs for Robert, yet the latter is far away from her in Mexico. Likewise in *Madame Bovary*, Emma Bovary, the protagonist, falls under the spell of Rodolphe even though she misses another man, Léon, who is away in Paris.

Edna substitutes her longing for Robert with Arobin, just like Emma who substitutes her longing for Léon with Rodolphe. Arobin fills the void left by Robert. "They became intimate and friendly by imperceptible degrees, and then by leaps. He sometimes talked in a way that astonished her at first and brought the crimson into her face; in a way that pleased her at last, appealing to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her" (120). Chopin uses the word "animalism" in the above paragraph, which might link her to naturalism. It is known Chopin read and was impressed by Darwin's theory of evolution. Bert Bender notes that Chopin revered Darwin, and believed his theory of evolution in *The Origin of Species*; however, Chopin disagrees with Darwin's view on the inferiority of women in sexual selection: "his theory of the female's modesty,

her passivity in the sex drama as a creature without desire" (Bender 100). In other words, Darwin's view is similar to the Victorian morals on the passivity or passionlessness of women, which Chopin does not agree with. Moreover, there are contradictions within the Victorian notion of womanhood. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg notes:

> Woman, Victorian society dictated, was to be chaste, delicate, and loving. Yet her Victorian contemporaries assumed that behind this modest exterior lay a complex network of reproductive organs that controlled her physiology, determined her emotions, and dictated her social role. She was seen, that is, as being both higher and lower, both innocent and animal, pure yet quintessentially sexual. (65)

In the above paragraph, Smith-Rosenberg also uses the term "animal". Here it can only be assumed that Chopin may have caught this contradiction within the prevailing Victorian notion of womanhood. The association with Arobin offers Edna no real autonomy or awareness of self. Arobin's presence acts more like a narcotic on the protagonist. Comparing *The Awakening* with *Madame Bovary*, Per Seyersted suggests that "Edna's revolt against her conventional roles as a wife and mother and against her biological destiny is naturally more representative for the female than the male mind", and he sees *The Awakening* as a woman's reply to a man's *Madame Bovary* (138).

Chopin suggests that Edna's awakening of identity is associated with her awakening of sensuality. Edna eventually yields to Arobin's seduction.

> She felt as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to took upon and comprehend the significance of life, that monster made up of beauty and brutality. But among the conflicting sensations which assailed

her, there was neither shame nor remorse. There was a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips. (128-29)

This is an important paragraph, not far from Edna's eventual suicide. Victorian critics were shocked at Edna's lack of moral judgment on her behaviour. Edna has betrayed her authenticity and heart, and replaced love with physical desire and lust. Avril Horner thinks that"[t]he fact that Chopin's characters often fail in their quests to realize an essence of self anticipates a major preoccupation of twenty-century fiction: that the awakening of the sexual self is often accompanied by a sense of internal division and by feelings of turmoil and alienation" (144-145). Here Horner is commenting on the relationship between female sexuality and authenticity. I agree with Homer's conclusion that the sexual awakening in Chopin's novel only plunges her heroine toward deeper and darker waters.

Edna's autonomy comes at a price both outwardly and inwardly. By moving to the pigeon house alone and associating with Arobin, Edna risks her reputation. Madame Ratignolle warns Edna the danger of associating with Arobin. However, Edna does not seem to mind. Edna at the time has completely abandoned other people's judgments on her. She wants to live an authentic life, truthful to herself. However, Edna is wishful in her thinking. In her time and society, she cannot escape unscathed the societal values and judgments, nor can she abandon her duty completely as a wife and mother, and expect to be left alone. If one looks at the historical background at the time, they will find that the notion of Victorian femininity was encouraged on both sides of the Atlantic. According to Ellen Jordan, in 1868 one speaker at a Social Science Congress in Britain claimed:

"The duties of a wife and mother ... were the noblest ends of a woman's life, and everything that encroached on them ... should be looked on as an evil disease, and utterly eradicated" (54). Similarly, in the novel Madame Ratignolle comments on Edna apprehensively: "In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life" (147). Madame Ratignolle's comment points to the disastrous consequence Edna will run into when she abandons the society's expectations for a married woman.

In addition, Edna's attitude toward her husband and her marriage is problematic. Edna realizes that she made a mistake by marrying her husband, yet she does nothing to fix it. Instead, the loveless marriage becomes the excuse to justify her relationship with Arobin. Edna asserts her autonomy by associating with men she chooses regardless of the bounds of marriage. Such an attitude is problematic and certain to create troubles in a conservative Victorian society. Commenting on Edna's falling prey to her awakening sensuality and becoming another of Arobin's conquests of seduction, Per Seyersted suggests the term "the curse of freedom". Surely he is not the first one to think of it. "What pains Edna is her realization that the idea of the great passion with its lofty, personal attachment, its one-ness with the beloved is largely a fiction, a euphemistic disguise for a basically sexual attraction, an animalistic, impersonal drive" (Seyersted 147). In terms of Edna's awakening, Chopin daringly includes woman's sexuality. It seems to Chopin a person's awakening needs to cover all the areas, both spiritual and physical. However, as mentioned before, Chopin does not suggest that sexual awakening can bring woman true liberation. Therefore, sexual liberation or lust cannot lead Edna out of her sense of entrapment.

The openness of Chopin's texts stems both from her adherence to authenticity and her unwillingness to preach and judge in accordance to the prevailing moral codes. Janet Beer thinks that the cultural imperatives "of Chopin's time and place were in favor of the indissolubility of the marriage contract and the containment of women's sexuality within its boundaries", and "Chopin examines the breaches in those boundaries" in her works (42). Likewise, commenting on Chopin's short stories that touch on women's sexuality, Bernard Koloski states: "It is such a sense of possession, of repossession, that flows through Chopin's short fiction—mostly Southern, mostly rural, mostly poor, mostly female. Chopin offers her readers not an ideology, not a coherent system for remaking the social world, but a strategy, a way of working with what she has, of bringing to life what she knows" (13). Here both Beer and Koloski reiterate Chopin's adherence to authenticity of human existence and her daringness to tread on controversial issues, especially in terms of triangular relationships and extra-marital issues. Whatever Chopin's personal attitude may have been, she is not condemning the characters in her works in either way.

Apart from writing on mental illness and sexuality, Chopin also touches on women's pregnancy and the ensuing labour in *The Awakening*. She purposefully places the scene of labour toward the end of the novel after Edna's full awakening, in order to strengthen its effect on the protagonist. Witnessing the labour of Madame Ratignolle causes Edna to rebel against Nature. The pain suffered by a woman in the process of giving birth causes Edna uneasiness and aversion toward Nature.

> But Madame only set her teeth hard into her under lip, and Edna saw the sweat gather in beads on her white forehead. After a moment or two she uttered a profound sigh and wiped her face with the handkerchief rolled in a ball. She appeared exhausted … Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered. She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go … With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture. (168-169)

Witnessing the scene of labour, Edna is averse to the painful process of birth. She realizes not only the pain associated with birth, but also the futility of new life. Ewell thinks that Edna can abandon her marriage, but she cannot ignore her children: "She can challenge the social obstacles to her new selfhood, but she is powerless against the 'ways of nature' " (152). In other words, Edna is powerless to change the destined course of female biology.

The experience of witnessing Madame Ratignolle's birth causes Edna to reflect on life and her awakening. Edna becomes more entrenched in her belief that nobody has the right to bend another person's will, not even children.

> "The trouble is," sighed the Doctor [Mandelet], grasping her meaning intuitively, "that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no

> account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost."
>
> "Yes," she said. "The years that are gone seem like dreams-- if one might go on sleeping and dreaming--but to wake up and find-- oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life." (171)

The dialogue between the Doctor and Edna again suggests the power of Nature over women. The biological destination of motherhood is irreversible and inevitable. Witnessing the sufferings on the part of women, Edna concludes that it is better to wake up and suffer than to remain ignorant about life and to follow social expectations. Despite all the sufferings and despondency she is subjected to, Edna now realizes that she does not want anything but her own way, unobstructed by anybody's will.

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir touches upon woman's biology, and regards woman's body as one form of confinement. When looking at woman's body, de Beauvoir notes the ambivalence in the way some women regard it. To some women, the body is a burden. De Beauvoir thinks that a woman can interpret her body in a negative way, and feels entrapped by her biology: "She is doomed to repetition, she sees in the future only a duplication of the past ... the cycle of each pregnancy, each flowering, exactly reproduces the one that proceeded. In this play of cyclical phenomena the sole effect of time is a slow deterioration" (610). For de Beauvoir the biological aspect of a woman can be depressing. It seems that a woman's body can doom her to a life of repetition without transcendence.

Julia Kristeva also writes about the challenges a woman's biology, in particular motherhood, poses to a woman's independence of soul. Kristeva thinks that pregnancy can lead to possible entrapment of souls among mothers. She argues that pregnancy fundamentally challenges a woman's sense of self, and it is easy for a woman to become self-effacing toward her child. In order to preserve an independent and creative self, she stresses that woman should not annihilate her "affective, intellectual and professional personality" in the process of maternity (364). Kristeva does not think women in the past had dealt well with the conflict between self and maternity; nevertheless, she is optimistic about the future.

Different from de Beauvoir who considers pregnancy a form of confinement, Kristeva suggests that woman can preserve her selfhood in the process of maternity. Despite different views espoused by feminist critics toward woman's biology, there is the ground for the argument that woman's biology can indeed lead to entrapment, if not necessarily so. Therefore, if a woman fails to deal adequately well with her biology, such as Edna in *The Awakening*, her biology can lead her to a hopeless sense of entrapment.

III. Solutions to End Female Entrapment

This section aims at answering the third question: what solutions have been offered in the novel to free women characters from their entrapment? In *The Awakening*,

Chopin altogether offers three options for her protagonist to break away from her situation of entrapment. The options are art, solitude, and suicide. In this section, I would argue that art and solitude serve as temporary solutions whereas suicide becomes the ultimate resort.

It is through Mademoiselle Reisz's music that Edna is firstly shaken. Edna is fond of music, but Mademoiselle Reisz's music wakes her up from a slumber and infuses her with strong stirs of emotions.

> The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth … But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her. (39)

After Mademoiselle Reisz's play, Edna is unable to speak, and she "pressed the hand of the pianist convulsively" (39). Music is a theme that Chopin is interested in exploring. To Chopin, music has a powerful influence on the human heart. For example, in her short story "With the Violin", Chopin describes a similar experience. "Oh! But it [music] was soft and exquisite, and it sent a quiver through the frame of the poor wretch who heard it… He at the table sat spellbound" (69). The description of the sensations caused by music in the short story is almost exactly like the one felt by Edna. Chopin associates music with the power of enlightenment. In anther short story "Mrs. Mobry's Reason",

through the mouth of one character, Chopin comments on music as: "I feel as if the Truth were going to come to me, some day, through the harmony of it [music]" (73). In *The Awakening,* Edna cannot fathom the exact reason for which Mademoiselle Reisz's music has moved her, but she is stirred and enlightened by her music. Thus, Mademoiselle Reisz's music marks the prelude to Edna's first stage of waking up.

Apart from introducing the powerful auditory quality of art, i.e. music, Chopin also includes the visual aspect of art, i.e. painting. In Edna's second stage of awakening, art facilitates her and gives her a sense of achievement and independence. Edna is able to sell some of her paintings and receive both encouragement and financial rewards. The encouragement from her agent gives Edna confidence in her ability to paint; while the money received from the sales enables Edna to think of renting a house on her own. "I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence" (122). Chopin explicitly uses words such as "freedom" and "independence" to characterize Edna's feeling. Artistic achievement and economic independence can enable a woman to search for an independent self, unencumbered by the roles of wife and mother.

At the same time, however, Chopin makes it clear that in the case of Edna, she cannot become the artist like Mademoiselle Reisz. Edna has neither the talent nor the strength it requires to become a great artist. Initially Edna enjoys dabbling in her spare time. Then she starts to paint. Although she can sell some of her paintings, she knows that her paintings lack the high quality great pieces of art have. Mademoiselle Reisz tells Edna that "[t]he bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth" (127). Mademoiselle Reisz knows the talent, courage, and strength it takes

to truly become a great woman artist. Edna, however, fails to perceive the former's warning, nor to realize the endurance it takes on the road toward artist-hood. Chopin is not the first writer to use the metaphor of the soaring bird. Margaret Fuller in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* has already used the image of a bird with its wings clipped. Although it is unclear whether Chopin had read Fuller or not, in the novel Mademoiselle Reisz's analogy and prediction of a bruised and exhausted weakling fluttering back to earth unfortunately becomes true of Edna's fate in the end. In other words, art is not the feasible and sustainable solution for Edna's independence, either economically or spiritually. It provides the protagonist with an outlet, and no more.

The second option to end Edna's confinement is solitude. *The Awakening* was originally named as "A Solitary Soul". Solitude is a very important theme in the novel. Chopin's thoughts on solitude stem from the influences of both Maupassant and George Sand. Maupassant wrote one short story entitled "Solitude", which embodies the theme that one cannot escape the isolation of self. In the short story, Maupassant comments on the relationship between solitude and love as follows:

> I have endured the anguish of having discovered and understood the solitude in which I live. And I know that nothing can end it; nothing! Whatever we may do or attempt, despite the embraces and transports of love, the hunger of lips, we are always alone.... I feel as if I were sinking day by day into some boundless subterranean depth, with no one near me, no other living soul to clasp my outstretched, groping hands.[103]

In *The Awakening*, Chopin expresses similar sentiments that human beings are essentially alone. Elizabeth Nolan thinks that "[t]oward the end of the novel, Edna Pontellier recognizes the fragility and impermanence of human relationships" (122), and she comments on the difference between Chopin and Maupassant as: "Chopin, then, subverts genre, formally and thematically, by placing the woman's experience at the heart of her text and constituting her as the *subject* of the narrative. Maupassant, however, had little interest in the female experience. Mary Donaldson-Evans argues that in his writings, women become merely the site on which male fears and desires are played out" (123). Nolan is keen to observe the difference in emphasis between the two writers when approaching the same theme of solitude. Yet if one ignores the difference of gender in Maupassant's and Chopin's works, one may find that both writers hold essentially similar attitudes toward solitude.

Chopin's focus on solitude may also stem from the influence of George Sand. Chopin admires works of George Sand. She even named her only daughter Lelia after Sand's novel *Lelia* (1831). *Lelia* is a very complex novel both in terms of genre and theme. Here it is not attempted to analyse Sand's novel, but to show the inspiration Chopin may have gotten from reading Sand's works. In her novel, Sand touches upon the themes such as solitude and suicide. Sand thinks that mistress, prostitute, and mother are the three inescapable fates for women, and that the human heart is full of endless pains that suicide can be the solution. In *The Awakening*, one finds that similar issues and themes are also explored by Chopin.

Edna tastes the delirium of autonomy in her second stage of awakening. After her father, husband, and children have left, she is finally at home alone. "[A] radiant peace

settled upon her when she at last found herself alone" (109). De Beauvoir highly emphasizes the importance of solitude for women. She notes: "Enslaved as she is to her husband, her children, her home, it is ecstasy to find herself alone, sovereign on the hillsides; she is no longer mother, wife, housekeeper, but a human being; she contemplates the passive world, and she remembers that she is wholly a conscious being, an irreducible free individual" (631). Edna fits exactly into de Beauvoir's description. She revels in her solitude. She takes a wholly new look at her house.

> When Edna was at last alone, she breathed a big, genuine sigh of relief. A feeling that was unfamiliar but very delicious came over her. She walked all through the house, from one room to another, as if inspecting it for the first time. She tried the various chairs and lounges, as if she had never sat and reclined upon them before. And she perambulated around the outside of the house, investigating, looking to see if windows and shutters were secure and in order. The flowers were like new acquaintances; she approached them in a familiar spirit, and made herself at home among them ... Even the kitchen assumed a sudden interesting character which she had never before perceived. (110-111)

In the above paragraph, Chopin repeatedly stresses that Edna feels as if she is seeing everything for the first time. Such novel feeling reveals Edna's change in her outlook toward the outer world.

It is no coincidence that Edna sits in the library that night and reads Emerson till she becomes sleepy. From the influences of the sea and swimming, one already senses the transcendental influence in this novel. Priscilla Leder thinks that transcendentalism of

Emerson offers a universal truth for both Chopin and Edna, i.e. to live according to their inner selves instead of social conventions, for Emerson writes in "Self-Reliance" that "[n]othing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind": "Insofar as Edna rebels against the strictures of social convention and wants only her 'own way,' she seems to follow Emerson's dictates" (Leder 245). In "Self-Reliance", Emerson stresses the importance of searching the truth within one's own self, as he writes: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion" (50). Deborah Barker goes further by pointing out the differences between Emerson's and Chopin's attitude toward nature: "For Emerson, nature is essentially moral, a means to understand the infinite ...For Edna, nature, the sea also speaks to the soul...but to Edna the sea is sensuous and maternal, not moral" (77). Barker is right to notice the neutral stance assumed by the narrator. Chopin has no intention to instil the moral judgment in her novel. The very night Edna sleeps with a sense of restfulness as she "had not known before" (112). The narrator conveys the message to the readers that Edna gains freedom and peace from her solitude. The sense of autonomy is delicious for her, at least, at the present moment.

Similar to de Beauvoir's argument, Seyersted argues that tradition and social convention pressure the woman to believe that she is a woman first and an individual secondly; however, when the woman feels it more important to be an individual first than to be a woman, "as Edna does, she is in deep water": "Unassisted, she has to create her own role and status and define her aims; she must fight society's opposition as well as her own feelings of insecurity and guilt, and—more than a man—she suffers under the liberty

in which she must justify her existence. When a woman in the existential manner assumes sole responsibility for her life, which then depends on her own efforts, freedom becomes something of a negative condition and she herself indeed a solitary soul" (149). Edna has undoubtedly benefitted from her solitude in the novel. But similar to art, solitude only provides her with a temporary source of peace and independence. At the same time, Edna suffers from the loneliness that invariably accompanies solitude. She tries to get rid of her loneliness by pursing love, but fails in her attempts. Chopin here echoes Maupassant's sentiment that human beings are essentially alone.

