

**TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CRITICS ON KATE CHOPIN:
TOWARD AN ANNOTATED EDITION OF *THE AWAKENING***

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INTRODUCTION

Modern critics have heralded Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* as an essential portrayal of women's lives in the late nineteenth century. By following the story of the novel's main character, Edna Pontellier, readers share in the self-examination and cultural criticism of a woman who is no longer content with merely being a wife and mother in a leisure class family – a status which was the definition of feminine success during Chopin's own era. However, due in great part to its heroine's questions concerning the definition of personal fulfillment and her ultimate suicide, the novel was largely rejected by critics of Chopin's time, who deemed the work scandalous and morally offensive. Due to its initial negative reception *The Awakening* and its author went virtually unnoticed and unexamined for most of the remaining nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not until the 1950s was the text truly rediscovered.

Since then, the rich dimensions of what is now considered Kate Chopin's most important novel have been studied with great enthusiasm. Her writings lend clarity to modern readers' understanding of women's lives during the late 1800s. Her novel helps us comprehend not only the lives of women of the leisure class, to which Chopin herself belonged, but also the lives of frequently marginalized groups like the working poor, minority women, unmarried elderly women, and widows. In Chopin's text, modern readers have a wealth of material for studying the cultural, societal, and attitudinal characteristics of her time.

Unfortunately for the modern student of Chopin, gaining access to the bulk of

critical analyses of *The Awakening* is time-consuming and often frustrating. What is needed to facilitate a better-rounded understanding of *The Awakening* is a tool that brings all the relevant critical works together at once. Toward this end, I have examined critical works, from 2000 to the present, that focus on *The Awakening* and its literary significance. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute a significant body of paraphrased and summarized material to an annotated edition of *The Awakening* already in production. This edition will serve all readers of *The Awakening*, from the casual reader to the literary scholar, by bringing nearly all recent criticism of the novel to the readers' fingertips in one concise resource. Utilizing a digitalized version of *The Awakening*, this thesis uses a series of detailed endnotes to couple specific paragraphs from the novel – often as short as one line -- with analysts' summarized comments concerning those paragraphs. Each paragraph from the novel is categorized by the chapter in which it appears and the sequence in which it occurs. For example, the third paragraph in the fifth chapter of the novel is referenced “5.3.” Each summarized critique of each particular paragraph is endnoted at the conclusion of each chapter of the novel and attributed to the author of the commentary and the year in which it was published.

A sample annotation is given below as an example of the form this thesis takes:

[39.26] How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky!
She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known.

[39.26] Lippincot 2000: The novel's last chapter describes Edna's birth

experience. Naked upon the beach, Edna is finally unencumbered by social constraints and expectations (63).

[39.27] **Lippincot 2000:** The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. 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.

[39.27]: Walking naked into the ocean, which symbolizes her mother, Edna begins the final stage of her rebirth (63-64).

[39.28]: 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-green meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end.

[39.29] Her arms and legs were growing tired.

[39.30] She thought of Leonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul. How Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed, perhaps sneered, if she knew! "And you call yourself an artist! What pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies."

[39.31] Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her.

[39.32] "Good-bye because I love you." He did not know; he did not

understand. He would never understand. Perhaps Doctor Mandelet would have understood if she had seen him, but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone.

[39.33] She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

[39.33] Lippincott 2000: Edna's physical exhaustion and awareness of the nearness of both life and death further reinforce Chopin's labor imagery (64).

In addition to offering an extremely detailed overview of recent critical analysis of Chopin's text, this thesis provides extensive summaries of commentary on major themes and characters in the novel. Brief examples of the form these summarized commentaries take are as follows:

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE: Lippincott 2000: Chopin informs the reader of nineteenth-century social norms concerning pregnancy through the character of Adèle Ratignolle (55). Edna's and Adèle's friendship mirrors the interconnectedness of an expectant mother with her unborn child (55-56). Edna's sexual and personal awakenings are juxtaposed with Adèle's actual pregnancy and child-birth experience (56).

EDNA PONTELLIER: Lippincott 2000: Edna herself is symbolically pregnant with the fully individuated woman she hopes to become (55). Although critics realize the confluent progression of Edna's awakening and Adèle's actual pregnancy, few

characterize Edna's discovery of self as a symbolic pregnancy (56). Chopin juxtaposes Edna's symbolic pregnancy with the real pregnancy of Adèle (58). Edna sleeps frequently to overcome the fatigue of her state, just as a pregnant woman would (59). Edna's senses are heightened by her pregnancy (59).

FEMINISM: Martin-Gonzalez 2001: Edna Pontellier and Mademoiselle Reisz, socially marginal characters, allow the author to explore alternate expressions of femininity than those common to the nineteenth century (273).

LADY IN BLACK: Disheroon-Green 2002b: The lady in black is frequently following the young lovers, who seem to desire nothing more than to be alone with one another, separate from social gatherings (83). The lady in black appears alone only one time (83). In view of Chopin's highly purposeful life and writing style, the lovers and the lady in black must symbolize key elements in Edna's sexual and personal awakening (84-85). The lady in black is obviously connected with Catholicism, a key aspect in the Creole culture in which Edna, a Kentucky Presbyterian, has married. The lady is characterized by the color of her clothing and her faithful religious practices: praying the rosary, reading a book of prayer, attending mass, and trying to understand religious mysteries. Recurring associations with the rosary lead one to presume a link to Mary, noted for her chaste and pure nature, as a good Creole wife was assumed to be (85).

LÉONCE PONTELLIER: Disheroon-Green 2002a: When Léonce Pontellier asserts male authority over his wife Edna, he is often simultaneously smoking a cigar, thus reinforcing his mentality of male-supremacy toward women and men of

questionable masculinity, such as Robert LeBrun (184). Léonce Pontellier is an image-obsessed, self-satisfying, egotistical husband who believes his wife should serve as a tasteful accessory (185).

LOVERS: Disheroon-Green 2002b: The lovers, who are not present in the earliest part of the novel, represent the relationship developing between Robert and Edna that will ultimately violate the Creole moral code (86-87). The only scene in which the lovers are visible without the lady in black follows Mademoiselle Reisz's concert, at which Edna's sensual stirrings begin (88). Although the lovers and the lady in black are often seen simultaneously, the nature of the lovers' relationship is basically innocent and childlike (88). The lovers' growing infatuation mirrors that of Robert and Edna, who make plans to spend increasingly more time together (90).

ROBERT LEBRUN: Disheroon-Green 2002a: Kate Chopin hints at Robert's homosexuality without crossing the lines of social acceptability (185). Robert would much rather spend his time with women than men (187). Robert's cigarettes are a veiled reference to his gender affinity. Léonce – father, husband, and successful business man – boldly smokes cigars, while Robert, the non-sexual companion of women, smokes delicate cigarettes (188).

RECEPTION OF THE NOVEL: Lippincott 2000: The contemporary readers who were most critical of Chopin, overlooking their own inconsistency, criticized Edna's adulterous behavior while ignoring Chopin's detailed description of Adèle's pregnancy (57).

Martin-Gonazalez 2001: Most nineteenth century critiques characterized

the novel as gruesome sex writing, obscene and tawdry (275).

Weinstock 2002: For five decades after its publication, *The Awakening* and its author were viewed as scandalous – a reaction that limited the book’s reading audience and its effect on the reading public (45). Edna Pontellier was characterized by reviewers as sick and self-centered, while *The Awakening* was considered wholly dirty and full of clichés (45).

IMAGERY: While Adèle’s pregnancy is openly characterized, Edna’s spiritual pregnancy is described in the most elusive fashion (57).

SEXUALITY AND/OR SEXUAL DESIRE: Martin-Gonzalez 2001: Edna claims the authority to refuse her husband sexually, one step of many that will bring her toward ownership of her self (275).

Weinstock 2002: The novel proposed that women had amorous wants as much as men, and it implicitly condemned opposing nineteenth-century views (50).

SETTING: Duet 2002: Stories by Chopin not set in New Orleans often address the issue of women’s work (57).

Lippincott 2000: Edna’s new self is conceived during her time at Grand Isle, where she is learning to swim in the ocean. The ocean serves as a maternal figure, as well as a sexual stimulus. The ocean serves as the main impetus in Edna’s awakening (57).

STYLE: Lippincott 2000: By using the first person perspective in this final turbulent scene, Chopin mirrors the intense drawing inward many laboring women experience (64).

STRUCTURE: Lippincott 2000: The structure of the novel mirrors the progress of a typical pregnancy (57).

SYMBOLISM: Lippincott 2000: Edna's episode of faintness during a church service further reinforce the pregnancy motif (59). Chopin juxtaposes the two pregnancies in the novel by comparing Edna's voracious, ever-increasing appetite with Adele's pickiness (59).

THEME(S): Duet 2002: The idea of Creole and Acadian women exploring their sexuality is a common theme in many of Chopin's stories (57).

The greatest part of this thesis, however, consists of the annotated, paragraph-by-paragraph commentary on *The Awakening*. The scope of criticism annotated draws from literary scholarship produced from the year 2000 to the present. In addition to including the summaries of commentaries produced by other writers, this thesis also includes general insights of my own, which are added in the final chapter. These appear in the same format as all the other comments.

The intent of this thesis is to contribute to an exceptionally detailed annotated version of the novel that will help guide each reader to a deeper, more fully developed understanding of *The Awakening's* complexity. It is hoped that this piece of a greater project will also benefit the understanding and long term appreciation of Kate Chopin and her greatest work of art.

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THE AWAKENING
by Kate Chopin

CHAPTER 1

[1.1] A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over:

[1.2] "*Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi!*"
That's all right!"

[1.3] He could speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understood, unless it was the mocking-bird that hung on the other side of the door, whistling his fluty notes out upon the breeze with maddening persistence.

[1.4] Mr. Pontellier, unable to read his newspaper with any degree of comfort, arose with an expression and an exclamation of disgust. He walked down the gallery and across the narrow "bridges" which connected the Lebrun cottages one with the other. He had been seated before the door of the main house. The parrot and the mockingbird were the property of Madame Lebrun, and they had the right to make all the noise they wished. Mr. Pontellier had the privilege of quitting their society when they ceased to be entertaining.

[1.5] He stopped before the door of his own cottage, which was the fourth one from the main building and next to the last. Seating himself in a wicker rocker which was there, he once more applied himself to the task of reading the newspaper. The day was Sunday; the paper was a day old.

The Sunday papers had not yet reached Grand Isle. He was already acquainted with the market reports, and he glanced restlessly over the editorials and bits of news which he had not had time to read before quitting New Orleans the day before.

[1.6] Mr. Pontellier wore eye-glasses. He was a man of forty, of medium height and rather slender build; he stooped a little. His hair was brown and straight, parted on one side. His beard was neatly and closely trimmed.

[1.7] Once in a while he withdrew his glance from the newspaper and looked about him. There was more noise than ever over at the house. The main building was called "the house," to distinguish it from the cottages. The chattering and whistling birds were still at it. Two young girls, the Farival twins, were playing a duet from "Zampa" upon the piano. Madame Lebrun was bustling in and out, giving orders in a high key to a yard-boy whenever she got inside the house, and directions in an equally high voice to a dining-room servant whenever she got outside. She was a fresh, pretty woman, clad always in white with elbow sleeves. Her starched skirts crinkled as she came and went.

Farther down, before one of the cottages, a lady in black was walking demurely up and down, telling her beads. A good many persons of the *pension* had gone over to the *Chênrière Caminada* in Beaudélet's lugger to hear mass. Some young people were out under the wateroaks playing croquet. Mr. Pontellier's two children were there sturdy little fellows of four and five. A quadron nurse followed them about with a faraway, meditative air.

[1.8] Mr. Pontellier finally lit a cigar and began to smoke, letting the paper drag idly from his hand. He fixed his gaze upon a white sunshade that was advancing at snail's pace from the beach. He could see it plainly between the gaunt trunks of the water-oaks and across the stretch of yellow camomile. The gulf looked far away, melting hazily into the blue of the horizon. The sunshade continued to approach slowly. Beneath its pink-lined shelter were his wife, Mrs. Pontellier, and young Robert Lebrun. When they reached the cottage, the two seated themselves with some appearance of fatigue upon the upper step of the porch, facing each other, each leaning against a supporting post.

[1.9] "What folly! to bathe at such an hour in such heat!" exclaimed Mr. Pontellier. He himself had taken a plunge at daylight. That was why the morning seemed long to him.

[1.10] "You are burnt beyond recognition," he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of

personal property which has suffered some damage. She held up her hands, strong, shapely hands, and surveyed them critically, drawing up her fawn sleeves above the wrists. Looking at them reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach. She silently reached out to him, and he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm. She slipped them upon her fingers; then clasping her knees, she looked across at Robert and began to laugh. The rings sparkled upon her fingers. He sent back an answering smile.

[1.11] "What is it?" asked Pontellier, looking lazily and amused from one to the other. It was some utter nonsense; some adventure out there in the water, and they both tried to relate it at once. It did not seem half so amusing when told. They realized this, and so did Mr. Pontellier. He yawned and stretched himself. Then he got up, saying he had half a mind to go over to Klein's hotel and play a game of billiards.

[1.12] "Come go along, Lebrun," he proposed to Robert. But Robert admitted quite frankly that he preferred to stay where he was and talk to Mrs. Pontellier.

[1.13] "Well, send him about his business when he bores you, Edna," instructed her husband as he prepared to leave.

[1.14] "Here, take the umbrella," she exclaimed,

holding it out to him. He accepted the sunshade, and lifting it over his head descended the steps and walked away.

[1.15] "Coming back to dinner?" his wife called after him. He halted a moment and shrugged his shoulders. He felt in his vest pocket; there was a ten-dollar bill there. He did not know; perhaps he would return for the early dinner and perhaps he would not. It all depended upon the company which he found over at Klein's and the size of "the game." He did not say this, but she understood it, and laughed, nodding good-by to him.

[1.16] Both children wanted to follow their father when they saw him starting out. He kissed them and promised to bring them back bonbons and peanuts.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 1:

[1.7] (**Disheroon-Green 2002a**): The Pontellier children disturb their father from his current occupation (186).

[1.7] (**Disheroon-Green 2002b**): (86).

[1.8] (**Asbee 2001b**): The structure of the novel reveals Darwinian influences: Edna here

emerges from the ocean; later she returns to it (263).

[1.8] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): (186).

[1.8] (Rich 2003): The opening episode of *The Awakening* reflects Chopin's impressionistic storytelling style (125).

[1.9, 3.2] (Treu 2000): Chopin employs an objective point of view in *The Awakening*, allowing characters to express themselves realistically with narrative commentaries interspersed (24).

[1.10] (Rich 2003): Edna reflects Léonce's success as a businessman and husband (128).