The third option for the protagonist to break free from her entrapment is suicide. In *The Art of Dying*, Deborah S. Gentry points out that in Western literature, as early as the Greek tragedy, women's suicides have been portrayed as "central plot elements" (1). In early Western literature, women's suicides are often considered heroic. One of the most famous examples should be Antigone, protagonist of *Antigone*, who kills herself heroically for the love of her family members. However, with the coming of the Age of Reason, namely, the eighteenth century, suicide was no longer viewed positively. Instead, it was associated with "weakness and mental instability" (Gentry 2). In the literary works of nineteenth century and early twentieth century, there was quite a number of literary works portraying women's suicide, such as *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, *The House of Mirth*, to name a few. Interestingly, although in reality women commit suicide at a rate lower than men, "the literary motif of suicide features primarily women victims in the nineteenth-century" (Gentry 2).

We may also examine the historical background in Chopin's time to look at the issue of woman's suicide. Studying Edward Westermarck's *The History of Human Marriage* (1891), Katherine Joslin notes:

> What Westermarck discovers from his research and Chopin depicts in her fiction is the seemingly counter-intuitive notion that freedom breeds discontentment, especially in marriage. He notes a strong correlation between divorce and suicide, the high expression of discontent ... The emancipation of women, especially of women able to earn a living, seemed to increase the instability of marriages. In the USA, two thirds of divorces at the end of the nineteenth century were demanded by the wife. Edna Pontellier, a Protestant woman who awakens to a world of promiscuity, separation and possible divorce, depression and, finally, suicide, would have seemed a plausible heroine to Westermarck. (Joslin 78)

In other words, the notion that freedom breeds discontentment and discontentment would then dissolve a marriage may indeed stand in a number of cases and scenarios, such as the protagonists in *The Awakening* or in Mary Austin's *A Woman of Genius* (1912).[104] What Westermarck and Joslin have pointed out once again confirms Seyersted's argument on the curses of freedom for the heroine, i.e. freedom is a double-edged sword. It gives one both joy and liberation as well as loneliness and pain.

There can be a few causes accounting for Edna's choice of death. The disappointment and disillusionment of love and passion certainly plays an important role in her final decision. Edna has a problematic attitude towards love. For instance, after her

return from Adèle's labour, Edna imagines to find Robert at her home: "She could picture at that moment no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one. His expression of love had already given him to her in part. When she thought that he was there at hand, waiting for her, she grew numb with the intoxication of expectancy" (172). Here Edna's thoughts are contradictory. She is thinking of the "possession of the beloved one", namely, Robert. Earlier Edna finds the idea of possession hideous, and she refuses to become the possession of any one but her own self. When Edna thinks of possessing her beloved one, she in effect contradicts her previous belief. This leads one to question whether Edna is adopting a double standard regarding the very idea of possession, or whether she has regressed in her idea of possession. To Edna's surprise, Robert is gone, leaving a note: "I love you. Good-by--because I love you" (172). Edna grows faint upon reading the note. Edna fails to perceive her autonomy does not include control over other people's mind or action. Robert is no different from her husband in adhering to the prevalent Victorian conventions. In other words, Robert does not believe in the supremacy of love in life, nor is he willing to discard social and moral codes.

Edna becomes fully disillusioned with any hope she holds after her awakening. Staying awake the whole night after Robert is gone, Edna decides to end her life.

> She had said over and over to herself: "To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else ... There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the

> soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. (176)

Edna realizes the profound solitude in life. Love cannot save Edna from life's solitude, and Robert, too, can someday melt out her existence. "She [Chopin] seems to say that Edna has a real existence only when she gives her own laws, when she through conscious choice becomes her own creation with an autonomous self. But while such developmental freedom may strengthen the self, it is accompanied by a growing sense of isolation and aloneness, and also anguish" (Seyersted 147-48). Seyersted is again commenting on the dual nature of freedom. But in the case of Edna, the pain and solitude overshadow the joy and liberation of her freedom. Edna realizes that she can abandon her role as wife, but she is still entrapped by her responsibility to her children. Nevertheless, she feels that even her children cannot force her into a life of dormant slavery by motherly guilt. Seeing no hope in life, death becomes the final resort.

Edna exerts her final freedom to decide her own demise by downing herself in the sea. Between the choice of duty and autonomy, Edna in the end solves the dilemma by abandoning both.

> The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water. (176)

It is symbolic here. Earlier Mademoiselle Reisz mentions that to become an artist one needs to have strong wings to soar into sky, and it is sad to see the weakling bruised and hurt. Now the bird with a broken wing symbolizes Edna's failure in her quest for self and autonomy.

The nakedness of Edna symbolizes her return as a baby to the mother's womb which is presented by the sea. By casting away the final piece of garment, Edna casts away the final piece of a fictitious self she blindly assumes earlier.

> But when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.
>
> How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known. (177)

Seyersted thinks that "Edna's action of casting off her garments symbolizes a lifting of the veil with which conventional ethics have draped the true meaning of existence" (159). The state of nakedness enables Edna to return to the original state of innocence, unperturbed by the worries and disappointments in human life. In the novel, the sea is associated both with the beginning and the ending of Edna's awakening.

Daringly Edna goes into the sea. "The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles" (177). The image of a serpent appears in the novel several times. Earlier during Madame Ratignolle's labour, Chopin also introduces the image of a golden serpent. The repeated image of a serpent is biblical. By

possessing knowledge, Adam and Eve lost their immortal lives and were driven out of Eden. In Edna's case, by waking up and opening her eyes to the real world, she loses her own life.

> She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end. Her arms and legs were growing tired. (177)

The childhood scene of walking in the blue-grass meadow has occurred in the novel several times as well. Returning to carefree birth and childhood, Chopin offers Edna the final repose and means to cease her pain after her awakening. The thought of childhood also reflects the ultimate freedom Edna is seeking. Upon her death, all she thinks is that nobody can possess her body and soul. She is at last free, if not in this world. Although awakened, Edna fails to fully comprehend her awakening and the true significance of life and autonomy. She mistakes love for everything, and falls into the conventional trap of tragedy. Her death is sad in that Edna fails to embrace true freedom and authenticity in life. She is lured by passion and happy union with a man instead of by real growth and independence. Edna's death reveals Chopin's pessimism toward the belief that a woman can gain full autonomy and succeed in deciding her own life path.

As mentioned earlier, *The Awakening* reminds one of a short story by Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour". The protagonist is happy at the news of her husband's death, for from then on, she can finally live for herself. "There would be no powerful will bending hers [Mrs. Mallard's] in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime" (353). Mrs. Mallard's thoughts in some way mirror those of Edna Pontillier in *The Awakening*. Edna refuses to be someone else's property and vows to no longer yield to another's will and not her own. Nancy Theriot notes that "late-nineteenth-century women began to question the validity of male definition and male control of women in general" (132). Chopin not only questions the male domination in her works, she goes even further by suggesting that neither gender has the right to impose their will on another human being. However, at the end of the story, Mrs. Mallard dies of a heart attack after discovering that her husband is not dead after all; whereas Edna drowns herself for failing to rule over her own life. Neither Mrs. Mallard nor Edna has enjoyed their exaltation in their new found autonomy for very long. The thwarted dreams of both Mrs. Mallard and Edna imply that Chopin has doubts about the feasibility of women's unhindered autonomy in late nineteenth century America. Allen Stein is right to summarize as follows: "Given the prevailing social arrangements in the late nineteenth century, autonomy for any woman may be at best an illusionary or transitory thing" (112). Stein's view can offer an explanation as to why Chopin seldom offers satisfactory endings for stories about a woman's quest for free will or autonomy in her works.

Edna's death also cannot help but remind readers of the deaths of Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina. There are certainly similarities among the three novels. For example, all of them were written during the second half of the nineteenth century. All the three protagonists suffer from the conservative nineteenth-century ethos at the time. And more importantly, all three protagonists are labelled as fallen women. Nevertheless, although dubbed as the American Madame Bovary, Edna Pontellier is fundamentally different from either Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina. Emma Bovary is bored with her married life, and longs for excitement and passion as the stimulus for life. Emma is not on a quest as Edna is for selfhood. She is more driven by lust. In the end, unable to pay all her debts, Emma is forced to kill herself. Therefore, Emma only bears superficial resemblance to Edna, and she never attains Edna's level of self-awareness and inner independence. Anna Karenina leaves her marriage for love. Betrayed by her lover, Anna chooses to kill herself. Both stories of Emma and Anna centre mainly on love. Edna Pontellier, however, is gradually awakened from a life when she is regarded as a piece of possession belonging to her husband. Different from Emma and Anna, she is more of a quest for selfhood and autonomy than love. Her final act of suicide is the final resort to exert and preserve her autonomy. "[H]er [Edna's] ultimate desire is for freedom to do as she likes, not, like Emma's, to find the man of her dreams" (Thornton 91). Critics tend to see *The Awakening* as a book on woman's sexual awakening; partially, it may be so. But if one only looks at the novel from the perspective of sexuality, one misses the more significant issues: autonomy, authenticity, growth and self-fulfilment, all of which are indispensible for a healthy and whole person. These can be the more significant issues for Chopin.

Commenting on Chopin's value as a writer, Seyersted thinks that Chopin broke new ground in American literature and lists her as the first woman writer in America to accept passion as the legitimate subject for serious fictions.

> Revolting against tradition and authority; with a daring which we can hardly fathom today; with an uncompromising honesty and no trace of sensationalism, she undertook to give the unsparing truth about woman's submerged life. She was something of a pioneer in the amoral treatment of sexuality, of divorce, and of woman's urge for an existential authenticity. She is in many respects a modern writer, particularly in her awareness of the complexities of truth and the complications of freedom. (Seyersted 197-98)

Seyersted may not be correct to regard Chopin as the first American woman writer who stressed the importance of passion for women. Stoddard, for example, approached the same subject several decades earlier. However, Seyersted is right to point out Chopin's pioneering spirit in depicting woman's discontentment and yearning for freedom and authenticity, and thus Chopin remains "too much of a pioneer to be accepted in her time and place" (199).

In conclusion, Chopin captures a dilemma faced by women whereby they feel entrapped both within and without the confines of a patriarchal domestic sphere in late nineteenth-century America. She has not offered a satisfactory solution and has taken an ambivalent but truthful stance in her works. Chopin's life in some sense supports Gilbert and Gubar's theory of anxiety of female authorship, and her works shed light on

understanding the female characters sense of entrapment, particularly in regard to marriage, in women's writing of late nineteenth-century America.

Chapter Four

Female Entrapment and Financial Difficulties:

Edith Wharton's *Summer*

WE women want too many things;
And first we call for happiness, --
The careless boon the hour brings,
The smile, the song, and the caress.

And when the fancy fades, we cry,
Nay, give us one on whom to spend
Our heart's desire! When Love goes by
With folded wings, we seek a friend.

And then our children come, to prove
Our hearts but slumbered, and can wake;
And when they go, we're fain to love
Some other woman's for their sake.

But when both love and friendship fail,
We cry for duty, work to do;
Some end to gain beyond the pale
Of self, some height to journey to.

And then, before our task is done,
With sudden weariness oppressed,
We leave the shining goal unwon
And only ask for rest. (Wharton 599)[105]

In this chapter, I am going to explore the theme of female entrapment in the personal life and works of Edith Wharton. I argue that Wharton's novel, *Summer*, testifies to the dilemma faced by women in early twentieth-century America, in particular those from the lower classes, whereby they feel entrapped both within and without the confines

of a patriarchal domestic sphere. When we look at her work in relation to Stoddard's *The Morgesons* and Chopin's *The Awakening*, we can see how Wharton takes up the theme of female entrapment in American women writers' works. However, Wharton, I will argue, looks at female entrapment from another perspective, i.e. that of class and money. In this chapter, the theories of Gubar and Gilbert, de Beauvoir, and Kate Millett will be used to support my argument.

In terms of the financial position for women, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, American feminist critic, had already recognized and stressed the importance of women's financial independence in her book *Women and Economics* (1898). She writes: "when the woman, left alone with no man to 'support' her, tries to meet her own economic necessities, the difficulties which confront her prove conclusively what the general economic status of the woman is. None can deny these patent facts, --that the economic status of women generally depends upon that of men generally" (396). Gilman recognizes the financial dependence that often ties a woman to a man in a patriarchal society, and renders her inferior in status.

Historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles E. Rosenberg point out that in nineteenth-century America, some women were clearly "growing dissatisfied with traditional roles" (115). They demanded opportunities for women in higher education and enhanced career options. American colleges started to admit female students around the mid nineteenth-century, starting with Oberlin College in Ohio. However, according to Catherine Clinton and Christine Lunardini, "[d]espite the groundswell of support for female education, those women determined to pursue a college degree did not always find acceptance easily. Women at coeducational institutions were frequently prohibited

from taking any classes in some departments. They often found themselves relegated to the seats at the very back of the class, ignored—and worse, ridiculed—by professors, and taunted by male students" (45). The opportunities in higher education usually applied to those women from the upper- and middle-classes. Without adequate financial support, it would be difficult for women of the lower classes to enter higher education in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century in America.[106]

Commenting on the employment situation in late nineteenth-century America, G.J. Barker-Benfield notes that the career options were quite narrow for women at the time. For example, "[i]n 1870, the first year that gainfully employed women and girls were counted by the federal census, four-fifths of them were engaged in their traditional occupations on the farm or in domestic service. The labor of those who did enter industry remained cheap and unskilled" (Barker-Benfield 21). Barker-Benfield explains the phenomenon in the same way as de Beauvoir does. She suggests that marriage was considered an easier option for young women at the time. "It was not only that men required women to stay out of the marketplace. Women acquiesced. They would not have served an apprenticeship if any craftsman would have taken them on, as they looked forward to marriage.... All the skill they needed was patience in the repeated performance of a simple task, and patience would be their main qualification for marriage" (Barker-Benfield 21). The only job men willingly allowed women to take was teaching, for "[b]y 1870 two-thirds of all teachers in public and private schools were women" (Barker-Benfield 21). But the pay for female teachers remained low. According to Catherine Clinton and Christine Lunardini, "female teachers were paid very little and

always less than male teachers in similar positions ... Low pay and inequitable pay scales characterized the teaching profession for women throughout the nineteenth century" (46). Worse still, in many cases, women of the lower class were not qualified to become teachers, due to their lack of education in the first place.

Moreover, Jeanne Boydston points out that for working-class women, their domestic labour in late nineteenth-century remained unacknowledged. "The distinction between 'paid labor' and 'housework' implied in working-class men's yearning for the domestic ideal persisted in late-nineteenth-century analyses of women's unpaid labor ...wives' work was largely unpaid, and ... husbands came to the marketplace as the 'possessors' of their wives' labor" (Boydston 86). In other words, women laboured, but they could not reap the financial rewards for their services at home, which further rendered them dependent on men.

Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* stresses the importance of factors such as class and economy in women's lives. She notes that "[o]ne of the most efficient branches of patriarchal government lies in the agency of its economic hold over its female subjects ... In general , the position of women in patriarchy is a continuous function of their economic dependence" (54-55). She points out that in a patriarchal society, "woman's independence in economic life is viewed with distrust" (56). Millett, nevertheless, distinguishes between the different employment categories filled by women of different classes. She suggests that women from the middle class, especially mothers, are not encouraged to work; however, for women of the lower class, their toil is "more readily accepted as 'need,'... And to be sure, it serves the purpose of making available cheap labor in factory and lower-grade service and clerical positions" (56). Millett argues few

women "rise above working class in personal prestige and economic power" (52-53), and women as a group generally do not enjoy the financial benefits or rewards of their labour, and have to remain economically dependent on men.

The aim of the chapter is therefore to examine female entrapment in Wharton mainly in regard to the financial position of women in nineteenth-century America. The chapter will be divided into three parts. Each part will answer one of the three major questions in relation to the idea of female entrapment. First, I would like to explore if Wharton, as a woman author, has ever felt entrapped in her life in regard to her goal of achieving artist-hood. Second, I will examine various forms of entrapment experienced by women characters in her novel *Summer*. Finally, I will look for the solutions offered in the novel to free women characters from their entrapment. The three questions will allow us to better understand the literary theme of female entrapment in early twentieth-century America.

Wharton and the Anxiety of Female Authorship

This section aims at answering the first question: has Wharton, as a woman author, ever felt entrapped in her life in regard to her goal of achieving artist-hood? As mentioned in the chapter on Kate Chopin, Gubar and Gilbert emphasize the link between women authors' private lives and their literary works. They argue that women writers of the nineteenth century often had to struggle to preserve their independent will and creativity; and some women writers projected their own sense of entrapment and anxiety onto their female characters in their literary works. Has Edith Wharton, whose literary career covered both the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, ever felt

entrapped in regard to her goal of achieving artist-hood? Has she ever projected her own feeling of anxiety and entrapment onto her literary creations?

Edith Wharton (her maiden name was Edith Jones) was born in 1862 into an elite family in the Upper East Side of New York. Her family "represented a class of American aristocrats made comfortable from inherited wealth, steeped in traditional values, and well practiced in patterns of ritualized behavior" (Singley 5). As was the custom for girls of her time, Wharton received no formal schooling. Her education came from her voracious reading of books in her father's library. According to Hermione Lee, Wharton's mother did not allow her daughter to read novels as a child, thus indirectly "forcing her [young Wharton] to read the classics, philosophy, history, and poetry" (31). The self-education Wharton started as a child continued throughout her life time

Wharton started to write when she was only six years old. According to Katherine Joslin: "From as early as six to as late as eleven, each morning, every morning, she [Wharton] wrote novels, novellas, short stories, poetry, travel books, social and aesthetic commentary, autobiography and literary criticism" (1). Wharton continued her writing habit well into her adulthood, which partly explains her literary productivity throughout her entire life. She wrote her first novella *Fast and Loose* in 1876 at age fourteen under a pseudonym. When Wharton turned sixteen, "[s]he had written enough ... for one of her parents to have a volume of [her] *Verses* privately printed at Newport late in 1878" (Lee 42).

Wharton's family, however, did not really approve of her literary and artistic endeavours. As the third child in her family, Wharton spent a lot of time alone, which caused anxiety on her mother's part. Wharton's mother later decided to introduce her

early into the social circle, and in 1885 approved her marriage to Edward (Teddy) Wharton, a man of leisure from the upper-class. Wharton's marriage to Teddy was not successful, and she later had an affair with a journalist named Morton Fullerton in 1908, and obtained a divorce from Teddy in 1913. The failure of Wharton's own marriage and her love affair with Fullerton caused her to reflect on life options women had in her era.[107]

By the turn of the twentieth century, Wharton had already published several collections of short stories and her first novella, *The Touchstone* (1900), firmly established her as a writer of short fiction (Benstock 33). Wharton devoted herself to voluntary service in World War I. In 1916 during the war, she took a break, and wrote *Summer* "at a high pitch of creative joy" (Fedorko 70). *Summer* was published in 1917. Wharton later claimed that *Summer* was among her top five favourite pieces of works.

It should be noted, however, that *Summer* was not very well received by Wharton's contemporary reviewers and readers, and Wharton was quite upset about it. In her autobiography *A Backward Glance*, Wharton explains that the creation of *Summer* is based on her experience when living in New England, and she defends the realistic nature of her novel.

> Needless to say, when "Summer" appeared, this chapter [on drunken outlaws in the Mountain] was received with indignant denial by many reviewers and readers; and not the least ferocious were the New Englanders who had for years sought of the reflection of local life in the rose-and-lavender pages of their favorite authoresses [Mary Wilkins and

Sarah Orne Jewett] —and had forgotten to look into Hawthorne's.

(Wharton 294)

Candace Waid suggests the above paragraph, which is taken from Wharton's autobiography, shows that Wharton was disturbed by the accusation that "it [*Summer*] was not realistic enough—the accusation that its author could not have known ... New England village life" (90).

Critics tend to turn their attention to Wharton's other more famous literary pieces, such as *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. According to Hildegard Hoeller, "for many decades, critics agreed unanimously that *The House of Mirth* (1905) was one of Wharton's very best novels whereas the novels written in the 1920s and later... were inferior work" (20). Some critics still hold doubts about Wharton's ability to genuinely portray lives in New England. For example, Nancy R. Leach in 1950s still thinks that "Wharton was aware of certain aspects of New England life, but she was not a native and her writing cannot help betraying this" (95). *Summer* is therefore more often mentioned in conjunction with Wharton's other novels.

Similar to Elizabeth Stoddard and Kate Chopin, in spite of all her efforts at writing, Wharton still had doubts about her ability as a writer and about the literary worth of her writings. In her autobiography *A Backward Glance*, she writes: "*I* have written short stories that were thought of worthy of preservation! Was it the same insignificant *I* that I had always know?" (113). Even after receiving many literary commendations, including winning the Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Innocence* (1920), Wharton still retained doubts about her true literary worth. She told a friend in 1925: "as my work reaches its close, I feel so sure that it is either nothing, or far more than they know. ...

And I wonder, a little desolately, which?" (Singley 4). Wharton's doubts reflected the lack of confidence women writers often faced in asserting their worth and place in the literary history that had been traditionally and overwhelmingly dominated by male writers. In other words, Wharton may also have suffered from the anxiety of female authorship mentioned by Gubar and Gilbert. Moreover, similar to some women writers before her who tried to mask their literary ambitions, Wharton too referred to herself shyly as "rather a housekeeperish person", while in fact she was highly ambitious, dedicated, and pleased to be called "a self-made man" (Fedorko ix). Similar to her predecessors such as Kate Chopin, Wharton was quite conscious of her gender as a woman writer.

It is interesting to compare Wharton with her predecessors such as Elizabeth Stoddard and Kate Chopin, as it sheds light on the circumstances women writers in the nineteenth-century often had to face. Similar to Stoddard and Chopin, who suffered from depression, Wharton also showed "early and persistent signs of depression and apathy" (Joslin 10). Mental illness accompanied Wharton in her career as a woman writer. Why did women writers often suffer from depression? Was it because they felt that their creativity was in some way hampered by the patriarchal society of the nineteenth-century? Or was it due to the pressure and hardship they had to endure in order to become great writers in a male-dominated literary world?[108]

Different from Stoddard and Chopin who failed to procure either great wealth or fame from their literary endeavours, Wharton achieved both. Literary recognition came early in her career. By the time she divorced Teddy in 1913, she had become "perhaps the best American writer of her time" (Joslin 22). In other words, different from Stoddard

and Chopin who failed to make an impact on later generations of writers, Wharton had successfully made her mark in American literary history within her life time. Shari Benstock notes that Wharton's financial success was reflected in her lavish lifestyle, and she never apologized for her wealth. From her middle age onward, Wharton was literarily earning "millions of dollars at today's rates" (Benstock 43).

Literature offers Wharton a sense of permanent identity. Although belonging to an elite group in New York, Wharton was not very at ease in America. She later chose to reside in Europe for a long time, and became a famous American expatriate. In her own autobiography *A Backward Glance*, Wharton referred to her self as "some homeless waif" (119). Kathy Fedorko thinks that Wharton finally acquired citizenship in the "land of letters" (x). Altogether, Wharton produced twenty-five novels, dozens of short stories, three books of poetry, and other writings.[109]

More importantly, compared with her predecessors, Wharton successfully procured "a room of her own". After moving from New York to France, Wharton enjoyed an international circle of intellectual friends consisting of writers, scholars, journalists, etc., which was often rare for a woman writer to have in Wharton's time. Wharton had a deep friendship with Henry James, and it was "a literary and personal companionship that she regarded as the most important of her life" (Benstock 34). Wharton attached great importance to finding a right place to live and to write. When she was about to move to Ste Claire in 1919, she claimed that "I feel as if I were going to get married—to the right man at last!" (Joslin 27). Wharton's emphasis on and the procurement of a place of her own certainly enable her to be productive and creative in her artistic endeavour. According to Katherine Joslin, by the time Wharton reached her

late middle age, she enjoyed "talent, health, independence, a plentiful and secure income, a group of supportive friends, both male and female" (23). Wharton is a rare model of the successful woman writer in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.

In addition, Wharton set up a model for future generations of women writers to follow. She exemplified how a woman artist should exhibit autonomy and professionalism. "Wharton showed by her example that women could achieve strength and self-sufficiency without the conventional supports of marriage" (Singley 6). Carol J. Singley goes even further by suggesting that Wharton changed the image of the woman writer: "A consummate professional, she wrote on a daily schedule and took charge of literary business as few female authors of the generation before her had done. She oversaw each stage of the publishing process and spoke forcefully for adequate publicity and compensation" (7). In other words, Wharton contributed to changing the biases and stereotypes associated with American women writers of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. Wharton's death received attention from the international press both for her literary achievements and her service in World War I, which was unusual for a woman writer of her time.[110]

Today Wharton's position in the American literary canon is firmly established. Singley thinks that Wharton's place in American letters as "one of the premier practitioners of realism" is assured (3). And according to Hildegard Hoeller, since 1990s, "[c]ritics have paid more and more attention to Wharton's entire work, her less well known novels, her travel writing, her letters. They have expanded her canon, 'recovered' more neglected works, even challenged the narrative of early triumph and subsequent decline" (23). In other words, today's critics challenge the previous view that Wharton's

works after *The Age of Innocence* were inferior in quality, and they have begun to take all her works in serious consideration.

In conclusion of this section, Wharton may well have suffered from the anxiety of female authorship in that she also harboured doubts about her own literary worth. However, compared with her predecessors such as Elizabeth Stoddard, she dealt with the issue relatively well. Due to her unique and advantageous family and social background, she was able to remain highly productive across her whole life span. Wharton's literary life in some way confirms Virginia Woolf's argument: "[G]ive her a room of her own and five hundred [pounds] a year, let her speak her mind and leave out half that she now puts in, and she will write a better book one of these days" (142). In other words, with the help of financial security and autonomy, Wharton's example shows that female genius can too grow and flourish in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.

II. Multifaceted Forms of Female Entrapment in *Summer*

This section aims at answering the second question: what are the forms of entrapment imposed on the women characters in the novel *Summer*? In this chapter, the suffocating sense of entrapment will be explored in terms of the pubic and the private spheres.[11] In this section, the relationship between the public sphere and female entrapment will be looked at in regard to Woolf's the notion of "a room of one's own", and also in regard to the popular theoretical notion of the "male gaze". The phrase "a room of one's own" is understood both in terms of physical space and economic independence.

A Room of One's Own

The protagonist of *Summer* is a young woman named Charity Royall, and the story is written in a third person narrative. In the beginning of the novel, Wharton presents readers with an image of the protagonist stepping out of lawyer Royall's red house "at the end of the one street of North Dormer" (107),[112] and murmuring "How I hate everything!" (108). Wharton chooses to start her novel in this fashion in order to leave readers with a clear impression of a young woman's dissatisfaction and frustration with her current life situation in North Dormer, a small village in New England. The image of a dissatisfied and furious young woman runs throughout the novel till the very end.

Wharton focuses on the symbol of the house early in the novel, almost at the same pace when she introduces the protagonist to the readers. Charity Royall is brought down as a little child from the Mountain that looms as "perpetual background of gloom to the lonely valley" (109) near North Dormer in New England by lawyer Royall. She grows up in the household of Mr. and Mrs. Royall, even though the couple never officially adopt her. After Mrs. Royall passes away, Charity becomes the only woman in lawyer Royall's house. Early in Charity's life, she is told by everyone that she should be grateful for lawyer Royall, for it is him who rescues her from the horrible life in the Mountain. The protagonist is christened as Charity to "commemorate Mr. Royall's disinterestedness in 'bringing her down'" (117), even though she never feels comfortable with such a sense of dependence. Hermione Lee rightly puts it that "[h]er name marks her out as a recipient of

philanthropy, and a possession" (505). The name "Charity" implies that the protagonist is perceived as a case of charity for the rest of her life. Charity's dislike of both the home with Mr. Royall and the place of North Dormer is manifested early in the novel, too. The sentence "How I hate everything!" (108) uttered by Charity appears twice in the beginning paragraphs of the novel, and in a way sets the tone for the whole story. The protagonist is desperate to leave North Dormer. Charity fits into Gilbert and Gubar's description of a mad woman in the attic who desperately wants to get out. Gilbert and Gubar argue that woman characters in nineteenth-century stories often had to choose between the "expulsion into the cold outside" and the "suffocation in the hot indoors" (86). In *Summer* Wharton presents readers with an angry woman in the house instead of a conventional picture of the angel in the house.

There are reasons for Charity's desire to flee. Charity has lived in North Dormer since she was five years old, and believed it to be a place of some importance. She has been told repeatedly by others that she should be grateful to be rescued from the barbarous Mountain to the civilized North Dormer which "represented all the blessings of the most refined civilization" (109). However, after a trip to a nearby city Nettleton, Charity starts to realize the barrenness of North Dormer.

> [Charity], for the first and only time, experienced railway- travel, looked into shops with plate-glass fronts, tasted cocoanut[113] pie, sat in a theatre, and listened to a gentleman saying unintelligible things before pictures that she would have enjoyed looking at if his explanations had not prevented her from understanding them. This initiation had shown her that North Dormer was a

small place, and developed in her a thirst for information that her position as custodian of the village library had previously failed to excite. (108-9)

The hustle and bustle of Nettleton leads Charity to the acute sense of the barrenness and isolation of North Dormer. North Dormer is disconnected from the modern world represented by railways, trolleys, and telegraphs. It is also dormant and unchangeable, as suggested by its name "Dormer". Feeling stifled at the unchanged and dormant North Dormer, and propelled by her youth and curiosity about an unexplored, unfamiliar, and interesting outside world, Charity wishes to leave.

Moreover, Charity is doubly entrapped by the "faded red house" she lives in with Mr. Royall (109). Kathy Fedorko suggests that there is a similarity between the red room in *Jane Eyre* and the "faded red house" in *Summer*: "The suggested allusion of the red house to the red room in which Jane is locked in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eye* accentuates the Gothic quality of *Summer*'s setting. Like Charity, Jane is an orphan, brought to Gateshead Hall by her uncle just as Charity is brought to North Dormer" (Fedorko 71). In other words, the protagonists of both novels are unwillingly trapped inside the house by outside forces,[114] and both want to get out.

The barrenness of both her home and North Dormer also causes the protagonist to sense acutely the barrenness of her life. Although Mr. Royall brings her to civilization (represented by North Dormer) by fetching her down from the Mountain, Charity feels the change from the Mountain to North Dormer brings her "anguish instead of joy" (129). Her heart is gnawed by the drastic difference between her fantasy world and the stark reality. In short, Charity finds her life "to be too desolate, too ugly and intolerable" (129). It is not objective for the protagonist to believe that her life is horrible, for compared with

other people who live in the Mountain and North Dormer, her circumstances are already much better.[115] However, disappointments with life distort the protagonist's vision, making her believe her life more pathetic than it really is. Jennifer Haytock notes that the protagonist "does not know what city life is like or what exactly she wants from it; she simply wants something more than the small town can offer" (64). Haytock is accurate to pinpoint the "vague but persistent" desire held by the protagonist to leave North Dormer.

Katherine Joslin expresses a similar view on the discontented protagonist in *Summer*. She notes that Wharton is not interested in telling the story of "those who seek and find", rather, she tends to "focus on the lives of the malcontents, those somehow at odds with the larger community" (37). Joslin is right to summarize this preference shown by Edith Wharton, for one can find discontented characters in Wharton's other novels, such as the protagonist in *Ethan Frome*. Similar to Charity Royall, Ethan Frome, the male protagonist, is doubly trapped in a loveless marriage and a barren life in a New England town called Starkfield. Ethan wishes to leave Starkfield with his lover, Mattie, but in reality he cannot. "The inexorable facts closed in on him [Ethan] like prison-warders handcuffing a convict. There was no way out—none. He was a prisoner for life, and now his one ray of light was to be extinguished" (Wharton 134). Ethan realizes that his sick wife, Zeena, cannot survive financially without him, nor is he certain that he can find employment to support both himself and Mattie if they go to the West. *Ethan Frome* and *Summer* are often linked together, as the protagonists of both novels wish to get out of their barren and miserable lives, yet in the end both fail in their attempts.

It should be noted that the protagonist once had a chance to leave North Dormer, but she gives it up. After Mrs. Royall's death, there is some talk of sending Charity to a

boarding-school away from North Dormer. However, out of her pity for Mr. Royall who is "dreadfully lonesome" (118), she gives up the chance of further education and leaving North Dormer. "He and she, face to face in that sad house, had sounded the depths of isolation; and though she felt no particular affection for him, and not the slightest gratitude, she pitied him because she was conscious that he was superior to the people about him, and that she was the only being between him and solitude" (118). Hermione Lee thinks that "[p]artly she [Charity] confines herself, choosing not to go away to boarding-school" (505). Similar to Charity, Mr. Royall is also trapped in North Dormer and in his own "sad" house. He once confidentially tells Charity: "I was a damn fool ever to leave Nettleton. It was Mrs. Royall that made me do it" (119). Mr. Royall is bitter in recollection, but cannot change the path he has chosen in his youth. Here Wharton touches upon the theme of alienation, which is focused on in depth by later modernist writers.[116] Initially Charity thinks that she is "the only being between him and solitude", however, the reality is that Charity also feels lonesome, isolated, and trapped. The loneliness and isolation only intensifies the protagonist's desire to get out of North Dormer.

In addition, the incident in which Mr. Royall tries to make inappropriate (sexual) advances to Charity only intensifies her determination to leave North Dormer. Out of loneliness, Mr. Royall tries to enter Charity's bedroom at night.

> For a moment they looked at each other in silence; then, as he puts his foot across the threshold, she stretched out her arm and stopped him. "You go right back from here," she said, in a shrill voice that startled her; "you ain't going to have the key tonight." "Charity, let me in. I don't want the

> key. I'm a lonesome man," he began, in the deep voice that sometimes moved her. Her heart gave a startled plunge, but she continued to hold him back contemptuously. "Well, I guess you made a mistake, then. This ain't your wife's room any longer." (120)

Charity shows her strength by blocking the door and refusing to let Mr. Royall enter her room, which used to be his late wife's room. Although in the end Mr. Royall goes away, Charity feels a "belated sense of fear … with the consciousness of victory", and she is "cold to the bone" (120). The incident reveals the protagonist's strength. Rather than be a submissive and selfless angel in the house, Charity is in effect independent, fierce in spirit, and good at discerning people's weakness in character. For example, as a child, she knew that Mr. Royall was "harsh and violent, and still weaker [than Mrs. Royall]" (113). That night Charity shows her strength by stopping Mr. Royall's advances and defending her honour. Moreover, she shows her cleverness by using the incident to her advantage. Although lacking qualification to become a librarian, Charity successfully manoeuvres to secure the position by using Mr. Royall's influence.