[1.10] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Léonce scolds Edna – while Robert watches and listens -- for getting sun burnt while swimming during the hottest time of day. Léonce thereby shows that Edna belongs to him. Her damaged skin further represents Robert's inability to successfully care for a woman (186).

[1.10] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): The unspoken interchange between Edna and Robert hints at their growing affection for one another (186).

[1.10] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Ultimately, Edna's sense of personal identity will clash with her roles as wife and mother, causing her to change the course her life takes. Edna strives to attain a sense of self independent of her children or husband (275).

[1.11] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): (187).

[1.13] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): When Robert refuses Léonce's billiards invitation he further proves himself a presence without threat. During this scene, Léonce smokes a cigar, emblem of his phallic superiority over a man who would choose the company of unavailable women to that of men (187-88).

CHAPTER 2

[2.1] Mrs. Pontellier's eyes were quick and bright; they were a yellowish brown, about the color of her hair. She had a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought.

[2.2] Her eyebrows were a shade darker than her hair. They were thick and almost horizontal, emphasizing the depth of her eyes. She was rather handsome than beautiful. Her face was captivating by reason of a certain frankness of

expression and a contradictory subtle play of features. Her manner was engaging.

[2.3] Robert rolled a cigarette. He smoked cigarettes because he could not afford cigars, he said. He had a cigar in his pocket which Mr. Pontellier had presented him with, and he was saving it for his after-dinner smoke.

[2.4] This seemed quite proper and natural on his part. In coloring he was not unlike his companion. A clean-shaved face made the resemblance more pronounced than it would otherwise have been. There rested no shadow of care upon his open countenance. His eyes gathered in and reflected the light and languor of the summer day.

[2.5] Mrs. Pontellier reached over for a palm-leaf fan that lay on the porch and began to fan herself, while Robert sent between his lips light puffs from his cigarette.

They chatted incessantly: about the things around them; their amusing adventure out in the water-it had again assumed its entertaining aspect; about the wind, the trees, the people who had gone to the Chênrière; about the children playing croquet under the oaks, and the Farival twins, who were now performing the overture to "The Poet and the Peasant."

[2.6] Robert talked a good deal about himself. He was very young, and did not know any better. Mrs. Pontellier talked a little about herself for the same reason. Each was interested in what the other said. Robert

spoke of his intention to go to Mexico in the autumn, where fortune awaited him. He was always intending to go to Mexico, but some way never got there. Meanwhile he held on to his modest position in a mercantile house in New Orleans, where an equal familiarity with English, French and Spanish gave him no small value as a clerk and correspondent.

[2.7] He was spending his summer vacation, as he always did, with his mother at Grand Isle. In former times, before Robert could remember, "the house" had been a summer luxury of the Lebruns. Now, flanked by its dozen or more cottages, which were always filled with exclusive visitors from the "*Quartier Français*," it enabled Madame Lebrun to maintain the easy and comfortable existence which appeared to be her birthright.

[2.8] Mrs. Pontellier talked about her father's Mississippi plantation and her girlhood home 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. She read a letter from her sister, who was away in the East, and who had engaged herself to be married. Robert was interested, and wanted to know what manner of girls the sisters were, what the father was like, and how long the mother had been dead.

[2.9] When Mrs. Pontellier folded the letter it was time for her to dress for the early dinner.

[2.10] "I see Léonce isn't coming back," she said,

with a glance in the direction whence her husband had disappeared. Robert supposed he was not, as there were a good many New Orleans club men over at Klein's.

[2.11] When Mrs. Pontellier left him to enter her room, the young man descended the steps and strolled over toward the croquet players, where, during the half-hour before dinner, he amused himself with the little Pontellier children, who were very fond of him.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 2:

[2.1, 13.11] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's glow – indicating that she is metaphorically pregnant with a new self - causes others to take notice, and even comment on her physical appearance (61).

[2.3, 36.20] (Barrish 2000): Before his trip to Mexico, the sexually ambiguous Robert smokes cigarettes. Upon his return to New Orleans, the newly masculinized Robert will purchase cigars by the box, reflecting his elevated sexual status (71).

[2.6] (Asbee 2001b) (263).

CHAPTER 3

[3.1] It was eleven o'clock that night when Mr. Pontellier returned from Klein's hotel. He was in an excellent humor, in high spirits, and very talkative. His entrance awoke his wife, who was in bed and fast asleep when he came in. He talked to her while he undressed, telling her anecdotes and bits of news and gossip that he had gathered during the day. From his trousers pockets he took a fistful of crumpled bank notes and a good deal of silver coin, which he piled on the bureau indiscriminately with keys, knife, handkerchief, and whatever else happened to be in his pockets. She was overcome with sleep, and answered him with little half utterances.

[3.2] He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation.

[3.3] Mr. Pontellier had forgotten the bonbons and peanuts for the boys. Notwithstanding he loved them very much, and went into the adjoining room where they slept to take a look at them and make sure that they were resting comfortably. The result of his investigation was far from satisfactory. He turned and shifted the youngsters about in bed. One of them began to kick and talk about a basket full of crabs.

[3.4] Mr. Pontellier returned to his wife with the information that Raoul had a high fever and needed looking after. Then he lit a cigar and went and sat near the open door to smoke it.

[3.5] Mrs. Pontellier was quite sure Raoul had no fever. He had gone to bed perfectly well, she said, and nothing had ailed him all day. Mr. Pontellier was too well acquainted with fever symptoms to be mistaken. He assured her the child was consuming at that moment in the next room.

[3.6] He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them. He talked in a monotonous, insistent way.

[3.7] Mrs. Pontellier sprang out of bed and went into the next room. She soon came back and sat on the edge of the bed, leaning her head down on the pillow. She said nothing, and refused to answer her husband when he questioned her. When his cigar was smoked out he went to bed, and in half a minute he was fast asleep.

[3.8] Mrs. Pontellier was by that time thoroughly awake. She began to cry a little, and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her *peignoir*. Blowing out the candle, which her

husband had left burning, she slipped her bare feet into a pair of satin *mules* at the foot of the bed and went out on the porch, where she sat down in the wicker chair and began to rock gently to and fro.

[3.9] It was then past midnight. The cottages were all dark. A single faint light gleamed out from the hallway of the house. There was no sound abroad except the hooting of an old owl in the top of a water-oak, and the everlasting voice of the sea, that was not uplifted at that soft hour. It broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night.

[3.10] 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. They seemed never before to have weighed much against the abundance of her husband's kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood.

[3.11] An 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. She did not sit there inwardly upbraiding her husband, lamenting at Fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken. She was just having a good cry all to herself. The mosquitoes made merry over her, biting her firm, round arms and nipping at her bare insteps.

[3.12] The little stinging, buzzing imps succeeded in dispelling a mood which might have held her there in the darkness half a night longer.

[3.13] The following morning Mr. Pontellier was up in good time to take the rockaway which was to convey him to the steamer at the wharf. He was returning to the city to his business, and they would not see him again at the Island till the coming Saturday. He had regained his composure, which seemed to have been somewhat impaired the night before. He was eager to be gone, as he looked forward to a lively week in Carondelet Street.

[3.14] Mr. Pontellier gave his wife half of the money which he had brought away from Klein's hotel the evening before. She liked money as well as most women, and, accepted it with no little satisfaction.

[3.15] "It will buy a handsome wedding present for Sister Janet!" she exclaimed, smoothing out the bills as she counted them one by one.