The position of a village librarian pays Charity eight dollars per month, and she has to save the money up for quite some time before she can leave North Dormer. In other words, without a room of her own, i.e. financial security, Charity cannot leave North Dormer as she hopes. The example of Charity can be better understood in the historical context of women's employment in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. Although more occupations were open to women in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century in America, the pay was generally meagre. Nancy Woloch notes that by the turn

of the twentieth century, "5 million American women earned wages and one out of five women was employed, a quarter of them in manufacturing" (235). Woloch also points out the woman worker in factories was "distinguished by her unskilled work, her low pay, and her concentration in a limited segment of industry" (236). Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* writes: "In general, the position of women in patriarchy is a continuous function of their economic dependence", and "the kinds of employment open to women [even] in modern patriarchies are, with few exceptions, menial, ill paid and without status" (Millett 55-56). Here Millett is stressing the inequality between the genders in terms of employment in America. In the novel, Wharton confirms this inequality by depicting the financial difficulties experienced by the protagonist.

Moreover, the joyless life as a librarian serves only to intensify Charity's desire to flee North Dormer once she has saved up enough money. Readers are informed that Charity's excursion from the library will intensify her joy and sense of well-being. Rather than educate herself by using her time in the library, Charity is in effect sick of the library: "she hated to be bothered by books" (116). Charity's dislike of the library suggests further problems, i.e. what can she do without adequate education and training if she goes to another place? Compared with women characters from the middle- and upper-classes, women characters of a lower class have to face the fact that their lack of knowledge and skills can serve as obstacles to shatter their dreams of ever leaving their original living conditions for better circumstances. The situation of Charity also reminds one of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900). The protagonist, Carrie, in *Sister Carrie* is also a young woman from a lower class. In order to make a living in the big city of Chicago, she initially works long hours at a factory for a very meagre pay. "Her

[Carrie's] legs began to tire and she wanted to get up and stretch. Would noon never come? It seemed as if she had worked an entire day. She was not hungry at all, but weak, and her eyes were tired, straining at the one point where the eye-punch came down" (Dreiser 36). Carrie is later seduced by a travelling salesman who buys her fashionable clothes. The bad working conditions and meagre pay in both Wharton's and Dreiser's works suggest the cruel reality for young women of the lower classes in their search for their dreams and better lives.

The protagonist's desire for independence is further demonstrated by her rejection of Mr. Royall's marriage proposal on two occasions. Charity rejects the double confinement of the red house and North Dormer. She wants to search for a better place, possibly "a room of her own". On the first occasion, she scorns Mr. Royall: "'Marry you? Me?' she burst out with a scornful laugh ... She straightened herself, insolently conscious of her youth and strength. 'I suppose you think it would be cheaper to marry me than to keep a hired girl'" (122). By rejecting Mr. Royall's proposal, and causing him humiliation, Charity assumes her command over the entire house. As the omniscient narrator comments: "Nothing now would ever shake her rule in the red house" (125). Thus, Charity subverts the role of a submissive angel in the house. Instead, she replaces Mr. Royall's authority, and takes on a typically masculine role of ruling over the house. On the second occasion, Charity summarizes her position at North Dormer as: "Things don't change at North Dormer: people just get used to them" (172). To her, Mr. Royall's proposal acts like a trap that threatens to tie her to a dormant and boring life. Even though Mr. Royall suggests that they can move to another place, Charity sees no hope in a life

with him. In other words, Charity does not want to place her fate into the hands of Mr. Royall; rather, she wants to search for her own independence.

It needs to be mentioned that in the latter part of the story,[117] Charity seems to temporarily "possess" a place of her own by associating with Lucius Harney, who later becomes her lover.[118] They find a deserted house on the way between North Dormer and the Mountain, where Charity and Lucius meet each other every day. However, the truth is that Charity does not legally own the house; therefore, it is still wishful thinking to believe that she finally has a room of her own, and that she and Lucius are living as a couple. "The little old house--its wooden walls sun-bleached to a ghostly gray--stood in an orchard above the road. The garden palings had fallen, but the broken gate dangled between its posts, and the path to the house was marked by rose-bushes run wild and hanging their small pale blossoms above the crowding grasses" (197). The deserted house is described by the narrator in a fairly romantic light by mentioning its nearby "rose-bushes" and their "pale blossoms", which may match the romantic atmosphere between Charity and Lucius. Wharton herself is interested in houses and architecture; therefore, it is not surprising that she describes each house in *Summer* in detail.

Katherine Joslin notes that finding a home or a house is a recurring and dominant theme in several of Wharton's works. She thinks that Wharton's "heroes and heroines all struggle to find an acceptable, secure place within their social order; they seek a metaphorical and often literary home in order to define their sense of self" (36). For example, Lily Bart, the protagonist of *The House of Mirth*, does not have a place of her own. She lives temporarily in the houses of her wealthy friends. Lily, therefore, hopes to marry a wealthy man to settle down. "She [Lily] had never been so near the brink of

insolvency; but she could at least manage to meet her weekly hotel bill … Her rooms, with their cramped outlook down a sallow vista of brick walls and fire-escapes … kept constantly before her the disadvantages of her state, and her mind reverted the more insistently to Mrs. Fisher's counsels [of marrying a wealthy man]" (Wharton 247). Lily's dream of marrying a wealthy man fail to materialize, and in the end she dies of an over-dose of sleeping pills.

One finds a similar theme in *Summer* as well. Charity also wishes to have a room of her own. In her temporary "room of one's own" where she meets Lucius regularly, Charity completely loses touch with reality in her secret love affair: "Everything unrelated to the hours spent in that tranquil place was as faint as the remembrance of a dream" (205). Amid such a dream and fantasy, interestingly Charity feels that she is developing a new self. In other words, Charity does not miss the stubborn, fierce, and proud side of her, instead, she feels that she is reaching out to all her sensibilities: "to the light of all her contracted tendrils" (205). The narrator describes Charity's feeling: "She had always thought of love as something confused and furtive, and he made it as bright and open as the summer air" (205). Lucius makes Charity feel love "as bright and open as the summer air", which reminds one of the novel's title "Summer". Although for the major part of the novel it is basked under the gloom of winter, this is the only time that Charity feels she is living under the bright and dazzlingly sunlight of summer, fleeting as it is.

In the end, Charity has to give up the temporal "place of her own."[119] Lucius leaves North Dormer, leaving her alone to face the consequences of their relationship, such as the gossip in the community and Charity's later discovery of her pregnancy,

which will be explained in the later section. In other words, Charity never truly owns a place of her own. The association with Lucius causes her to give up her original dream of moving away to a bigger city to pursue a better life. Toward the end of the novel, she returns to the red house in North Dormer, and remains forever trapped there.[120]

The Male Gaze: Imbalance of Power and Entrapment

In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey raises the concept of the male gaze. She writes: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (162). Mulvey thinks that under the male gaze, women become objects to be displayed and looked at. They have to assume and retain their "traditional exhibitionist role" (162). Mulvey realizes the imbalance of power between the two genders under patriarchy, and argues that in the setting of a film the male gaze can turn a woman character into his "property". Although Mulvey discusses the idea of the male gaze in the context of cinema, it can also be applied to literature. In other words, the male gaze can also objectify women characters in literary works as well.

In *Summer* the female protagonist's plan of escape is interrupted by the appearance of a stranger from a big city, or the more civilized world, compared with North Dormer. The stranger, Lucius Harney, comes to North Dormer to study its old buildings and architecture. Lucius Harney is a well-educated young man from a good family background. He accidentally visits the library where Charity works. Although

earlier Charity refuses Mr. Royall's marriage proposal on two occasions; this time, ironically, she falls head over heels for Lucius, and readily accepts the conventional idea of viewing marriage as a woman's "respectable path to economic security" (Rosen 160). The protagonist is willing to give up the independence she longs for in exchange for marriage with Lucius Harney if she has the chance. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir devotes a special section to the phenomenon of what she calls "the woman in love". She explains that when a woman is in love, "she will humble herself to nothingness before him [her lover]" and "[l]ove becomes for her a religion" (653). Compared with the quest for independence and identity, de Beauvoir notes that the woman usually opts for the easier road, i.e. to get married. In *Summer*, Charity follows the same mentality described by de Beauvoir. She fails to fathom the true meaning of independence and self, and instead chooses to believe in the fairytale of being happily ever after if she marries the man of her dream, i.e. Lucius Harney.

By accepting love as her "religion" and "rescue", Charity accepts the male gaze of Lucius, and more importantly, she even starts to view herself according to Lucius's gaze. For example, in the novel there is a passage in which Charity looks at herself in the mirror and imagines herself to be the bride of Lucius.

> Her small face, usually so darkly pale, glowed like a rose in the faint orb of light, and under her rumpled hair her eyes seemed deeper and larger than by day. Perhaps after all it was a mistake to wish they were blue. A clumsy band and button fastened her unbleached night-gown about the throat. She undid it, freed her thin shoulders, and saw herself a bride in low-necked satin, walking down an aisle with Lucius Harney. He would

kiss her as they left the church....She put down the candle and covered her face with her hands as if to imprison the kiss. (126)

Charity cannot escape from the conventional emphasis on a woman's outward beauty and femininity. Her earlier thought of changing her eye colour to blue exposes her sense of inferiority when comparing herself to some belle[121] in the neighbouring city. She forgets her desire for independence, and exchanges her selfhood for the fantasy of a beautiful wedding gown and marriage. Commenting on the part where Charity looks at herself in the mirror, Haytock thinks that the protagonist is "so enraptured with her vision of herself as Harney sees her that she even kisses her own reflection" (50). Here Haytock talks about the double layer of the "gaze". The first layer is Lucius's gaze at Charity, i.e. the male gaze. The second layer is Charity's identification with the male gaze. Haytock believes that Charity continues to see herself through Lucius's gaze as their relationship deepens. In other words, by adopting Lucius's gaze, Charity loses touch with her own authentic self. Haytock certainly offers one reasonable way of interpreting the scene in which Charity looks at her own reflection in the mirror. Commenting on the male gaze in another piece of Wharton's works, "The Looking Glass", Susan Sweeney writes: "Wharton's story shows how much Mrs. Clingsland's [a woman character] sense of identity depends upon her beauty—an ephemeral, intangible, abstract quality that exists (or can be proven to exist) only in the eye of a male beholder" (140). In the story of *Summer* Charity has internalized the "standard of beauty" in a patriarchal society, and looks at an idealized image of her reflection in the mirror.

The involvement between Charity and Lucius demonstrates the former's inadequacy and her entrapment under the male gaze in several ways. First, it exposes

Charity's lack of education and intellect. Charity is painfully aware of her own inadequacy when Lucius talks about art and life. "To avoid the awkwardness of listening with a blank face, and also to escape the surprised stare of the inhabitants of the houses before which he would abruptly pull up their horse and open his sketch-book, she slipped away to some spot from which, without being seen, she could watch him at work, or at least look down on the house he was drawing" (138). Shut off from the intellectual dialogue with Lucius, Charity can only assume the role of a guide and observer instead of a participant and thinker in Lucius's research. She cannot comprehend the latter's intellect and views on art. So does Wharton suggest that Charity is only lured by the outward appearance of Lucius? Is her love and dream of marrying him shallow in essence?

Moreover, Charity is also trapped by her inadequacy in language, which results from her lack of education. She feels inadequate to express her feelings whether it is anger or love. "She felt the pitiful inadequacy of this, and understood, with a sense of despair, that in her inability to express herself she must give him an impression of coldness and reluctance; but she could not help it" (Wharton 225). Judith Fryer thinks "Charity's inarticulateness separates her from Lucius Harney's world", and her "inability to enter this world of words—Wharton's salvation—makes her unable to control her fate" (198-99). Similarly, Fedorko stresses the difference in articulateness between Lucius and Charity, and explains it in terms of "confidence builders of money and education" (74). In other words, with neither money nor education, Charity cannot avoid the constraints in articulation and expression of emotions. In *Sexual Politics*, Millett points out: "If knowledge is power, power is also knowledge, and a large factor in their subordinate

position is the fairly systematic ignorance patriarchy imposes upon women" (57-58). In other words, the ignorance imposed by patriarchy partly causes the vulnerable position Charity has to assume in her relationship with her lover.

Furthermore, Charity is entrapped by her own sense of inferiority. Charity is not sure of herself, and depends on Lucius's reassurance of her worth and difference from others, which is another example of her accepting Lucius's male gaze and power over her. Lucius, who is well-educated and comes from a big city, represents what Charity believes that she lacks. In other words, it is Charity who projects an ideal image onto Lucius, and gives the latter absolute power over her. As mentioned earlier, Charity feels ashamed of herself before girls like Miss Annabel Balch.[122]

> Yet the girl, no less, remained a rival, since she represented all the things that Charity felt herself most incapable of understanding or achieving. Annabel Balch was, if not the girl Harney ought to marry, at least the kind of girl it would be natural for him to marry. Charity had never been able to picture herself as his wife; had never been able to arrest the vision and follow it out in its daily consequences; but she could perfectly imagine Annabel Balch in that relation to him. (227)

The fact that Charity cannot imagine herself to be the wife of Lucius shows her deep-seated sense of inferiority, her consciousness of her obscure origins, and her lack of belief in her own worth as a person. Commenting on the power of wealth and social status, Carol Wershoven thinks that women characters in Edith Wharton's novels are generally expected to live by the rules in a patriarchal society, in which "money is the supreme

good, and thus the source of power" (15). Annabel Balch represents what Charity does not possess, such as money, education, social status, and so on. When Charity cannot picture herself together with Lucius, she is in effect judging herself by the rules in the patriarchal society mentioned by Carol Wershoven. The differences in class, education, and wealth fundamentally separate Charity from Lucius. Belonging to an elite group both in terms of education and social standing, Wharton apparently knows the drastic gap created by education and class on people. Therefore, she comments via the narrator: "Education and opportunity had divided them by a width that no effort of hers [Charity's] could bridge, and even when his youth and his admiration brought him nearest, some chance word, some unconscious allusion, seemed to thrust her back across the gulf" (146). In other words, the relationship between Charity and Lucius is doomed in the beginning. Any fantasy on her part is not going to be materialized.

Charity's blind attachment to Lucius can also be explained by tracing back to her origins. "She was the child of a drunken convict and of a mother who wasn't 'half human,' and was glad to have her go" (149). Thus, in some way, Charity shares the similar background with an orphan. Her birth-mother does not want her nor can she afford to keep her. Although she is later adopted by the Royalls, it is doubtful if Mrs. Royall has acted as a surrogate mother, providing her with love and affection. Wharton has a troubled relationship with her mother, and the image of an orphan appears in several of her novels. For instances, Wendy Gimbel argues that the image of an orphan appears in four of Wharton's novels: *The House of Mirth, Ethan Frome, Summer, and The Age of Innocence*, and she adds that "[t]o be orphaned means to be without a self."[123] It can be assumed that Charity is emotionally undernourished when growing up, and she

is at the same time shameful of her obscure origins. Her frequent outbursts of arrogance and anger serve as a mask to cover her secret shame and insecurity. The character of Charity also reminds one of Fanny Bowles in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*. Fanny's mother dies early, and she is sent to work as the maid in the Morgesons. Mrs. Morgeson does not provide her with warmth and affection, so Fanny, like Charity, is emotionally undernourished as well. In the novel Fanny is also angry and sarcastic most of the time. Both Charity and Fanny fit into the characteristics of the madwoman suggested by Gilbert and Gubar, who stress that "[i]t is debilitating to be *any* woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters" (53).

In *Summer*, Lucius mainly views Charity under his male gaze, although he temporarily provides her with warmth and care. The way Lucius treats Charity is worth examining. Charity feels that Lucius is treating her with the "deference due to a girl of his own class" (177). This, however, is a purely subjective feeling from the protagonist. We, as readers, are not sure if it is accurate and truthful that Lucius indeed treats her with the respect due to a young woman of his own class. Kathy Grafton suggests that "[f]or Harney, who comes from the same world of privilege as Annabel, the difference between the backgrounds and present social positions of the two women is more prevalent in his consciousness and more directive of his actions than he realizes" (354). Although Lucius later buys Charity a beautiful gift of a blue pin, what one feels most keenly is Charity's lack of taste and Lucius's power over her instead of the passionate love manifested between the couple. Haytock notes that "much of Charity's sense of her own uniqueness is determined by the men in her life ... Harney's gaze makes her feel special and defines

her" (50). In the novel, Charity continues to look up to Lucius and to rely on his judgment. A typical example is the incident of buying a pin.

> "Which do you like best?" he asked leaning over the counter at her side.
>
> "I don't know...." She pointed to a gold lily-of-the-valley with white flowers.
>
> "Don't you think the blue pin's better?" he suggested, and immediately she saw that the lily of the valley was mere trumpery compared to the small round stone, blue as a mountain lake, with little sparks of light all round it. She coloured at her want of discrimination. (180)

The blue pin is a symbolic token. Charity has the ability and courage to assert her own opinions with people from North Dormer, and can in particular stand up to the influence and opinion of Mr. Royall; nevertheless, in the case of Lucius who is from the outside world,[124] the protagonist totally loses the confidence in her own judgment when she is with him. Lucius may be superior in his taste, but it is Charity who grants him so much power over her. Here I agree with Haytock's view that "[t]he incident of the blue brooch encapsulates how his gaze moulds her definitions of beauty and alters even what Charity chooses to desire" (50). Charity values Lucius's opinion over her own, and is much more concerned with pleasing Lucius instead of pleasing herself. Similarly, in a later example of choosing beverages, "Charity hastily revised her previous conception of the beverage" (182) after Lucius remarks that it is good. In other words, Charity loses her sense of independence and judgment when she is with Lucius.

Is the protagonist using the secret love affair with Lucius as another version of escape from the drudgery of everyday life that she finds stifling? Secrecy signals the future problems with the relationship between Charity and Lucius (i.e. they try to meet in secret so as to avoid the notice of others). For example, when Charity is with Lucius during their day trip to Nettleton, Wharton uses the word "illusion" to describe her feeling. Charity totally abandons her quest for selfhood in order to spend some moments with Lucius. "Nothing else mattered, neither the good nor the bad, or what might have seemed so before she knew him. He had caught her up and carried her away into a new world" (207). This reminds one of Edna Pontellier's feeling for Robert in *The Awakening*. Edna Pontellier holds the illusion that if there is love, nothing else in the world matters. Such a romantic notion is bound to hit the wall of cold reality. The relationship between Charity and Lucius is not in touch with the actual circumstances i.e. the gaps between them in terms of economic standing, family background, education, etc.; therefore, Charity is bound to wake up sooner or later. Kate Millett notes that romantic love often "obscures the realities of female status and the burden of economic dependency" (51). In the novel even when Charity is still together with Lucius, she cannot help being plagued by a sense of insecurity from time to time: "She wondered if some day she would sit in that same place and watch in vain for her lover" (207). Deep in Charity's mind, she does not believe that she and Lucius can be together forever.

Charity fails to realize that her infatuation for Lucius is simply another form of entrapment. "She hardly heard his excuses for being late: in his absence a thousand doubts tormented her, but as soon as he appeared she ceased to wonder where he had come from, what had delayed him, who had kept him from her. It seemed as if the places

he had been in, and the people he had been with, must cease to exist when he left them, just as her own life was suspended in his absence" (208). In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir points out that women are often subjected to the position of passive waiting for the coming of their husbands or lovers: "In a sense her whole existence is waiting, since she is confined in the limbo of immanence and contingence, and since her justification is always in the hands of others. She awaits the homage, the approval of men, she awaits love, she awaits the gratitude and praise of her husband or her lover" (622). De Beauvoir disapproves of this situation for women. Here the protagonist is in the same position of passive waiting for her lover. She is essentially deceiving herself by imagining and creating a fantasy world. Haytock is right to conclude that Harney dominates the relationship in that he essentially "controls what Charity wants from their relationship" (50). Charity's experience in another angle confirms de Beauvoir's argument that "[w]omen's lot is harder to bear in poverty and toil", and the experiences of "ennui, waiting, [and] disappointment" recur in innumerable cases (496).

Edith Wharton is considered by many as a realist writer, and she emphasizes the power of environment and social class and so forth on people. The plot of *Summer* also proves Wharton's emphasis on the power of society over individuals. Realizing her ignorance of who Lucius really is, the protagonist starts to wake up to the reality. "Behind the frail screen of her lover's caresses was the whole inscrutable mystery of his life: his relations with other people--with other women--his opinions, his prejudices, his principles, the net of influences and interests and ambitions in which every man's life is entangled. Of all these she knew nothing, except what he had told her of his architectural aspirations" (214). In other words, Charity does not have a deep

understanding of Lucius's thoughts, character, social connections, etc. Catching a glimpse of Lucius and Annabel Balch together, Charity's fantasy world breaks apart. Kathy Grafton comments on the unequal relationship between Charity and Lucius as follows:

> Charity then automatically "fits the bill" for Harney as a woman "to whom he need[s] [to] ascribe no aesthetic misgivings, and who does not know the rest of his life and cannot criticize him" ... In other words, Harney does not feel as if Charity could possibly encumber the beautiful future he envisions for himself because, in the back of his mind, he knows that he will end up with a more "appropriate" mate. Even Charity perceives that her relation to Harney at this point is characterized by her inferiority. (Grafton 355)

Compared with Balch, Charity cannot fight for the discrepancy between their social classes, family backgrounds, education, economic standing, etc. Charity feels that "[i]t was rather a terror of the unknown, of all the mysterious attractions that must even now be dragging him away from her, and of her own powerlessness to contend with them" (215). She is powerless even to get out of her own situation, i.e. to have enough money to leave North Dormer. "Having opened herself to these fundamental realizations about herself, Charity feels intense shame when she doesn't measure up to the standard that Lucius and his imagined world—a world of learning and social status—have become for her" (Fedorko 77). The design of such plot demonstrates Wharton's pessimism toward the paucity of choices given to a woman from a lower-class background.

One can also find similar attitudes and treatments of characters in Wharton's other works such as *Ethan Frome* and *Bunner Sisters*, in which abject poverty of the lower class is depicted. For example, in *Ethan Frome*, women characters such as Zeena Frome and Mattie Silver are both trapped in a barren New England town named Starkfield, from which "most of the smart ones get away" (Wharton 9). Likewise in *Bunner Sisters*, Eliza Bunner, the elder sister, has to sacrifice her own happiness and borrow money so that her younger sister, Evelina Bunner, can have a dowry to get married and be happy. However, in the end, Eliza's good intentions for her sister are not realized, and she questions herself "the inutility of self-sacrifice": "Now she perceived that to refuse the gifts of life does not ensure their transmission to those for whom they have been surrendered … there was only a black abyss above the roof of Bunner Sisters" (Wharton 591). Given the examples in *Ethan Frome* and *Bunner Sisters*, one can come to the conclusion that the entrapment experienced by Charity Royall can be extended over a larger social scale. Although belonging to an elite class, Wharton quite accurately portrays the hardship and sufferings experienced by her characters from the lower class.

In addition, the protagonist's vulnerability is presented in her tearing apart Annabel Balch's dress. As Charity cannot destroy her rival Balch, nor compete with her in terms of educational, economical, and family backgrounds, she can only express her anger by furiously tearing apart the lace dress that her friend Ally is making for Miss Balch. The tearing of the lace dress also reminds one of Bertha who likewise tears Jane Eyre's wedding dress into pieces. Here Wharton is paying a tribute to Charlotte Brontë. Charity in the novel is often depicted as an angry woman. She is angry with the boring place she lives in, with her guardian's disrespect toward her, with people's mean gossip,

and even with herself, i.e. her inability to improve her circumstances. Her anger becomes a natural reaction to her powerlessness toward the cruel reality. "The more she thought of these things the more the sense of fatality weighed on her: she felt the uselessness of struggling against the circumstances. She had never known how to adapt herself; she could only break and tear and destroy … She felt herself too unequally pitted against unknown forces" (228). By tearing Miss Balch's dress into pieces, Charity tears away her remaining hope. Hermione Lee thinks that the protagonist "is trapped in an intensely parochial, gossipy, puritanical and philistine New England town, which is almost all she has ever known" (505). In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar argue that the mad characters often represent the anxiety and rage of the women authors themselves against the inevitable patriarchal structures: "from a female point of view the monster woman is simply a woman who seeks the power of self-articulation" (79). In other words, the tearing of the dress is another way of expressing and articulating the anger on the part of the protagonist in *Summer*.

As mentioned earlier, Wharton emphasizes the link between individuals and their environment in her novels. Joslin points out that although Wharton "rebelled against the norms of behavior for females in American society, she retained the notion that the essence of the self is inextricably bound to the world around the individual" (2); therefore, "[i]dentity for Wharton is inextricably bound to culture, to one's material and social environment" (29). Joslin places *Summer* among Wharton's other novels, such as *The House of Mirth*, *The Fruit of the Tree*, *Ethan Frome*, and *The Age of Innocence* to stress "the bonds or restrictions society places on the individual and the resulting bond or

covenant between the two" (30, 36). For example, in *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer asks Countess Ellen Olenska to be with him.

> "I [Newland] want—I want somehow to get way with you into a world where words like that that—categories like that—won't exist. Where we shall be simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole of life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter."
>
> She [Ellen] drew a deep sigh that ended in another laugh. "Oh, my dear—where is that country? Have you ever been there?" (Wharton 293)

This is an often quoted dialogue from *The Age of Innocence*, in which Olensaka tells Archer that their union is unrealistic and impossible. Different from Charity in *Summer* who is from a lower class in a New England village, Archer and Olenska in *The Age of Innocence* are from the upper classes in New York. Nevertheless, despite the differences in class, education, and wealth, they also have to face the restraints of the society.

Unable to combat the overpowering societal forces, Charity finally gives up the hope of ever marrying Lucius Harney. She writes Lucius a letter as follows: "I want you should marry[125] Annabel Balch if you promised to. I think maybe you were afraid I'd feel too bad about it. I feel I'd rather you acted right. Your loving CHARITY" (229). By doing so, Charity absolves Lucius of his responsibility of marrying her. Charity's gesture is less out of selfless motive than a desire to surrender to the harsh reality, her fate, to be exact. Haytock thinks that "Charity does not act on her feelings until Harney's gaze turns her into a sexual object. Despite Charity's refusal to regret the affair, even at the end of

the novel, it is hard to view the story as one of a woman's desire when that desire is controlled by the male gaze" (51). Likewise, commenting on the male gaze in Wharton's works, Susan Sweeney writes: "Wharton's story demonstrates not only how a woman identifies with her construction by a male gaze, but also the lengths to which she will go, if necessary, to manufacture that gaze on her own" (141). In other words, Charity's decision to free Lucius and not to regret their affair can be formulated according to the male gaze and the implied imbalance of power. Her total dependence on her lover makes her live "in fear and servility" (de Beauvoir 678); and she fails to realize the unequal power her lover exerts over her till the very end.

Ruth Rosen notes that in early twentieth-century America, for many young women who "found their ambitions blocked by their gender and class, marriage ... represented the most respectable path to economic security" (160). In *Summer* the protagonist also embraces the option of marriage. Charity initially thinks that Lucius will help her to break her entrapment in North Dormer, yet in the end her relationship with Lucius becomes another form of confinement. From the relationship between Charity and Lucius, what one feels is the imbalance of power between the two genders. The unequal relationship between Charity and Lucius reflects not only the gaps of class and wealth, but also the lack of options for women of the lower classes in early twentieth-century America.

The Private Sphere (the Female Body) and Entrapment

In this section on the private sphere, I will mainly look at the female body and entrapment. It should be stressed that the female body in these novels can be viewed both in positive and negative terms, i.e. the female body can be both liberating and confining.[126] In *Summer* Wharton's view on female sexuality and ensuing pregnancy will be examined in relationship to the theme of entrapment.

In the novel Lucius prevents Charity from embarking on a trip to the Mountain after Mr. Royall has publicly insulted her; however, he plunges her into deeper ruin by consummating their physical relationship. Their physical relationship begins after Mr. Royall openly denounces Charity as a "whore". So here comes the question: is it because the protagonist has lost respect from other people, such as her guardian, so that Lucius can now treat her irresponsibly? Carol Singly thinks that Wharton, as a woman author, takes a special interest in relating women characters' experiences of "desire and disappointment" to "women's sexuality" (8-9). Applying the theory of Sigmund Freud, Kathy Grafton explains the above scene where Charity is humiliated as follows:

> The fact that Charity is degraded in Harney's eyes allows him to lower his estimation of her; she thus becomes sexually desirable for him. However, his fiancee, Annabel Balch, remains untainted in his mind. Although she is portrayed as sexually repressed, Harney's esteem for her remains high as he reserves for her the feelings of tenderness and regard he theoretically reserves for his mother and/or sister. Because Harney is unable to feel sexual desire for Annabel, he needs Charity. (Grafton 362)

Grafton offers a possible and reasonable explanation as to why Wharton puts the episode of Charity's seduction after the scene in which she is publicly insulted by Mr. Royall. In other words, Lucius finds Charity "sexually desirable" only after confirming her inferiority.

As mentioned earlier, Lucius and Charity find a deserted house between the Mountain and North Dormer, and use it as their secret meeting place. Kathy Fedorko notes that the protagonist's "erotic involvement with Lucius Harney creates a need to know herself and a willingness to plunge into the threatening dark abyss of her inner life that yields self-knowledge" (75). In other words, Fedorko views Charity's "erotic involvement" with Lucius as a positive experience. Charity may feel happy and elated in her consummated passion with Lucius temporarily, as suggested by Fedorko, nevertheless, she loses her sense of independence and self in exchange. Although the protagonist seems to temporarily own "a place of her own" i.e. the deserted house, she totally loses her sense of self and her free will, and yields absolutely to Lucius's will. "Since that evening in the deserted house she could imagine no reason for doing or not doing anything except the fact that Harney wished or did not wish it. All her tossing contradictory impulses were merged in a fatalistic acceptance of his will" (203). Here one sees a fierce and independent woman turning into a meek and passive one. Commenting on Charity's loss of independence, Margaret McDowell writes: "Charity's love affair has thus cost her independence as a human being ... Her summer experience made her aware of the potentiality that emotion holds for a mature woman. In exchange, she lost an inner self-reliance" (71). The transformation of the protagonist is explained by the narrator in terms of passion. Wharton seems to suggest that passion can

fundamentally alter a woman, at least in the case of Charity. Due to her passion for Lucius, Charity obediently accepts Lucius's inappropriate advances on her, compared with her former drastic reaction to Mr. Royall's inappropriate (sexual) advances.

Moreover, the consummated passion fails to bring Charity a sense of security and hope with her lover. "She had given him all she had--but what was it compared to the other gifts life held for him? She understood now the case of girls like herself to whom this kind of thing happened. They gave all they had, but their all was not enough: it could not buy more than a few moments" (215). Bigger societal forces, such as class and wealth, are at work; therefore, their relationship is doomed to fail. Relating *Summer* to Wharton's private life, Jennifer Haytock comments:

> Nonmarital sexuality and women's desire were not new in 1917, and Wharton certainly knew it. Her affair with Morton Fullerton, by the time of *Summer* many years behind her, had opened her eyes to the power of female desire and placed her in an ambivalent position in regard to nonmarital sexuality... Charity's affair, like Wharton's, ultimately becomes shared female experience as Wharton does learn what other women know ... Wharton portrays other issues surrounding men's freedom to discard women when it suits them. (52-3)

Here Haytock is talking about the universal female experiences. She thinks that the experiences of Charity and other minor female characters in *Summer* are exchangeable in that they all end up as "disposable women" (53). Even unconsciously Charity is somewhat aware of the insubstantiality of their relationship. "If ever she looked ahead she felt instinctively that the gulf between them was too deep, and that the bridge their

passion had flung across it was as insubstantial as a rainbow" (224). Ironically, Charity does not question the morality of Lucius. Lucius has been acting quite selfishly toward her, but passion blinds her to this hypocritical side of him. Under the pressure from Mr. Royall, Lucius vaguely and hesitantly tells Charity that he will marry her someday. Then he leaves, and gives no definite date of his return, leaving Charity alone to face the storm in her life.

Furthermore, Charity is made vulnerable and is confined by her own pregnancy, which is not an uncommon plot in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction[127] about fallen women. Haytock notes that "[t]he only real danger with premarital sexual activity is getting "caught" - that is, becoming pregnant. North Dormer girls Julia Hawes and Rose Coles both became pregnant out of wedlock, although their fates differ: Julia has an abortion and becomes a prostitute, and Rose becomes trapped in a marriage of necessity" (48-9). In the case of Charity, she is faced with the possible humiliation, as suggested by Lev Raphael, that her pregnancy will be discovered and she will become "the derision of her neighbors" (298). Without the possibility of marrying Lucius, Charity initially goes to a private clinic, possibly contemplating an abortion. Wharton depicts the woman doctor in a murderous light: "This woman [Dr. Merkle] with the false hair, the false teeth, the false murderous smile" (231). Wharton's disapproval and her aversion to the woman who makes money by exploiting other weaker women are clear here. Unable to pay the fee of five dollars for seeing Dr. Merkle, Charity has to leave her blue pin as a pledge. It should be noted that although Charity later finds herself pregnant, which provides her with a legitimate excuse to tie Lucius to her, she does not take advantage of her condition. The protagonist's decision has to do with the notion of entrapment. On the one hand, she

realizes that the connection between her and Lucius on some level is inseparable, for "they were building the child in her womb; it was impossible to tear asunder strands of life so interwoven" (33); on the other hand, she is also clear about the possible consequence if she let her condition be known to others.

> Distinctly and pitilessly there rose before her the fate of the girl who was married "to make things right." She had seen too many village love-stories end in that way. Poor Rose Coles's miserable marriage was of the number; and what good had come of it for her or for Halston Skeff? They had hated each other from the day the minister married them. (237)

Charity does not want herself to suffer confinement through pregnancy, nor is she comfortable with confining others i.e. Lucius Harney. She still holds to the belief that marriage should be based on voluntary love, therefore, she cannot identify with the solution of marrying "to make things right". Using her pregnancy as leverage to force Lucius into marrying her will break the beautiful memories they share together. Those moments are treasured in the protagonist's heart, and she does not want to tarnish them.

Charity thus becomes another case of the "fallen woman" in literature. In her doctoral dissertation, "The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century American Novel", Julie Smith states that the theme of the fallen woman is very common for nineteenth-century novels published in Europe and America, and she also notes that most of the writers who explore the theme of the fallen woman tend to sympathize with "women who were compelled to obey a repressive code of sexual behavior" that "mandated grossly unfair standards of behavior for men and women: it condemned women for any and all

sexual indiscretions, yet condoned sexual license in men" (1). In *Summer* Wharton literarily let her protagonist fall. Charity experiences a faint, and "fell face downward at Mr. Royall's feet" after Lucius abandons her. Dale M. Bauer notes that "Wharton provides no alternatives to the cultural conflicts between Victorian domesticity and modern sexuality. She can point to this conflict, dramatize it, but not quite resolve the ambivalence it stimulates" (137). Wharton has not offered a satisfactory solution to the conflict, which will be explored in the third section below.

III. Solutions to End Female Entrapment

This section aims at answering the third question: what solutions have been offered in the novel to free women characters from their entrapment? In *Summer*, Wharton offers three possible solutions for how her protagonist can resolve her difficult situation: returning to her origin or roots, becoming a prostitute, and getting married. In this section, I argue that compared with the choices of going back to her origins (i.e. the Mountain) and turning to prostitution, marrying Mr. Royall is the sad but realistic solution. In other words, if we read Wharton as something of a social critic, she seems to suggest that in early twentieth-century America, marriage is often the only possible option for a lower class woman.