[3.16] "Oh! we'll treat Sister Janet better than

that, my dear," he laughed, as he prepared to kiss her good-by.

[3.17] The boys were tumbling about, clinging to his legs, imploring that numerous things be brought back to them. Mr. Pontellier was a great favorite, and ladies, men, children, even nurses, were always on hand to say goodby to him. His wife stood smiling and waving, the boys shouting, as he disappeared in the old rockaway down the sandy road.

[3.18] A few days later a box arrived for Mrs. Pontellier from New Orleans. It was from her husband. It was filled with *friandises*, with luscious and toothsome bits--the finest of fruits, *patés*, a rare bottle or two, delicious syrups, and bonbons in abundance.

[3.19] Mrs. Pontellier was always very generous with the contents of such a box; she was quite used to receiving them when away from home. The *patés* and fruit were brought to the dining-room; the bonbons were passed around. And the ladies, selecting with dainty and discriminating fingers and a little greedily, all declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 3:

[3.1-3.6] (Asbee 2001b): Throughout this portion of the chapter, Chopin uses a technique of repetition that creates a constant shifting in the novel's perspective from that of Mr. Pontellier to one in which he is absent (246).

[3.2] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Mr. Pontellier's example of masculine superiority is reinforced when he half-wakes Edna after a late night at the club to tell her unimportant details of his evening. He is offended at her disinterest, which further reflects his lack as an emotional participant in their marriage. In response to her disinterest, he verbally attacks her abilities as a mother. Ultimately, Edna concedes to check the children to alleviate Léonce's tirade (188-89).

[1.9, 3.2] (Treu 2000): Chopin employs an objective point of view in *The Awakening*, allowing characters to express themselves realistically with narrative commentaries interspersed (24).

[3.6] (Barrish 2000): (67).

[3.7] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Extinguishing his cigar, Léonce retires for the evening, his place as Edna's master assured. Léonce has satisfied his own necessities, without care for Edna's well-being, leaving her awake and dissatisfied (189).

[3.8] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Used by Léonce (almost as if raped), Edna further realizes what is lacking in her marriage. At this moment Edna's affinity for Robert warms. She begins to see how he fills emotional needs her husband cannot (189).

[3.18-3.19] (Barrish 2000): (67).

[3.18] (McGee 2000): The food that Léonce sends Edna is not substantial or healthy; he sends her sweets that suggest that he is repaying her for being subservient. Not only rewarding Edna for being his wife, these sweet gifts are also expressions of Léonce's value as a husband to the women who share Edna's treats (48).

[3.19] (McGee 2000): Léonce's rather condescending gifts reflect his shallow understanding of Edna's real needs while drawing glowing response from the women on Grand Isle (48).

[3.19] (Asbee 2001b): In this particular scene it is unclear whether the ironic tone is that of Edna or the narrator or even the two of them together (252).

CHAPTER 4

[4.1] It would have been a difficult matter for Mr. Pontellier to define to his own satisfaction or any one

else's wherein his wife failed in her duty toward their children. It was something which he felt rather than perceived, and he never voiced the feeling without subsequent regret and ample atonement.

[4.2] If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing. Tots as they were, they pulled together and stood their ground in childish battles with doubled fists and uplifted voices, which usually prevailed against the other mother-tots. The quadron nurse was looked upon as a huge encumbrance, only good to button up waists and panties and to brush and part hair; since it seemed to be a law of society that hair must be parted and brushed.

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

[4.4] Many of them were delicious in the rôle; one of them was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm.

If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adèle Ratignolle. There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams. 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. She was growing a little stout, but it did not seem to detract an iota from the grace of every step, pose, gesture. One would not have wanted her white neck a mite less full or her beautiful arms more slender. 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 as she sewed away on the little night-drawers or fashioned a bodice or a bib.

[4.5] Madame Ratignolle was very fond of Mrs. Pontellier, and often she took her sewing and went over to sit with her in the afternoons. She was sitting there the afternoon of the day the box arrived from New Orleans. She had possession of the rocker, and she was busily engaged in sewing upon a diminutive pair of night-drawers.

[4.6] She had brought the pattern of the drawers for

Mrs. Pontellier to cut out--a marvel of construction, fashioned to enclose a baby's body so effectually that only two small eyes might look out from the garment, like an Eskimo's. They were designed for winter wear, when treacherous drafts came down chimneys and insidious currents of deadly cold found their way through key-holes.

[4.7] Mrs. Pontellier's mind was quite at rest concerning the present material needs of her children, and she could not see the use of anticipating and making winter night garments the subject of her summer meditations. But she did not want to appear unamiable and uninterested, so she had brought forth newspapers, which she spread upon the floor of the gallery, and under Madame Ratignolle's directions she had cut a pattern of the impervious garment.

[4.8] Robert was there, seated as he had been the Sunday before, and Mrs. Pontellier also occupied her former position on the upper step, leaning listlessly against the post. Beside her was a box of bonbons, which she held out at intervals to Madame Ratignolle.

[4.9] That lady seemed at a loss to make a selection, but finally settled upon a stick of nougat, wondering if it were not too rich; whether it could possibly hurt her. Madame Ratignolle had been married seven years. About every two years she had a baby. At that time she had three babies, and was beginning to think of a fourth one. She was always talking about her "condition." Her "condition" was in

no way apparent, and no one would have known a thing about it but for her persistence in making it the subject of conversation.

[4.10] Robert started to reassure her, asserting that he had known a lady who had subsisted upon nougat during the entire--but seeing the color mount into Mrs. Pontellier's face he checked himself and changed the subject.

[4.11] Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them. There were only Creoles that summer at Lebrun's. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable.

[4.12] Never would Edna Pontellier forget the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival the harrowing story of one of her *accouchements*, withholding no intimate detail. She was growing accustomed to like shocks, but she could not keep the mounting color back from her cheeks. Oftener than once her coming had interrupted the droll story with which Robert

was entertaining some amused group of married women.

[4.13] A book had gone the rounds of the *pension*. When it came her turn to read it, she did so with profound astonishment. She felt moved to read the book in secret and solitude, though none of the others had done so,--to hide it from view at the sound of approaching footsteps. It was openly criticised and freely discussed at table. Mrs. Pontellier gave over being astonished, and concluded that wonders would never cease.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 4:

[4.3] (Lippincott 2000): (58).

[4.3] (Pizer 2001): Though Adèle Ratignolle serves as a contrast to Edna, the women share a mother's protective instinct (6).

[4.3] (McGee 2000): Edna resists immersing herself in the roles of wife and mother as the women around her have done (48).

[4.3] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Chopin creates Adèle to juxtapose her with the new woman symbolized by Edna (275).

[4.3] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Reviewers could not overlook the fact that Edna does

not worship her husband or idolize her children, and they chastised Chopin's tender treatment of a character who, they believed, deserved reprimand (275).

[4.3] (Bunch 2001-2): While on Grand Isle, Edna realizes that she must escape the social boundaries that restrict her, especially the roles of wife and mother, knowing she does not fit them well anyway (51).

[4.3, 39.22] (Bunch 2001-2): (59).

[4.3, 37.11] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna visits Adèle during her labor, the last person she will see before her suicide (58).

[4.3, 16.11] (Bunch 2001-2): Adèle's pleas only reinforce Edna's resolve to live outside the realms of marriage and motherhood (59).

[4.3, 37.12] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna chooses death over a life of servitude as a wife and mother (59).

[4.3, 4.9] (Muirhead 2000): Adèle reminds Edna of the limiting nature and duties of motherhood and marriage (48).

[4.3-4.4, 4.11, 7.7] (Barrish 2000): Madame Ratignolle's fair complexion is emphasized in the novel to contrast her with Edna and make clear her identification with white feminine identity (73-74).

[4.4] (Asbee 2001b): The novel's ever-changing narrative perspective may be used to draw readers into empathizing with Edna, as the use of the pronoun "our" here implies (247).

[4.11] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): (91).

[4.11] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): (85).

[4.11] (Asbee 2001b): Much as the colored servants are characterized as distinct from the Creoles they serve, Edna too, a Kentucky Presbyterian, is not a natural member of the Creole society (254).

[4.12] (Lippincott 2000): Edna, as an example of non-Catholic gentility, disapproves of Adèle's open disclosure among mixed company concerning the specifics of her pregnancy and birthing experience (57).

CHAPTER 5

[5.1] They formed a congenial group sitting there that summer afternoon--Madame Ratignolle sewing away, often stopping to relate a story or incident with much expressive gesture of her perfect hands; Robert and Mrs. Pontellier sitting idle, exchanging occasional words, glances or smiles which indicated a certain advanced stage of intimacy and *camaraderie*.

[5.2] He had lived in her shadow during the past month. No one thought anything of it. Many had predicted that Robert would devote himself to Mrs. Pontellier when he arrived. Since the age of fifteen, which was eleven years before, Robert each summer at Grand Isle had constituted himself the devoted attendant of some fair dame or damsel. Sometimes it was a young girl, again a widow; but as often as not it was some interesting married woman.

[5.3] For two consecutive seasons he lived in the sunlight of Mademoiselle Duvigne's presence. But she died between summers; then Robert posed as an inconsolable, prostrating himself at the feet of Madame Ratignolle for whatever crumbs of sympathy and comfort she might be pleased to vouchsafe.

[5.4] Mrs. Pontellier liked to sit and gaze at her fair companion as she might look upon a faultless Madonna.

[5.5] "Could any one fathom the cruelty beneath that

fair exterior?" murmured Robert. "She knew that I adored her once, and she let me adore her. It was 'Robert, come; go; stand up; sit down; do this; do that; see if the baby sleeps; my thimble, please, that I left God knows where. Come and read Daudet to me while I sew.'"

[5.6] "*Par exemple!* I never had to ask. You were always there under my feet, like a troublesome cat."

[5.7] "You mean like an adoring dog. And just as soon as Ratignolle appeared on the scene, then it WAS like a dog. '*Passez! Adieu! Allez vous-en!*'"

[5.8] "Perhaps I feared to make Alphonse jealous," she interjoined, with excessive naïveté. That made them all laugh. The right hand jealous of the left! The heart jealous of the soul! But for that matter, the Creole husband is never jealous; with him the gangrene passion is one which has become dwarfed by disuse.

[5.9] Meanwhile Robert, addressing Mrs Pontellier, continued to tell of his one time hopeless passion for Madame Ratignolle; of sleepless nights, of consuming flames till the very sea sizzled when he took his daily plunge. While the lady at the needle kept up a little running, contemptuous comment:

[5.10] "*Blagueur--farceur--gros bête, va!*"

[5.11] He never assumed this seriocomic tone when alone with Mrs. Pontellier. She never knew precisely what to make of it; at that moment it was impossible for her to

guess how much of it was jest and what proportion was earnest. It was understood that he had often spoken words of love to Madame Ratignolle, without any thought of being taken seriously. Mrs. Pontellier was glad he had not assumed a similar role toward herself. It would have been unacceptable and annoying.

[5.12] Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials, which she sometimes dabbled with in an unprofessional way. She liked the dabbling. She felt in it satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her.

[5.13] She had long wished to try herself on Madame Ratignolle. Never had that lady seemed a more tempting subject than at that moment, seated there like some sensuous Madonna, with the gleam of the fading day enriching her splendid color.

[5.14] Robert crossed over and seated himself upon the step below Mrs. Pontellier, that he might watch her work. She handled her brushes with a certain ease and freedom which came, not from long and close acquaintance with them, but from a natural aptitude. Robert followed her work with close attention, giving forth little ejaculatory expressions of appreciation in French, which he addressed to Madame Ratignolle.

[5.15] *"Mais ce n'est pas mal! Elle s'y connait, elle a de la force, oui."*

[5.16] During his oblivious attention he once quietly rested his head against Mrs. Pontellier's arm. As gently she repulsed him. Once again he repeated the offense. She could not but believe it to be thoughtlessness on his part; yet that was no reason she should submit to it. She did not remonstrate, except again to repulse him quietly but firmly. He offered no apology.

[5.17] The picture completed bore no resemblance to Madame Ratignolle. She was greatly disappointed to find that it did not look like her. But it was a fair enough piece of work, and in many respects satisfying.

[5.18] Mrs. Pontellier evidently did not think so. After surveying the sketch critically she drew a broad smudge of paint across its surface, and crumpled the paper between her hands.

[5.19] The youngsters came tumbling up the steps, the quadroon following at the respectful distance which they required her to observe. Mrs. Pontellier made them carry her paints and things into the house. She sought to detain them for a little talk and some pleasantries. But they were greatly in earnest. They had only come to investigate the contents of the bonbon box. They accepted without murmuring what she chose to give them, each holding out two chubby hands scoop-like, in the vain hope that they might be filled; and then away they went.

[5.20] The sun was low in the west, and the breeze

soft and languorous that came up from the south, charged with the seductive odor of the sea. Children freshly befurbelowed, were gathering for their games under the oaks. Their voices were high and penetrating.

[5.21] Madame Ratignolle folded her sewing, placing thimble, scissors, and thread all neatly together in the roll, which she pinned securely. She complained of faintness. Mrs. Pontellier flew for the cologne water and a fan. She bathed Madame Ratignolle's face with cologne, while Robert plied the fan with unnecessary vigor.

[5.22] The spell was soon over, and Mrs. Pontellier could not help wondering if there were not a little imagination responsible for its origin, for the rose tint had never faded from her friend's face.

[5.23] She stood watching the fair woman walk down the long line of galleries with the grace and majesty which queens are sometimes supposed to possess. Her little ones ran to meet her. Two of them clung about her white skirts, the third she took from its nurse and with a thousand endearments bore it along in her own fond, encircling arms.

Though, as everybody well knew, the doctor had forbidden her to lift so much as a pin!

[5.24] "Are you going bathing?" asked Robert of Mrs. Pontellier. It was not so much a question as a reminder.

[5.25] "Oh, no," she answered, with a tone of indecision. "I'm tired; I think not." Her glance wandered

from his face away toward the Gulf, whose sonorous murmur reached her like a loving but imperative entreaty.

[5.26] "Oh, come!" he insisted. "You mustn't miss your bath. Come on. The water must be delicious; it will not hurt you. Come."

[5.27] He reached up for her big, rough straw hat that hung on a peg outside the door, and put it on her head. They descended the steps, and walked away together toward the beach. The sun was low in the west and the breeze was soft and warm.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 5:

[5.1] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): This friendship contrasts significantly with Edna's marriage to Léonce, partly because at this point the relationship lacks erotic overtones. Now aware of her emotional need, however, Edna displaces her sexual feelings toward Robert, who cannot reciprocate (189).

[5.2] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert would much rather spend his time with women than men (187).