In *Summer* Charity views the flight to the Mountain as a solution to her problem. "The longing to escape, to get away from familiar faces, from places where she was known, had always been strong in her in moments of distress. She had a childish belief in

the miraculous power of strange scenes and new faces to transform her life and wipe out bitter memories" (193). A new place and a new start may promise new opportunities and a new way of life. However, it is immature for Charity to believe that a distant place can exert the magic power of wiping out her bitterness and disappointment in life. For example, after being humiliated by Mr. Royall, Charity feels that she can no longer live under the same roof as him. With nowhere to go, the only place that Charity can think of is the Mountain. The idea of going back to the Mountain, to her own folks and roots, occurs to Charity wherever things are difficult.

Although Charity views the Mountain as a final resort to save her from her circumstances, it is also this "final resort" that shatters her last hope and fantasy, and forces her to yield to reality. "She supposed it was something in her blood that made the Mountain the only answer to her questioning, the inevitable escape from all that hemmed her in and beset her" (238). Charity views the Mountain as an escape from her present problems. Over the years, she has been naively considering the Mountain as a possible escape in the background. However, the actual visit to the Mountain destroys the last fantasy that can come to her rescue.

> CHARITY lay on the floor on a mattress, as her dead mother's body had lain. The room in which she lay was cold and dark and low-ceilinged, and even poorer and barer than the scene of Mary Hyatt's
> earthly pilgrimage. On the other side of the fireless stove Liff Hyatt's mother slept on a blanket, with two children--her grandchildren, she said--rolled up against her like sleeping puppies. They had their thin clothes

> spread over them, having given the only other blanket to their guest ... She had seen poverty and misfortune in her life; but in a community where poor thrifty Mrs. Hawes and the industrious Ally represented the nearest approach to destitution there was nothing to suggest the savage misery of the Mountain farmers. (251)

The destitution of the Mountain opens Charity's eyes to the harsh reality. Wharton compares the children to "sleeping puppies" to suggest the dehumanization on the Mountain. Commenting on Wharton's choice of the Mountain, Abigail Hamblen believes that Wharton chooses nature to "produce an atmosphere of distasteful poverty, sullen malice", and to contrast it with "the deplorable sordidness and sadness of the human lives" (241). Likewise, Fedorko thinks that Charity's experience at the Mountain is "a traumatic 'coming-to-awareness' process" that her sense of who she is and how she relates to the world is revised (70). The protagonist's experience on the Mountain can be understood as an awakening or even epiphany to the harsh reality. Witnessing the poverty at the Mountain, Charity realizes that all those years of imaginative ideals were deluding. She is in effect homeless and rootless.

Without adequate financial support, Charity can only follow the path of Julia Hawes, and become a prostitute. In *Abortion Rites: A Social History of Abortion in America*, Marvin Olasky notes that that the number of prostitutes soared in nineteenth century America. Similarly, Ruth Rosen, in *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*, suggests that "the peak of women's engagement in prostitution [in America] took place between 1850 and 1900 rather than during the early years of the twentieth

century" (3). In *Their Sisters' Keepers: Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1870*, Marilynn Wood Hill points out that in the second half of nineteenth-century in America, "[w]ith women's occupational options limited and wages low, employment often entailed a choice between unpleasant alternatives, including prostitution" (17).

> Among the many social ills that marked life in a rapidly changing America after 1830s—poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, diseases—prostitution often became the symbol of what was perceived as the social and moral disintegration of society. As a challenge to the idyllic view of woman as asexual, maternal, and pure, and as a threat to the stability of one of the most revered social institutions, the family, prostitution was dubbed the major nineteenth-century social problem often called, for the rest of the century, "the social evil". (Hill 17)

Here Hill explains the rise of prostitution in the background of rapid industrialization in America in the nineteenth century, and the challenges prostitution poses to the ideal of Victorian femininity.

Olasky offers two explanations for the rise of prostitution in the nineteenth century. Firstly, American businessmen made more business trips away from homes in the nineteenth century, which "made anonymity more likely" (46). In other words, prostitution flourished because "customers" who hired prostitutes were unlikely to get caught when they were away from home. Secondly, Olasky explains that prostitution "offered shorter hours and far higher wages" compared with other occupations opened to women in late nineteenth century (46). Olasky's explanation is also supported by Hill, who likewise points out both the positive and negative "economic reasons" for women to

choose prostitution: "women were forced into prostitution because of destitution and economic need ... [And] [m]any chose the occupation because it offered a better life—a more comfortable lifestyle and the means to accumulate savings" (Hill 81). Against the backdrop of limited employment opportunities and low wages, for young women who were abandoned after seduction, ostracized by their communities, or who simply wanted fashionable goods but were low in cash, the prostitution "industry" lured them in.

In nineteenth-century North America and Europe, prostitution was one of the paths that an unmarried woman of a lower class was sometimes lured, or forced, into. For example, in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), Fantine, the young woman character, is seduced and abandoned, and she later gives birth to an illegitimate child. "Fantine was left in solitude. Being abandoned by the father of the child – and such partings, alas, are irrevocable – she was thrown entirely on her own resources" (Hugo 146). In order to make a living for both her and the child, Fantine has to find work in a factory while letting a couple raise her illegitimate child. Later she is forced to turn to prostitution in order to provide money for her daughter. Wharton obviously is influenced by the theme of prostitution in nineteenth-century literature, and includes it in her novel as well.

In *Summer* Wharton hints at the possibility of Charity becoming a prostitute as early as in the middle of the story. The protagonist is entrapped by the malicious judgment of conduct from people in her community, including her guardian. Her accidental encounter with Julia Hawes,[128] the prostitute, and Mr. Royall during her trip with Lucius at Nettleton is symbolic.

> He [Mr. Royal] was just behind Julia Hawes, and had one hand on her arm; but as he left the gang-plank he freed himself, and moved a step or two

> away from his companions. He had seen Charity at once, and his glance passed slowly from her to Harney, whose arm was still about her. He stood staring at them, and trying to master the senile quiver of his lips; then he drew himself up with the tremulous majesty of drunkenness, and stretched out his arm. "You whore--you damn--bare-headed whore, you!" he enunciated slowly. (189)

Outraged to discover Charity and Lucius together and propelled by his drunkenness, Mr. Royall makes the blunder of calling Charity a "whore" before the public. After being humiliated by her guardian in public, Charity feels deeply wounded and risks the damage to her reputation. Carol Wershoven notes that "it is very easy for a woman to cross the boundaries into the bleak world of social disapproval or even ostracism" in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America (16). Due to her pregnancy out of wedlock, Julia is socially ostracized, and has to turn to prostitution. Charity faces a similar fate in the near future. After being called a whore by her guardian in public, Charity suddenly has a vision of herself: "hatless, dishevelled, with a man's arm about her, confronting that drunken crew, headed by her guardian's pitiable figure" (190). The image of a dishevelled woman reminds one of Ophelia in *Hamlet*.[129] The image of dishevelled woman is often associated with madness.[130] Wharton here shows her familiarity with the literary tradition, and implies the ill fate awaiting her protagonist.

It should be noted that Mr. Royall, who represents the patriarchal system at large, is applying double standards here. He associates with a prostitute when he is away from North Dormer, yet he accuses Charity of being a whore. In other words, women who become prostitutes are condemned and ostracized, but the men who hire them for their

"service" are tolerated or even accepted. Ruth Rosen notes that "[f]or men, prostitution upheld the double standard, the polarized images of women as angelic or monstrous, but in neither case fully human, and the ideology that women existed to serve men" (6). In *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir sharply attacks the double standard of this practice in patriarchy as follows: "The most flagrant example of this duplicity is the male's attitudes towards prostitution, for it is his demand that creates the supply. I have noted with what disgusted skepticism prostitutes regard the respectable gentlemen who condemn vice in general but view their own personal whims with indulgence; yet they regard the girls who live off their bodies as perverted and debauched, not the males who use them" (625). De Beauvoir has been quite outspoken against this inequality between the two genders.

In her book *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett also condemns the double standard employed toward prostitutes. Moreover, she points out the rivalry and division among women themselves caused by patriarchy.

> One of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another, in the past creating a lively antagonism between whore and matron ... One envies the other her "security" and prestige, while the other envied yearns beyond the confines of respectability for what she takes to be the other's freedom, adventure, and contact with the great world. Through the multiple advantages of the double standard, the male participates in both worlds, empowered by his superior social and economic resources to play the estranged women against each other as rivals. (Millett 52)

Similar to Millett, Ruth Rosen comments on the antagonism between "whore and matron" by stating: "The singling out of a caste of degraded women served as an object lesson and a threat to other women. The spectre of the whore was always before them as a reminder of what they might become or how they might be treated if they failed to live up to the angel image or lived outside of male protection" (6). In *Summer* Julia Hawes is hostile and sarcastic toward Charity, and the latter does not have a favourable opinion of the former either. Wharton, Millett, and Rosen are all observant to describe the antagonism between "whore and matron" in a patriarchal society.

Against the poverty of the Mountain, the path of becoming a prostitute like Julia, ironically, appears even more appealing than the half-human environment on the Mountain:

> She said to herself that she would find some quiet place where she could bear her child, and give it to decent people to keep; and then she would go out like Julia Hawes and earn its living and hers. She knew that girls of that kind sometimes made enough to have their children nicely cared for; and every other consideration disappeared in the vision of her baby, cleaned and combed and rosy, and hidden away somewhere where she could run in and kiss it, and bring it pretty things to wear. (253)

This again leads to the issue of paucity of choices for women. Haytock explains that "[t]he choice of a real (as opposed to literary) woman to become a prostitute must be viewed in light of women's economic opportunities. In the mid-nineteenth century, those opportunities were severely limited" (60). In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

America, women were given more choices and options in life. For example, they were admitted to institutions of higher education and could be employed for a variety of jobs. According to Nancy Woloch, the American congress funded higher education through the Morrill Act during the Civil War, and "[b]y 1870, eight state universities, mainly in the West and Midwest, admitted women" (276). By 1900 the numbers of co-educational colleges and universities had increased by "almost five times as many" to the figure for 1867 (Woloch 277). However, for women of the lower class with no social connections or education, their choices were still quite limited. "Without the financial support of a family, a single woman faced the bleak prospect of attempting to support herself on subsistence wages or turning to prostitution" (Rosen 163). In *Summer* Charity's dream of a better life is totally destroyed after the discovery of her pregnancy. She is stuck in her predicament. Charity's plan of becoming a prostitute fully exposes her entrapment in her current circumstances. Burdened with the upcoming baby, she has to sacrifice her person, even her own body, in order to survive a harsh environment. She has to become entrapped so that her daughter may have a chance of freedom in the future.

Although in the end Charity does not become a prostitute, she is nonetheless trapped for the rest of her life in another form of economic bondage, i.e. marriage to an old man she does not love. Mr. Royall brings Charity down from the Mountain for the second time in her life, and offers to marry her for the third time. Under a confused mind and with no better option in view, Charity finally agrees.

> "What's all this about wanting?" he [Mr. Royall] said as she paused. "Do you know what you really want? I'll tell you. You want to be took home and took care of. And I guess that's all there is to say." ... "Ain't it?" He looked at his watch. "Well, I'll tell you another thing. All I want is to know if you'll marry me. If there was anything else, I'd tell you so; but there ain't. Come to my age, a man knows the things that matter and the things that don't; that's about the only good turn life does us." His tone was so strong and resolute that it was like a supporting arm about her. She felt her resistance melting, her strength slipping away from her as he spoke. (257)

In the above paragraph, Mr. Royall fully shows his authority and advantages in seniority, position, and money. Utterly confused and exhausted, Charity loses her usual strength to fight the outside forces any longer. Her condition forces her to yield to Mr. Royall's proposal, i.e. to marry the man she earlier feels disgusted at. Charity's choice suggests the lack of life options for both her and women in similar situations. By marrying Mr. Royall, she totally abandons her own dream of ever getting out of North Dormer. Fedorko sarcastically comments: "Charity resembles Wharton's earlier Gothic short story heroines in the confinement of her liveliness and sexuality in a restrictive house by an older man, her collusion in that confinement, and all her ambiguous 'rescue'" (71), and "[a]t the end of her Gothic stories the heroine is often dead or imprisoned" (17). The protagonist is thus forever trapped in the "faded red house" in North Dormer. In other words, she is forced to assume the role of the angel in the house for the rest of her life.

The ending of the novel is immersed in sentimentality and sadness. The last act of Charity is to get her blue brooch from Dr. Merkle. Although Dr. Merkle charges Charity far more than she should, she pays anyway, for "[s]he wanted it for her baby: she meant it, in some mysterious way, to be a link between Harney's child and its unknown father" (267). Wharton does not build a picture where women characters help each other to survive the storm in *Summer*; instead, what one mostly sees is women characters exploiting and hurting one another. Being a realist herself, Wharton does not want to create a romantic story through rose-colored lenses. Abigail Hamblen comments: "Incredibly, she [Wharton] cites with contempt the work of Mary Wilkins and of Sarah Orne Jewett who looked at their subjects, she says, through 'rose-colored spectacles'" (239). Adhering to realism, Wharton wants to depict the cruelty and ugliness in life, in which the importance of money cannot be ignored.

Out of the whirlwind of her passion for Lucius and her desire to escape North Dormer, Charity in the end only gets to keep the blue pin. Charity sacrifices her life and dream for both her lover and the baby. Critics have different views concerning the ending of the novel. Haytock thinks that in *Summer* the author suggests that there are few good choices for women: "Wharton insists that the new freedoms offered to women of the 1910s and 1920s are simply window-dressing that hide the basic fact that women must marry" (73). Kathy Grafton, however, views the ending in a positive light. She thinks that Charity's decision to marry Mr. Royall can be seen "as a positive one", and "[w]e must keep in mind that the options for a young girl of her class in such a predicament during this time were few. Therefore, though marriage to Mr. Royall may at first seem like a kind of surrender on Charity's part, it actually further reveals her maturity and clear

vision" (365). It is quite hard to accept Grafton's view, i.e. to view the ending as "positive"; therefore, the view espoused by Haytock and Fedorko seems more reasonable. Both Haytock and Fedorko agree that there is the inequality of wills between Charity and Mr. Royall, and it is quite difficult to consider Royall as a benevolent man who saves Charity from the fate of prostitution. The protagonist's return to the red house symbolizes the restoration of the order in the patriarchal society.

It is interesting to find that women writers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, such as Stoddard, Chopin, and Wharton in particular, have all devoted themselves quite faithfully to portraying the reality. Readers may find the fate awaiting the protagonist in *Summer* to be quite bleak and hopeless, but Wharton has continued to assume a neutral stance in writing her fictions. Abigail Hamblen thinks that "[b]y the very nature of her circumstances, Mrs. Wharton is detached from her subject ... For she views this particular culture as if it were in a laboratory, rather as historians study the civilizations of ancient Crete or of the Australian aborigines" (243). Hamblen may have gone too far in explaining the detached stance Wharton assumes as an author. One can feel Wharton's sympathy toward the protagonist, however, she does not relent in portraying the sad ending, and she does not attempt to judge or preach in her novel. According to Katherine Joslin, Wharton explains the creation of her characters as follows: "It is necessary to me that the note of inevitableness should be sounded at the very opening of my tale, and that my characters should go forward to their ineluctable doom.... From the first I know exactly what is going to happen to every one of them; their fate is settled beyond rescue, and I have but to watch and record" (39). One can sense the cool neutrality Wharton assumes toward her literary creation. Thus, Joslin is

quite accurate to summarize Wharton's stance as a novelist as "neutral, distant, outside the picture she is painting" (39).

The ending suggests the protagonist's defeat and failure in her quest for a better new world for herself. Wharton writes stories about characters who are mostly from an upper-class background, such as the main characters in *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*, most of whom are from the upper-class in New York. This time, surprisingly, she sets the background as a poor and isolated New England village. However, it seems that for her women characters from both the upper- and lower-classes the ending is typically gloomy. Joslin explains the author's reluctance to allow happy endings in her fictions as a result of Wharton's belief in the "painful compromise" between personal desires and social expectations (8). Pointing out that the protagonist in *Summer* is a "victim", Hermione Lee states: "The choices she [Charity] has to make as a woman are few and grim. This is one of Wharton's most outspoken and lacerating books about the limitations of women's lives. She is not easily described as a feminist writer, but *Summer* is particularly bitter about female oppression" (507). Here I agree with both Joslin and Lee, and think that the sad ending reflects the Wharton's doubts that women in her era can successfully brave a new world for their own.

In conclusion, Edith Wharton's work, *Summer*, again points to the dilemma described by Gubar and Gilbert, i.e. "the equally uncomfortable spatial options of expulsion into the cold outside or suffocation in the hot indoors" (Gubar and Gilbert 86). Like predecessors such as Kate Chopin, Wharton has not offered a satisfactory solution in *Summer* either. Wharton's life experiences, i.e. her doubts about her literary worth, supports Gilbert and Gubar's theory on the anxiety of female authorship and her works

shed light on the female character's sense of entrapment in women's writing, particularly in relation to the financial position of women in early twentieth-century America.

Conclusion

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar point out that the attempt to break away from the confinement of home was a common theme in nineteenth-century women's literature, and they describe it as a unique female tradition in women's writings in the nineteenth century. This thesis looks at the theme of female entrapment in three American women writers and their works: Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Mogesons* (1862), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917). The three authors' lives and works reflect the dilemma faced by women of various social backgrounds, whereby they feel entrapped both within and without the confines of a patriarchal domestic sphere in the American context from the post-bellum period to World War I. As mentioned in the introduction, the main body of the thesis is structured around three major questions in relation to the idea of female entrapment. In the concluding part of this thesis, I would like to give a brief summary of the potential answers to these three questions I have raised.