[5.3] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert plays the role of grief-stricken lover when a

young, common maiden dies during the previous summer, as he flirts shamelessly with Madame Ratignolle. Madame Ratignolle, like all Robert's female companions, is romantically unattainable. All are married, widowed, of advanced age, or young enough to preclude marriageability (187).

[5.4] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna feels alienated from the Creole women, exemplified by Adèle Ratignolle, whose identity is completely determined by their roles as mothers and wives. These women treat their roles almost as jobs (51).

[5.5] (Bunch 2001-2): Adèle flirts with Robert innocently, as a mother would joke with a child, never going beyond the bounds of her marriage (52).

[5.11] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna realizes that her feelings for Robert LeBrun go beyond Adèle's harmless flirtations (51).

[5.13] (Lippincott 2000): (57).

[5.22] (Lippincott 2000): (59).

CHAPTER 6

[6.1] Edna Pontellier could not have told why, wishing to go to the beach with Robert, she should in the first place have declined, and in the second place have followed in obedience to one of the two contradictory impulses which impelled her.

[6.2] A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her,--the light which, showing the way, forbids it.

[6.3] At that early period it served but to bewilder her. It moved her to dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish which had overcome her the midnight when she had abandoned herself to tears.

[6.4] In 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.

[6.5] But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!

[6.6] The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul

to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.

[6.7] The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 6:

[6.2] (Lippincott 2000): Just as a pregnant woman is only faintly aware at first that she may be pregnant, so Edna is at first only faintly aware of the transformation she is beginning to undergo (57).

[6.2-6.4] (Asbee 2001b): Just when the reader might anticipate a new sense of direct connection with the novel's heroine, Chopin intentionally shifts to an aloof tone, distancing Edna's emotional dilemma from the potential sentimentality of the reader (246).

[6.3] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's increasing moodiness reflects the characteristic emotional state of a pregnant woman (60).

[6.4] (Lippincott 2000): During Edna's ocean swim, she feels an immense wisdom descend upon her. The phrasing here suggests the Biblical moment when Mary

becomes pregnant with Jesus (57).

[6.4] (Lippincott 2000): Chapter 6 parallels week number six of Edna's metaphorical pregnancy, when the initial realization of change takes place (57).

[6.5] (Lippincott 2000): This initial realization is for Edna as it would be for a true pregnancy: obscure, confusing, and bothersome (57-58).

[6.6] (Asbee 2001a): (272).

[6.6–6.7] (Asbee 2001a): Although *The Awakening* is written in the third person omniscient mood, the language of the novel lacks no intensity in its effect on the senses (271).

[6.7] (Pizer 2001): The natural elements on Grand Isle as well as her husband's absence; Mademoiselle Reisz's passionate piano concerts; the easy-going atmosphere of the hotel; and the attention of Robert LeBrun all encourage Edna to resist the confinements imposed by social mandates (6).

[6.7] (Pizer 2001): (6).

CHAPTER 7

[7.1] Mrs. Pontellier was not a woman given to confidences, a characteristic hitherto contrary to her nature. Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life--that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.

[7.2] That summer at Grand Isle she began to loosen a little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her.

There may have been--there must have been--influences, both subtle and apparent, working in their several ways to induce her to do this; but the most obvious was the influence of Adèle Ratignolle. The excessive physical charm of the Creole had first attracted her, for Edna had a sensuous susceptibility to beauty. Then the candor of the woman's whole existence, which every one might read, and which formed so striking a contrast to her own habitual reserve--this might have furnished a link. Who can tell what metals the gods use in forging the subtle bond which we call sympathy, which we might as well call love.

[7.3] The two women went away one morning to the beach together, arm in arm, under the huge white sunshade. Edna had prevailed upon Madame Ratignolle to leave the children behind, though she could not induce her to relinquish a diminutive roll of needlework, which Adèle

begged to be allowed to slip into the depths of her pocket. In some unaccountable way they had escaped from Robert.

[7.4] The walk to the beach was no inconsiderable one, consisting as it did of a long, sandy path, upon which a sporadic and tangled growth that bordered it on either side made frequent and unexpected inroads. There were acres of yellow camomile reaching out on either hand. Further away still, vegetable gardens abounded, with frequent small plantations of orange or lemon trees intervening. The dark green clusters glistened from afar in the sun.

[7.5] The women were both of goodly height, Madame Ratignolle possessing the more feminine and matronly figure.

The charm of Edna Pontellier's physique stole insensibly upon you. The lines of her body were long, clean and symmetrical; it was a body which occasionally fell into splendid poses; there was no suggestion of the trim, stereotyped fashion-plate about it. A casual and indiscriminating observer, in passing, might not cast a second glance upon the figure. But with more feeling and discernment he would have recognized the noble beauty of its modeling, and the graceful severity of poise and movement, which made Edna Pontellier different from the crowd.

[7.6] She wore a cool muslin that morning--white, with a waving vertical line of brown running through it; also a white linen collar and the big straw hat which she had taken from the peg outside the door. The hat rested any

way on her yellow-brown hair, that waved a little, was heavy, and clung close to her head.

[7.7] Madame Ratignolle, more careful of her complexion, had twined a gauze veil about her head. She wore dogskin gloves, with gauntlets that protected her wrists. She was dressed in pure white, with a fluffiness of ruffles that became her. The draperies and fluttering things which she wore suited her rich, luxuriant beauty as a greater severity of line could not have done.

[7.8] There were a number of bath-houses along the beach, of rough but solid construction, built with small, protecting galleries facing the water. Each house consisted of two compartments, and each family at Lebrun's possessed a compartment for itself, fitted out with all the essential paraphernalia of the bath and whatever other conveniences the owners might desire. The two women had no intention of bathing; they had just strolled down to the beach for a walk and to be alone and near the water. The Pontellier and Ratignolle compartments adjoined one another under the same roof.

[7.9] Mrs. Pontellier had brought down her key through force of habit. Unlocking the door of her bath-room she went inside, and soon emerged, bringing a rug, which she spread upon the floor of the gallery, and two huge hair pillows covered with crash, which she placed against the front of the building.

[7.10] The two seated themselves there in the shade of the porch, side by side, with their backs against the pillows and their feet extended. Madame Ratignolle removed her veil, wiped her face with a rather delicate handkerchief, and fanned herself with the fan which she always carried suspended somewhere about her person by a long, narrow ribbon. Edna removed her collar and opened her dress at the throat. She took the fan from Madame Ratignolle and began to fan both herself and her companion.

It was very warm, and for a while they did nothing but exchange remarks about the heat, the sun, the glare. But there was a breeze blowing, a choppy, stiff wind that whipped the water into froth. It fluttered the skirts of the two women and kept them for a while engaged in adjusting, readjusting, tucking in, securing hair-pins and hat-pins. A few persons were sporting some distance away in the water. The beach was very still of human sound at that hour. The lady in black was reading her morning devotions on the porch of a neighboring bathhouse. Two young lovers were exchanging their hearts' yearnings beneath the children's tent, which they had found unoccupied.

[7.11] Edna Pontellier, casting her eyes about, had finally kept them at rest upon the sea. The day was clear and carried the gaze out as far as the blue sky went; there were a few white clouds suspended idly over the horizon. A lateen sail was visible in the direction of Cat Island, and

others to the south seemed almost motionless in the far distance.

[7.12] "Of whom--of what are you thinking?" asked Adèle of her companion, whose countenance she had been watching with a little amused attention, arrested by the absorbed expression which seemed to have seized and fixed every feature into a statuesque repose.

[7.13] "Nothing," returned Mrs. Pontellier, with a start, adding at once: "How stupid! But it seems to me it is the reply we make instinctively to such a question. Let me see," she went on, throwing back her head and narrowing her fine eyes till they shone like two vivid points of light. "Let me see. I was really not conscious of thinking of anything; but perhaps I can retrace my thoughts."

[7.14] "Oh! never mind!" laughed Madame Ratignolle. "I am not quite so exacting. I will let you off this time. It is really too hot to think, especially to think about thinking."

[7.15] "But for the fun of it," persisted Edna. "First of all, the sight of the water stretching so far away, those motionless sails against the blue sky, made a delicious picture that I just wanted to sit and look at. The hot wind beating in my face made me think--without any connection that I can trace of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her

waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water. Oh, I see the connection now!"

[7.16] "where were you going that day in Kentucky, walking through the grass?"

[7.17] "I don't remember now. I was just walking diagonally across a big field. My sun-bonnet obstructed the view. I could see only the stretch of green before me, and I felt as if I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it. I don't remember whether I was frightened or pleased. I must have been entertained.

[7.18] "Likely as not it was Sunday," she laughed; "and I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of."

[7.19] "And have you been running away from prayers ever since, *ma chère?*" asked Madame Ratignolle, amused.

[7.20] "No! oh, no!" Edna hastened to say. "I was a little unthinking child in those days, just following a misleading impulse without question. On the contrary, during one period of my life religion took a firm hold upon me; after I was twelve and until-until--why, I suppose until now, though I never thought much about it--just driven along by habit. But do you know," she broke off, turning her quick eyes upon Madame Ratignolle and leaning forward a little so as to bring her face quite close to that of her

companion, "sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided."

[7.21] Madame Ratignolle laid her hand over that of Mrs. Pontellier, which was near her. Seeing that the hand was not withdrawn, she clasped it firmly and warmly. She even stroked it a little, fondly, with the other hand, murmuring in an undertone, "*Pauvre chérie.*"

[7.22] The action was at first a little confusing to Edna, but she soon lent herself readily to the Creole's gentle caress. She was not accustomed to an outward and spoken expression of affection, either in herself or in others. She and her younger sister, Janet, had quarreled a good deal through force of unfortunate habit. Her older sister, Margaret, was matronly and dignified, probably from having assumed matronly and housewifely responsibilities too early in life, their mother having died when they were quite young, Margaret was not effusive; she was practical. Edna had had an occasional girl friend, but whether accidentally or not, they seemed to have been all of one type--the self-contained. She never realized that the reserve of her own character had much, perhaps everything, to do with this. Her most intimate friend at school had been one of rather exceptional intellectual gifts, who wrote fine-sounding essays, which Edna admired and strove to imitate; and with her she talked and glowed over the English classics, and

sometimes held religious and political controversies.

[7.23] Edna often wondered at one propensity which sometimes had inwardly disturbed her without causing any outward show or manifestation on her part. At a very early age--perhaps it was when she traversed the ocean of waving grass--she remembered that she had been passionately enamored of a dignified and sad-eyed cavalry officer who visited her father in Kentucky. She could not leave his presence when he was there, nor remove her eyes from his face, which was something like Napoleon's, with a lock of black hair falling across the forehead. But the cavalry officer melted imperceptibly out of her existence.

[7.24] At another time her affections were deeply engaged by a young gentleman who visited a lady on a neighboring plantation. It was after they went to Mississippi to live. The young man was engaged to be married to the young lady, and they sometimes called upon Margaret, driving over of afternoons in a buggy. Edna was a little miss, just merging into her teens; and the realization that she herself was nothing, nothing, nothing to the engaged young man was a bitter affliction to her. But he, too, went the way of dreams.

[7.25] She was a grown young woman when she was overtaken by what she supposed to be the climax of her fate. 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.

[7.26] The picture of the tragedian stood enframed upon her desk. Any one may possess the portrait of a tragedian without exciting suspicion or comment. (This was a sinister reflection which she cherished.) In the presence of others she expressed admiration for his exalted gifts, as she handed the photograph around and dwelt upon the fidelity of the likeness. When alone she sometimes picked it up and kissed the cold glass passionately.

[7.27] Her marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate. It was in the midst of her secret great passion that she met him. He fell in love, as men are in the habit of doing, and pressed his suit with an earnestness and an ardor which left nothing to be desired. He pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her. She fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them, in which fancy she was mistaken. Add to this the violent opposition of her father and her sister Margaret to her marriage with a Catholic, and we need seek no further for the motives which led her to accept Monsieur Pontellier for her husband.

[7.28] The acme of bliss, which would have been a marriage with the tragedian, was not for her in this world.

As the devoted wife of a man who worshiped her, she felt she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams.

[7.29] But it was not long before the tragedian had gone to join the cavalry officer and the engaged young man and a few others; and Edna found herself face to face with the realities. She grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution.

[7.30] She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them. The year before they had spent part of the summer with their grandmother Pontellier in Iberville. Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense longing. Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her.

[7.31] Edna did not reveal so much as all this to Madame Ratignolle that summer day when they sat with faces turned to the sea. But a good part of it escaped her. She had put her head down on Madame Ratignolle's shoulder. She

was flushed and felt intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor. It muddled her like wine, or like a first breath of freedom.

[7.32] There was the sound of approaching voices. It was Robert, surrounded by a troop of children, searching for them. The two little Pontelliers were with him, and he carried Madame Ratignolle's little girl in his arms. There were other children beside, and two nurse-maids followed, looking disagreeable and resigned.

[7.33] The women at once rose and began to shake out their draperies and relax their muscles. Mrs. Pontellier threw the cushions and rug into the bath-house. The children all scampered off to the awning, and they stood there in a line, gazing upon the intruding lovers, still exchanging their vows and sighs. The lovers got up, with only a silent protest, and walked slowly away somewhere else.

[7.34] The children possessed themselves of the tent, and Mrs. Pontellier went over to join them.

[7.35] Madame Ratignolle begged Robert to accompany her to the house; she complained of cramp in her limbs and stiffness of the joints. She leaned draggingly upon his arm as they walked.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 7:

[7.2] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's increased awareness causes her to relax her customarily conservative demeanor. Like a newly pregnant woman, Edna slowly begins to transform (58).

[7.2] (Lippincott 2000): Edna makes an emotional connection with Adèle, sharing a tender moment of physical affection coupled with candid conversation (58).

[7.2] (Asbee 2001b): Edna's adolescent memories are set side-by-side with her feelings about swimming as an adult (260).

[4.3-4.4, 4.11, 7.7] (Barrish 2000): Madame Ratignolle's fair complexion is emphasized in the novel to contrast her with Edna and make clear her identification with white feminine identity (73-74).

[7.10, 7.33] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): Although the lovers and the lady in black are often seen simultaneously, the nature of the lovers' relationship is basically innocent and childlike (88).

[7.15] (Asbee 2001b): Edna compares the sea to a Kentucky meadow (259).

[7.15-7.20] (Rich 2003): Expressing Edna's need to get away from her current situation, this scene also reveals the link between sensory stimuli and recollections or feelings in Chopin's fiction (126).

[7.18] (Asbee 2001b): The phrasing here characterizes Edna's childhood memories of Presbyterianism (261).

[7.20] (Asbee 2001b): Edna's attitudes toward religion have come full circle (260).

[7.21] (Lippincott 2000): For the first time ever, Edna becomes genuinely close to another woman (58).