Regarding the first question, i.e. the anxiety of female authorship, one can find that the three women authors all harboured doubts about their abilities to write. Among them, Stoddard suffered the most from her anxiety of female authorship, as she had undergone a much more painful struggle to achieve her dream of artist-hood, compared with Chopin and Wharton. Different from Stoddard, who openly declared her ambition to become a great writer, Chopin masked her ambition in order to appear acceptable to the Victorian notion of femininity. Her action may be deemed wise in the context of the late nineteenth century in which the ideal of femininity still reigned in America. Although

Wharton achieved both fame and money early in her professional career, she still held doubts about her true ability as a writer. The three women writers' experiences confirm Gubar's and Gilbert's argument about the anxiety of authorship for women writers in nineteenth-century America.

In terms of the second question, i.e. the forms of entrapment suffered by the women characters in the three novels, Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862) explores the entrapment imposed by the ideology of the cult of domesticity. The protagonist of Chopin's *The Awakening* goes through the process of awakening to her own sense of self and struggles to shake off the entrapment largely (not solely) imposed upon her by her marriage. Edith Wharton's *Summer* (1917) vividly captures the dissatisfaction and frustration experienced by a poor working-class woman with her restricted and dead-end life in a small village in New England. Although the three novels are different in their focus, it is interesting to find that sub-themes such as the pursuit of "a room of her own", and the confinement and liberation resulting from a woman's experience of her body are approached by all three women writers, which reflects both the importance the three women writers attach to these sub-themes and the common concerns they share toward the forms of female entrapment.

Concerning the third question, i.e. the solutions to end the female entrapment, the three women writers have offered a number of possible solutions for their women characters to resolve their difficult situations. Among the solutions, solitude and marriage are the two common ones suggested. In regard to solitude, Stoddard has been quite objective in describing both its positive and negative aspects, i.e. solitude can either liberate women from their present entrapment or plunge them deeper into their

confinement; whereas Chopin considers it as a temporary solution to free her protagonist from her situation of entrapment in marriage. Stoddard has quite a hopeful attitude toward the proposed solution of marriage provided there is equality between the two genders in marriage. Chopin, on the other hand, suggests that marriage can be a form of entrapment for some women such as her protagonist, whereas Wharton uses the solution of marriage to suggest the lack of options for a young woman of a lower class to escape her financial entrapment. In other words, women of the lower classes still have to marry in order to survive in their difficult circumstances.

It should be noted that none of the three women authors have offered a completely satisfactory solution to solve the dilemma of female entrapment, which reflects the complexity and difficulty of the matter. The ambivalence assumed by the three women authors demonstrates their maturity in that they have recognized the complexity of the problem as well as the restraints of their times. Their efforts at marking and revealing this problem have both raised social awareness and encouraged future generations of women writers to deal with the issue. The pain and frustration associated with female entrapment, whether it is from the perspectives of ideology, marriage, finance, or anything else, calls for greater attention to be paid to this unique female experience.

In addition, as the main body of the thesis focuses on exploring the theme of female entrapment in three novels, the narrative style of each novel is also important. Stoddard uses first-person narration in *The Morgesons*; while both Chopin and Wharton resort to third-person narration in *The Awakening* and *Summer*. *The Morgesons* is a female bildungsroman, i.e. "a novel which tracks its protagonist from youth to maturity, charting ... her development or decline" (Zagarell 286). There are bildungsromans before

The Morgesons that use first person narration, such as *Jane Eyre*. Therefore, Stoddard's application of first-person narration can been seen as a response to the *Bildungroman* tradition. By using a first-person narrator, Stoddard enables readers to penetrate into the protagonist's inner thoughts. However, at the same time, readers have to remind themselves that the protagonist's account may not be reliable. Sandra Zagarell points out that "Cassandra-as-narrator is especially unusual because of her variable dependability ... [s]ome are accurate, some miss the mark" (299). Therefore, readers need to judge for themselves if the depiction by the narrator is accurate or not. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Stoddard's writing style is also difficult to describe. Jennifer Putzi notes that Stoddard "was neither a strictly romantic nor a strictly realistic writer, a sentimentalist nor a regionalist; rather, she took advantage of shifting American literary tastes to craft a different kind of narrative fiction" (xii). Likewise, Lawrence Buell considers Stoddard to be in "a transitional position between romance and realism" (265). In other words, Stoddard's works show the blended influences from romanticism, realism, regionalism, etc.

Compared with Stoddard and Wharton, Chopin may be the most experimental of the three writers in terms of narrative technique, which may well be because of her knowledge of French literature. For example, Chopin admires the works of Maupassant, and is strongly influenced by his writing technique. Bernard Koloski notes that Chopin was captivated by de Maupassant's "direct and simple" writing style, "an economy of detail, a penchant for ironic endings, and a fascination with—a continual focus on—the way that women respond to the people around them" (6). In *The Awakening* Chopin uses free indirect discourse, which she may have learnt from Gustave Flaubert. Blakey

Vermeule explains free indirect discourse as "a technique for presenting a character's inner thoughts from a third-person point of view" (75). And he also notes that "Gustave Flaubert sparked technical and psychological fireworks with it [the technique]" (72). Chopin is familiar with Flaubert's works, and applies free indirect discourse in *The Awakening*. The advantage of free indirect discourse is that it helps the readers to enter the psychological realm of the characters, which in the case of Edna, enables the readers to better comprehend the emotional changes and development of the protagonist. Commenting on the form of *The Awakening*, Elaine Showalter thinks that "the novel has moved away from conventional techniques of realism to an impressionistic rhythm of epiphany and mood", as "chapters [of the novel] are unified less by their style than by their focus on Edna's consciousness" (43). Showalter's comment in another way reiterates Chopin's emphasis on portraying her protagonist's inner thoughts, emotions, and consciousness through her narrative.

Although Wharton is sometimes linked to modernism, she is quite traditional in her application of narrative techniques. Unlike modernists such as James Joyce or Virginia Woolf who boldly experiment with their narrative forms, Wharton is more comfortable applying the conventional third-person narration. However, as Abigail Hamblen suggests, Wharton is quite "detached from her subject" (243). One can clearly sense the distance that Wharton tries to keep toward her works. Showalter also thinks that Wharton has maintained "her aesthetic distance [from] and control [of]" her fictions (271). In *Summer* Wharton uses the third-person omniscient narrator. Although the narrative form in *Summer* can be regarded as conventional, Wharton manages to unveil the emotional changes experienced by her protagonist, and asks readers to sympathize

with Charity's misfortune. In summary, the three women writers have not been particularly radical or experimental in their use of narrative techniques, which may either reflect their comfort with the traditional narrative techniques or their greater concern for the content over the form.

Looking at the three authors and their works chronologically, one may also feel that it is a shame that Stoddard's worth was not recognized in her life-time. A similar fate, this neglect by critics and readers, awaited Chopin as well. In other words, Stoddard and Chopin failed initially to influence future generations of writers. The chapter on Elizabeth Stoddard in this thesis, in particular, is a tribute to this fairly recently rediscovered author, and it is hoped that more studies can be done to deepen our understanding and appreciation of this long-neglected woman writer. Although by now Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton have already been much studied, their emphases on, and efforts at, exploring the theme of female entrapment should be acknowledged and valued. Personally, the yearning and frustration of the protagonist in Chopin's *The Awakening* inspired me most to undertake this project on the theme of female entrapment in American women writers from the mid nineteenth- to the early twentieth-century. In addition, one can also recognize that although *The Morgesons* and *The Awakening* initially failed to influence later generations of women writers, the common theme of female entrapment had not been forgotten. Indeed it has been picked up by later generations of American women writers, which suggests the continuing oppression women still feel in the twentieth century and beyond.

Although this thesis stops in the early twentieth century, it should be stressed that the discussion of female entrapment obviously does not stop there. There are other

American women writers who have carried on with the theme of female entrapment in the twentieth century. For example, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), to name but one work, looks at oppression and entrapment from the perspective of African-American women in the 1930s. The continuing effort to explore the theme of female entrapment suggests how significant this issue is, and the unique relevance it has for women's lives throughout history.

Chapter Notes

[1] Critics have different opinions regarding how to define the three waves of feminism. In this thesis, the concept of the three waves of feminism is applied only to give a general and chronological account of the feminist theories on the theme of female entrapment.

[2] Wollstonecraft had not foreseen women's ability to participate in all fields of professions two hundred years later.

[3] In *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, Joan B. Landes defines the traditional term "public" and "private" as follows: "The term 'public' suggests the opposite of 'private': that which pertains to the people as a whole, the community, the common good, things open to the sight, and those things that are accessible and shared by all. Conversely, 'the private' signifies something closed and exclusive, as in the admonition 'Private property—no trespassing'" (1-2). However, Landes also notes that feminism has "upset the firm divisions between public and private matters", and contributed to "a deepening understanding of the historical, symbolic, and practical effects of the organization of public and private life" (2). In this thesis, the public sphere is defined as referring to perspectives such as the scarcity of life options available for women, the institution of marriage, and the notion of "a room of one's own"; while the private sphere mainly refers to the female body, and to states such as anorexia and pregnancy.

[4] Critics such as Hermione Lee.

[5] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Poems*, 34.

[6] In this thesis, entrapment and confinement will be used interchangeably.

[7] "Patriarchy literally means rule by the father. The term, however, is used in a variety of ways. Radical feminists use it to describe a broad system of oppression and control of women by men" (Aulette 29).

[8] In this thesis, I will use the "ideal of femininity in the nineteenth-century" and "Victorian femininity" interchangeably. The Victorian era refers to the period under the rule of Queen Victoria in Nineteen-century Britain; however, some critics also apply the term "Victorian" in American context as well. For example, Ronald Walters uses the term "Victorian America" in his book *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America*.

[9] The idea of Victorian femininity will be explained in detail in the chapter on Kate Chopin.

[10] "achieving artist-hood" here refers to becoming a writer with literary recognition.

[11] Critics began to turn their attention to Stoddard around 1980s.

[12] Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*, 12.

[13] George Cotkin, *Reluctant Modernism: American Thought and Culture, 1880-1890*, 76.

[14] Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady* points to the significant number of women patients in public lunatic asylums in mid-nineteenth century in English society (Showalter 3).

[15] "But during the Civil War, when Congress funded higher education through the Morrill Act, a new spurt of coeducation began. By 1870, eight state universities, mainly in the West and Midwest, admitted women" (Woloch 276).

[16] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Daily Alta California*, Oct. 22, 1854. From Anne E. Boyd, *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America.*

[17] Elizabeth Stoddard's letter to Margaret Sweat, July 20, 1852. From Anne E. Boyd, *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America.*

[18] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Daily Alta California*, Oct. 8, 1854.

[19] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Poems*, 22.

[20] Elizabeth Stoddard's letters to Margaret Sweat in 1852 and 1853. From *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America.*

[21] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Daily Alta California*, Oct. 22, 1854.

[22] Ibid, June 19, 1855.

[23] Ibid, June 2, 1857.

[24] I will explain the private sphere in a later section starting from p. 48.

[25] Elizabeth Stoddard, *The Morgesons and Other Writings*, 7.

[26] Elliott explains the New England Puritanism as follows: "For puritans the establishment of the New England colony was a sign that the world had entered into the last phase of history and that the people of New England were fulfilling the biblical prophecy by establishing the New Jerusalem. Their dream of America was the establishment of a perfecting society which would come to coincide with the invisible Church of God's chosen on earth, and thus prepare the way for the Second Coming of Christ" (Elliott xiv).

[27] This can be another example of the Brontë sisters' influence on Stoddard.

[28] Elizabeth Stoddard, 1901 Preface, *The Morgesons*, 259.

[29] *The Morgesons* was published during the American Civil War; however, Stoddard hardly mentions the war in the novel. She was therefore criticized for not closely following the major event of her time.

[30] "In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America, Baptists, Quakers, Methodists, Mennonites, and Presbyterians all constituted ... sects" (Weber 171).

[31] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Poems*, 38.

[32] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Stories*, 202-205.

[33] Tom Winnifrith, *Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, 31.

[34] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Poems*, 20.

[35] It is considered "illicit passion" because Cassandra falls for a married man.

[36] John Eliot Bowen, editor of *The Independent*, 1889.

[37] There are many discussions regarding the concepts of self and subject. For example, in her essay "'The Death of the Subject' and its Sociological Rebirth as Subjectivation", Andrea D. Bührmann comments on the relationship between self and subject as well as the hybridity of subject as follows: "Most of the concepts of the self found in cultural studies adhere to this procedural structuration of the modern subject [i.e. Identity thus appears as a kind of authentic core belonging to the subject, which is formed step by step in the course of socialization and is then established and stabilized if the formation of the identity has been successful], but the hybrid gestalt of the subject remains a topic of debate. At the core of this debate is what one should designate as ahistorical, general and thus naturally given, and what is culturally changeable. On the one hand, the subject is considered as determined by its connection to empiricism and its heterogeneity of

experiences. On the other hand, in accordance with philosophical tradition, the subject is seen as the determinant of the individual and society" (16-17).

[38] Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*, 13.

[39] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Daily Alta California*, Dec. 3, 1855 and Aug. 3, 1856.

[40] In this thesis, I do not attempt to defend Cassandra's transgression with Charles. According to the morality of the time, Cassandra's conduct of getting involved with a married man is considered wrong. But it is not within the intention of the author, Elizabeth Stoddard, to pass moral judgment on her characters.

[41] Stoddard had read and admired works by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the latter also encouraged her to continue her writing.

[42] Some would argue that Cassandra is only close to committing an adulterous affair with a married man.

[43] Cassandra does not regret the affair. Hester, on the other hand, does not publicly repent of her affair. It is debatable whether Hester has privately repented or not.

[44] "In 1874 the term 'anorexia nervosa' was coined by William Gull ... Between 1874-1918... the condition of anorexia was publicly identified and labeled" (Dignon16). Today anorexia nervosa is defined as "a state in which the sufferer, usually female, refuses to eat enough to maintain normal body weight for her height" (Gilbert 3-4).

[45] I do not think Stoddard purposefully promotes anorexia in her novel; rather, I think she is more recording and reflecting a possible situation.

[46] Elizabeth Stoddard and Emily Dickinson

[47] It is not simply the form of marriage, but the values the parties hold toward marriage. I will explain it in later part of this section.

[48] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 631-637.

[49] I will write about Ben's failed marriage toward the end of this chapter.

[50] In reality it also took Elizabeth Stoddard quite some time to make the final decision of marrying Richard. One can assume that the issue of giving up her autonomy bothered young Stoddard as well.

[51] Kate Chopin, *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, 734.

[52] Stoddard and Wharton have also touched upon the theme of marriage in their works, but they have not examined it in such depth as Chopin does in *The Awakening*. I think the three writers, to a certain degree, have all been ambivalent about the choice of marriage, and its positive and negative impacts on their women characters. Stoddard holds a more positive attitude toward marriage compared with Chopin, whereas Wharton mainly views marriage as a means of survival for her protagonist who is from a lower class.

[53] I will explain the literary receptions of *The Awakening* in the section "Chopin and Anxiety of Female Authorship".

[54] There are many discussions regarding gender and sexuality. For example, Claire Colebrook in *Gender* explains the differences between gender and sexuality as: "There are today, in general, two competing accounts of gender. The first is the explanation from sexuality. There are two types of biological body – male and female – that are then socialised and represented through certain stereotypes or images: gender is the social construction of sex. … The second account is the explanation from culture. There are, in fact, no essential differences, but societies order the world into male and female

oppositions. Sexuality is meaningless, complex and bears none of the binary simplicity that characterises gender. It is gender – or cultural differentiation into kinds – that allows us to think of distinctly different bodies" (9). In *Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender*, Jacquelyn W. White explains gender and sexuality as follows: "Many contemporary scholars view sexuality as a cultural construction. Cultures provide individuals with knowledge and 'lenses' that structure institutions, social interactions, beliefs, and behaviors. Through cultural lenses or meaning systems, individuals perceive the 'facts' of sex and gender. Conceptualizations of sex and gender and the importance of sex and gender as social categories vary from culture to culture" (311).

[55] In this thesis, I view sexuality as a sub-category under gender. Sexuality emphasizes more on the biological aspect, whereas gender emphasizes both the biological and cultural aspects. If one solely looks at *The Awakening* from the perspective of sexuality, one may miss other significant issues, such as autonomy, authenticity and self-fulfilment, all of which Chopin has paid great attention to in her works.

[56] I will explain the pubic and private spheres in detail in later sections (starting from p.94). The public sphere includes the scarcity of life options available for women, the institution of marriage, and the notion of "a room of one's own"; and the private sphere includes bodily sensations, mental illness, and woman's biology.

[57] In this thesis, "Victorian femininity", "the ideal Victorian woman", and "Victorian womanhood" are used interchangeably to refer to the same idea.

[58] The poem was first published in 1854, and later was revised in 1862.

[59] Retrieved from http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/patmore/angel/9.html on Sept. 21, 2010.

[60] Retrieved from http://s.spachman.tripod.com/Woolf/professions.htm on Sept. 21, 2010.

[61] Their fathers' or husbands' houses.

[62] I have written about the literary background for women writers in nineteenth-century America in detail in the chapter on Elizabeth Stoddard.

[63] Refer to the chapter on Elizabeth Stoddard.

[64] Nancy Walker, *Kate Chopin: A Literary Life*, 18.

[65] The reason will be explained in a later part of the chapter.

[66] There are some similarities between Chopin's personal life and the character of Edna Pontiller, therefore, *The Awakening* can read as semi-autobiographical.

[67] It is recorded as 1850 in books such as *Kate Chopin: A Literary Life*.

[68] Barbara C. Ewell, *Kate Chopin*, 11.

[69] Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*, 40.

[70] Ibid 41.

[71] Ibid 39.

[72] Chopin developed "a romantic attachment to a prominent Cloutierville man" after her husband's death (Ewell 16).

[73] Dr. Kolbenheyer is the family physician, and also a good friend of Kate Chopin.

[74] Seyersted 52.

[75] Chopin was a widower then, and made decisions on her own.

[76] Alice Hall Petry, *Critical Essays on Kate Chopin*, 53.

[77] Seyersted 176.

[78] Petry 52.

[79] "Social acquaintances and evens some friends began to avoid her [Chopin]; the city's Mercantile Library reportedly banned the novel from its shelves; she was excluded from the St. Louis Fine Arts Club; and, in another possible rebuke, the Wednesday Club omitted her form its American Prose Writers Series, begun that fall" (Ewell 25).

[80] Biographies on Kate Chopin that were published before 1980s.

[81] "A Room of One's Own"

[82] Daniel S. Rankin's *Kate Chopin and her Creole Stories*.

[83] Reprinted in *Critical Essays on Kate Chopin*.

[84] Per Seyersted is considered one of the most influential scholars on Chopin.

[85] Chopin was careful to present the public with an image of a mother preoccupied with domesticity.

[86] It will be discussed in later sections on Chopin's novel and short stories.

[87] I will explain the two spheres in later parts.

[88] Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories of Kate Chopin*, 6.

[89] From 1880 to 1920 in America, "women's major forms of employment were in the domestic and personal service industry". By 1900, 20 percent of American women were employed. In other words, there are not many life options for women at the time (Bose 55).

[90] In her twelve years of marriage, Chopin gave birth to six children.

[91] It can be assumed that Chopin may not be very comfortable to break completely free from the Victorian notion of femininity.

[92] I divide Edna's process of waking up into three stages. In the first stage, Edna begins to realize a sense of selfhood at Grand Isle. In the second stage, she tries to strive for

autonomy in New Orleans. In the third stage, Edna realizes the futility of her struggle, and commits suicide at Grand Isle.

[93] Both characters have acted according to their present emotions without giving thoughts to future consequences.

[94] For example, women's movement for equality and suffrage.

[95] According to Mary Beth Combs, it was not until the passing of "The 1870 Married Women's Property Act" that granted British women the right to control their own property.

[96] Anna has an affair with Vronsky while still enjoying the comforts provided by her husband.

[97] Allen Stein explains the "autonomous self" in his book *Women and Autonomy in Kate Chopin's Short Fiction* as the yearning for power to control over one's own life. Nancy Theriot in *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-century America* summarizes the female autonomy in late nineteenth-century as "freedom of individual decision, the need for self-knowledge, and the right to education" (133). Here, I agree with both Stein's and Theriot's notions.

[98] Statistically, women are twice more likely to suffer from depression than men (Gotlib and Hammen 86).

[99] Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that is tied to seasons of the year. Most people with SAD are depressed only during the late fall and winter (sometimes called the "winter blues") and not during the spring or summer. A small number, however, are depressed only during the late spring and summer. Retrieved from

http://www.emedicinehealth.com/seasonal_depression_sad/article_em.htm on Dec. 7, 2010.

[100] "Manic depression, which therapists refer to as bipolar illness, is the most dramatic mood disorder. Its victims moods swing from depression to the opposite extreme—euphoria" (Hales 40).

[101] It cannot be assumed that for all women writers, but in the case of Kate Chopin, it is the case.

[102] "No conscious action is more final or more absolute than suicide. It leaves no time for regrets or second thoughts. It is, quite simply, the end" (Hale 60).

[103] Thomas Bonner, *The Kate Chopin Companion*, 195-196.

[104] The female protagonist ends her marriage in order to pursue her career of acting.

[105] Edith Wharton, "Wants." *Atlantic Monthly* 45 (May 1880): 599.

[106] Commenting on financial difficulties for women in the nineteenth-century, Ruth Rosen notes that a single woman would face bleak prospect "[w]ithout the financial support of a family" (163).

[107] This paragraph is a brief summary of Wharton's love life, and there is no intention to make light of the sufferings she had gone through in her divorce and personal affairs.

[108] It has been proved by psychologists that women are generally more prone to develop depression than men; however, there is little research focusing on the relationship between women artists and depression. The causes of the depression experienced by the three women writers in this thesis are uncertain. Apart from the possible explanations listed in this paragraph for their conditions, there is also the possibility that writing itself can become a "cure" to free women writers from their depression. The association

between mental illness and women artists draws attention to the phenomenon and raises concerns.

[109] Carol Singley, *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, 7.

[110] Few people had remembered the death of either Stoddard or Chopin.

[111] I will explain the private sphere in a later part.

[112] Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome, Summer, Bunner Sisters*, 107-108.

[113] It is spelt as such in the novel.

[114] "the outside force" refers to factors beyond the control of the two protagonists, such as orphanage, lack of opportunities for women in a patriarchal society, etc.

[115] I will explain the poverty on the Mountain on pp. 202-203.

[116] Wharton is generally considered a realist writer, but some of the themes in her fictions, such as alienation, can also be linked to modernism.

[117] Starting from Chapter XI in Wharton's *Summer*.

[118] I will examine the relationship between Charity and Lucius in detail in a later section. Lucius is an outsider to North Dormer, and comes from a wealthy family background.

[119] Charity does not legally own this little house where she and Lucius meet each other.

[120] I will explain it in section three of this chapter.

[121] Annabel Balch

[122] Annabel Balch is a beautiful girl from a rich family and is also engaged to Lucius.

[123] Retrieved from http://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI8213241 on May 30 2011.

[124] Lucius is from a big city, therefore, to the protagonist, she considers him to be different from people in North Dormer.

[125] It is written in the novel as such. It can be understood either as a typo when the novel was printed or Wharton's intention to depict Charity's lack of education. According to Nany R. Leach, "one reads such idiomatic expressions as Charity Royall's "I want you should leave me" as misprints rather than reproductions of New England dialect" (96).

[126] I have written about de Beauvoir's and Bordo's views toward the female body in Chapter Three.

[127] Fictions such as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Les Misérable*, etc.

[128] Julia Hawes is a girl originally from North Dormer. She gets pregnant before marriage, and later becomes a prostitute.

[129] When staging the play *Hamlet*, Ophelia, who is in love with Hamlet, is often presented as dishevelled before she commits suicide.

[130] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 10-11.

Works Cited

Adams, James Eli. *A History of Victorian Literature*. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2009.

Alaimo, Stacy. "Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons*: A Feminist Dialogue of Bildung and Descent." *Legacy* 8 (Spring 1991): 35.

Ammons, Elizabeth. "Gender and Fiction." *The Columbia Literary History of the American Novel*. Ed. Emory Elliott. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 267-284.

---. *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991.

Aulette, Judy. *Changing American Families*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002.

Barker, Deborah E. "The Awakening 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.

---. *Aesthetics and Gender in American Literature: Portraits of the Woman Artist*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2000.

Barker-Benfield, G. J. *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Routlege, 2000.

Bauer, Dale M. "Wharton's 'Others': Addiction and Intimacy." *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*. Ed. Carol J. Singley. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. 115-146.

Baym, Nina. "The Rise of the Woman Author." *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Ed. Emory Elliott. New York: Columbia UP, 1988. 289-305.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1972.

Beer, Janet. *Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Studies in Short Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's, 1997.

Bender, Bert. "Kate Chopin's Quarrel with Darwin before *The Awakening*." *Critical Essays on Kate Chopin*. Ed. Alice Hall Petry. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996. 99-116.

Benstock, Shari. "Edith Wharton, 1862-1937: A Brief Biography." *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*." Ed. Carol J. Singley. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. 19-50.

Bonner, Thomas Jr. *The Kate Chopin Companion*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1998.

Bordo, Susan. "Unbearable Weight." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001.

Boyd, Anne E. *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004.

Boydston, Jeanne. "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence." *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*. Ed. Vicki Ruiz and Ellen DuBois. New York: Routledge, 2000. 44-56.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. London: The Zodiac Press, 1958.

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc, 1958.

Buell, Lawrence. "Will Stoddard Endure?" *American Culture, Canons, and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard*. Eds. Robert McClure Smith and Ellen Weinauer. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2003. 265-270.

Buell, Lawrence, and Sandra A. Zagarell. Introduction. *The Morgesons and Other Writings*. By Elizabeth Stoddard. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1984. xi-xxv.

Bührmann, Andrea D. "'The Death of the Subject' and its Sociological Rebirth as Subjectivation". *Care or Control of the Self? Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, and the Subject in the 21st Century*. Eds. Andrea D. Bührmann and Stefanie Ernst. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 14-35.

Chesler, Phyllis. *Women and Madness*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Chopin, Kate. "The Haunted Chamber." *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Ed. Per Seyersted. London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. 734.

---. *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories of Kate Chopin*. New York: Simon& Schuster, Inc., 2004.

Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of Medusa." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001.

Clinton, Catherine, and Christine Lunardini. *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.

Combs, Mary Beth. "Balances of Power: The Middle Class and Married Women's Property in Nineteenth Century Britain." Diss. The University of Iowa, 2000.

Colebrook, Claire. *Gender*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Cotkin, George. *Reluctant Modernism: American Thought and Culture, 1880-1890*. New York: Twayne, 1992.

Dignon, Andrée. *All of Me: A Fuller Picture of Anorexia*. New York. Peter Lang, 2007.

Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1959.

Elliott, Emory. Introduction. *Puritan Influences in American Literature*. Ed. Emory Elliott. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1979. xi-xx.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-Reliance." *The Inaugural Address 2009*. New York: Penguin Books, 2009. 47-97.

Ewell, Barbara C. *Kate Chopin*. New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1986.

---. "Kate Chopin and the Dream of Female Selfhood." *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou*. Ed. Lynda S. Boren and Sara deSaussure Davis. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992. 157-165.

Fedorko, Kathy. *Gender and the Gothic in the Fiction of Edith Wharton*. London: The Uof Alabama P, 1995.

Filene. Peter. *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*. London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998.

Flaubert, Gastave. *Madame Bovary*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1992.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1971.

Fryer, Judith. *Felicitous Space: the Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986.

Fuller, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century and Other Writings*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.

Fusco, Richard. *Maupassant and the American Short Story: The Influence of Form at the Turn of the Century*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania UP, 1994.

Gentry, Deborah S. *The Art of Dying*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

Gilbert, Sara. *Counselling for Eating Disorders*. London: Sage Publications, 2000.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "Women and Economics." *Social and Political Theory: Classical Readings*. Ed. Michael Kimmel and Charles Stephen. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998. 396-404.

Gimbel, Wendy. "Edith Wharton: Orphancy and Survival." Diss. Fordham University, 1982.

Gotlib, Ian, and C. Hammen, eds. *Handbook of Depression*. London: The Guilford Press, 2009.

Grafton, Kathy. "Degradation and Forbidden Love in Edith Wharton's *Summer*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 41. 4 (1995): 350-366.

Hales, Dianne. *Depression*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989.

Hamblen, Abigail Ann. "Edith Wharton in New England." *The New England Quarterly* 38.2 (1965): 239-244.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963.

Haytock, Jennifer. *Edith Wharton and the Conversations of literary Modernism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Heilmann, Ann. "*The Awakening* and New Woman Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin*. Ed. Janet Beer. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 87-104.

Hill, Marilynn Wood. *Their Sisters' Keepers: Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1870*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.

Hoeller, Hildegard. *Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Realism and Sentimental Fiction.* Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2000.

Hugo, Victor. *Les Misérables.* Trans. Norman Denny. London: Penguin Books, 1982.

Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House and Other Plays.* London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One.* Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1985.

---. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference.* Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. London: Athlone Press, 1993.

Jacobs, Dorothy H. "The Awakening: A Recognition of Confinement." *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou.* Ed. Lynda S. Boren and Sara deSaussure Davis. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992. 80-94.

Jansson, Siv. "The Tenant of Wildfell hall: Rejecting the Angel's Influence." *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture.* Ed. Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998. 31-47.

Jordan, Ellen. *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain.* London: Routledge Press, 1999.

Joslin, Katherine. *Edith Wharton.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

---. "Kate Chopin on Fashion in a Darwinian World." *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin.* Ed. Janet Beer. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 73-86.

Kleinberg, S. J. *Women in the United States, 1830-1945.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1999.

Koloski, Bernard. *Kate Chopin: A Study of the Short Fiction.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.

Kristeva, Julia. "New Maladies of the Soul." *The Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. 349-369.

Landes, Joan B. Introduction. *Feminism, the Public and the Private*. Ed. Joan B. Landes. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. 1-17.

Leach, Nancy R. "New England in the Stories of Edith Wharton." *The New England Quarterly* 30.1 (1957): 90-98.

Leder, Priscilla. "Land's End: *The Awakening* and 19th-Century Literary Tradition." *Critical Essays on Kate Chopin*. Ed. Alice Hall Petry. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996. 237-250.

Lee, Hermione. *Edith Wharton*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2007.

Luck, Chad. "A Liberal Inheritance: Biology, Property, and the Limits of the Possessive Individual in Stoddard's '*The Morgesons*'." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 40.1 (2007): 37-48.

Mahoney, Lynn. *Elizabeth Stoddard and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Matlack, James H. "Hawthorne and Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard." *The New England Quarterly* 50. 2 (1977): 278-302.

Matthews, Glenna. *"Just A Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

McDowell, Margaret. *Edith Wharton*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976.

Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1970.

Mitchell, Sally. *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1835-1880*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green U Popular P, 1981.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*. Ed. Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992. 158-166.

Nolan, Elizabeth. "*The Awakening* as Literary Innovation: Chopin, Maupassant and the Evolution of Genre." *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin*. Ed. Janet Beer. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 118-131.

Odih, Pamela. "Gendered Time in the Age of Deconstruction." *Time Society* 8.1 (1999): 9-38.

Olasky, Marvin. *Abortion Rites: A Social History of Abortion in America*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1995.

Petry, Alice Hall. Ed. *Critical Essays on Kate Chopin*. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996.

Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel*. London: Bowering Press Plymouth, 1965.

Putzi, Jennifer. Introduction. *Two Men*. By Elizabeth Stoddard. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2008. xi-lviii.

Rankin, Daniel S. *Kate Chopin and her Creole Stories*. Philadelphia, 1932.

Raphael, Lev. *Edith Wharton's Prisoners of Shame: A New Perspective on Her Neglected Fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1991.

Romero, Lora. "Domesticity and Fiction." *The Columbia Literary History of the American Novel*. Ed. Emory Elliott. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 110-129.

Rosen, Ruth. *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1982.

Seyersted, Per. *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1980.

Shands, Kerstin W. *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Showalter, Elaine. *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

---. "Tradition and Female Talent: *The Awakening* as a Solitary Book." *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Kate Chopin—Updated Edition*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007. 7-26.

---. *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Singley, Carol J, ed. *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

Smith, Julie. "The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century American Novel." Diss. University of Kansas, 2003.

Smith, Robert McClure, and Ellen Weinauer. *American Culture, Canons, and the Case of Elizabeth Stoddard*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2003.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity Nineteenth-Century America." *Readings in Gender and Culture in America*. Ed. Nancy McKee and Linda Stone. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2002. 64-76.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll, and Charles E. Rosenberg. "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America."

Women and Health in America. Ed. Judith Leavitt. Madison, Wisconsin: The U of Wisconsin P, 1999. 111-130.

Stein, Allen F. *Women and Autonomy in Kate Chopin's Short Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2005.

Stoddard, Elizabeth. *The Morgesons and Other Writings*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1984.

---. *Elizabeth Stoddard: Stories*. Lebanon, NH: UP of New England, 2003.

---. *Poems*. Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2009.

Stockton, Elizabeth. "'A Crusade against Duty': Property, Self-Possession, and the Law in the Novels of Elizabeth Stoddard." *The New England Quarterly* 79.3 (2006): 413-438.

Strouse, Jean. *Alice James: A Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980.

Sweeney, Susan Elizabeth. "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall: Gazing in Edith Wharton's 'Looking Glass'." *Narrative* 3.2 (1995): 139-160.

Theriot, Nancy. *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America*. Lexington, Kentucky: The UP of Kentucky, 1996.

Thornton, Lawrence. "*The Awakening*: A Political Romance." *Critical Essays on Kate Chopin*. Ed. Alice Hall Petry. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996. 85-98.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Boulder, Colo.: Net Library, 1999.

Vermeule, Blakey. *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2010.

Waid, Candace. *Edith Wharton's Letters from the Underworld: Fictions of Women and Writing*. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1991.

Walker, Nancy. *Kate Chopin: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Walters, Ronald, ed. *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America*. London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000.

Warren, Joyce, ed. *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1993.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. New York: Charles Scribbner's Sons, 1976.

Weir, Sybil. "*The Morgesons*: A Neglected Feminist Bildungsroman." *The New England Quarterly* 49.3 (1976): 427-439.

Wershoven, Carol. *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton*. London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1982.

Wharton, Edith. "Wants." *Atlantic Monthly* 45 (May 1880): 599.

---. *The Age of Innocence*. New York: The Modern Library, 1920.

---. *Ethan Frome*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939.

---. *The House of Mirth*. New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1951.

---. *Bunner Sisters*. Boulder, Colo.: Net Library, 1995.

---. *A Backward* Glance. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

---. *Ethan Frome, Summer, Bunner Sisters*. London: Everyman, 2008.

White, Jacquelyn W. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2009.

Winnifrith, Tom. *Fallen Women in the Nineteenth-Century Novel.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* London: Penguin Books, 2004.

Woloch, Nancy. *Women and the American Experience.* New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994.

Wood, Ann Douglas. "The 'Scribbling Women' and Fanny Fern: Why Women Wrote." *American Quarterly* 23:1 (1971): 3-23.

Wood, Jane. *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own.* London: The Hogarth Press, 1967.

Zagarell, Sandra A. "'Strenuous Artistry': Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgeons.*" *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing.* Eds. Dale M. Bauer and Philip Gould. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 284-307.