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[7.22] (Lippincott 2000): On the evening of her intimate conversation with Adèle, Edna responds with great emotion to a piano piece performed by Mademoiselle Reisz. As the novel proceeds, Edna will increasingly come into physical contact with others (58).

[7.23] (Asbee 2001b): (260).

[7.27] (Asbee 2001b): Edna married the Catholic Leonce to spite her Presbyterian father and sister, but only substituted one religious affiliation for another (260).

[7.27] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): (275).

[7.27-7.28, 7.31, 38.9-38.10] (Bunch 2001-2): Even though she is now one of Leonce's possessions, Edna's original intent in marrying her Catholic husband was to escape her father's Protestant household and a girl's romantic imaginings (50).

[7.29] (Asbee 2001a): While at the beginning of the novel Edna is married to Leonce, with whom she feels no romantic joining of souls, at the novel's close Edna surrenders herself totally to the seductive call of nature, a possible negation, or transformation, of romanticism on Chopin's part (272).

[7.30] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): (276).

[7.30] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Chopin's description of Edna's feelings concerning her children outraged many readers (276).

[7.30] (Bunch 2001-2): Although Edna cares greatly for her sons, Etienne and Raoul, she feels unsuited for motherhood (51).

CHAPTER 8

[8.1] "Do me a favor, Robert," spoke the pretty woman at his side, almost as soon as she and Robert had started their slow, homeward way. She looked up in his face, leaning on his arm beneath the encircling shadow of the

umbrella which he had lifted.

[8.2] "Granted; as many as you like," he returned, glancing down into her eyes that were full of thoughtfulness and some speculation.

[8.3] "I only ask for one; let Mrs. Pontellier alone."

[8.4] "*Tiens!*" he exclaimed, with a sudden, boyish laugh. "*Voilà que Madame Ratignolle est jalouse!*"

[8.5] "Nonsense! I'm in earnest; I mean what I say. Let Mrs. Pontellier alone."

[8.6] "Why?" he asked; himself growing serious at his companion's solicitation.

[8.7] "She is not one of us; she is not like us. She might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously."

[8.8] His face flushed with annoyance, and taking off his soft hat he began to beat it impatiently against his leg as he walked. "Why shouldn't she take me seriously?" he demanded sharply. "Am I a comedian, a clown, a jack-in-the-box? Why shouldn't she? You Creoles! I have no patience with you! Am I always to be regarded as a feature of an amusing programme? I hope Mrs. Pontellier does take me seriously. I hope she has discernment enough to find in me something besides the *blagueur*. If I thought there was any doubt--"

[8.9] "Oh, enough, Robert!" she broke into his heated outburst. "You are not thinking of what you are saying. You

speak with about as little reflection as we might expect from one of those children down there playing in the sand. If your attentions to any married women here were ever offered with any intention of being convincing, you would not be the gentleman we all know you to be, and you would be unfit to associate with the wives and daughters of the people who trust you."

[8.10] Madame Ratignolle had spoken what she believed to be the law and the gospel. The young man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

[8.11] "Oh! well! That isn't it," slamming his hat down vehemently upon his head. "You ought to feel that such things are not flattering to say to a fellow."

[8.12] "Should our whole intercourse consist of an exchange of compliments? *Ma foi!*"

[8.13] "It isn't pleasant to have a woman tell you--" he went on, unheedingly, but breaking off suddenly: "Now if I were like Arobin--you remember Alcée Arobin and that story of the consul's wife at Biloxi?" And he related the story of Alcée Arobin and the consul's wife; and another about the tenor of the French Opera, who received letters which should never have been written; and still other stories, grave and gay, till Mrs. Pontellier and her possible propensity for taking young men seriously was apparently forgotten.

[8.14] Madame Ratignolle, when they had regained her cottage, went in to take the hour's rest which she

considered helpful. Before leaving her, Robert begged her pardon for the impatience--he called it rudeness--with which he had received her well-meant caution.

[8.15] "You made one mistake, Adèle," he said, with a light smile; "there is no earthly possibility of Mrs. Pontellier ever taking me seriously. You should have warned me against taking myself seriously. Your advice might then have carried some weight and given me subject for some reflection. *Au revoir*. But you look tired," he added, solicitously. "Would you like a cup of bouillon? Shall I stir you a toddy? Let me mix you a toddy with a drop of Angostura."

[8.16] She acceded to the suggestion of bouillon, which was grateful and acceptable. He went himself to the kitchen, which was a building apart from the cottages and lying to the rear of the house. And he himself brought her the golden-brown bouillon, in a dainty Sevres cup, with a flaky cracker or two on the saucer.

[8.17] She thrust a bare, white arm from the curtain which shielded her open door, and received the cup from his hands. She told him he was a *bon garçon*, and she meant it. Robert thanked her and turned away toward "the house."

[8.18] The lovers were just entering the grounds of the *pension*. They were leaning toward each other as the wateroaks bent from the sea. There was not a particle of earth beneath their feet. Their heads might have been

turned upside-down, so absolutely did they tread upon blue ether. The lady in black, creeping behind them, looked a trifle paler and more jaded than usual. There was no sign of Mrs. Pontellier and the children. Robert scanned the distance for any such apparition. They would doubtless remain away till the dinner hour. The young man ascended to his mother's room. It was situated at the top of the house, made up of odd angles and a queer, sloping ceiling. Two broad dormer windows looked out toward the Gulf, and as far across it as a man's eye might reach. The furnishings of the room were light, cool, and practical.

[8.19] Madame Lebrun was busily engaged at the sewing-machine. A little black girl sat on the floor, and with her hands worked the treadle of the machine. The Creole woman does not take any chances which may be avoided of imperiling her health.

[8.20] Robert went over and seated himself on the broad sill of one of the dormer windows. He took a book from his pocket and began energetically to read it, judging by the precision and frequency with which he turned the leaves. The sewing-machine made a resounding clatter in the room; it was of a ponderous, by-gone make. In the lulls, Robert and his mother exchanged bits of desultory conversation.

[8.21] "Where is Mrs. Pontellier?"

[8.22] "Down at the beach with the children."

[8.23] "I promised to lend her the Goncourt. Don't forget to take it down when you go; it's there on the bookshelf over the small table." Clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! for the next five or eight minutes.

[8.24] "Where is Victor going with the rockaway?"

[8.25] "The rockaway? Victor?"

[8.26] "Yes; down there in front. He seems to be getting ready to drive away somewhere."

[8.27] "Call him." Clatter, clatter!

[8.28] Robert uttered a shrill, piercing whistle which might have been heard back at the wharf.

[8.29] "He won't look up."

[8.30] Madame Lebrun flew to the window. She called "Victor!" She waved a handkerchief and called again. The young fellow below got into the vehicle and started the horse off at a gallop.

[8.31] Madame Lebrun went back to the machine, crimson with annoyance. Victor was the younger son and brother--a *tête montée*, with a temper which invited violence and a will which no ax could break.

[8.32] "Whenever you say the word I'm ready to thrash any amount of reason into him that he's able to hold."

[8.33] "If your father had only lived!" Clatter, clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! It was a fixed belief with Madame Lebrun that the conduct of the universe and all things pertaining thereto would have been manifestly of a

more intelligent and higher order had not Monsieur Lebrun been removed to other spheres during the early years of their married life.

[8.34] "What do you hear from Montel?" Montel was a middleaged gentleman whose vain ambition and desire for the past twenty years had been to fill the void which Monsieur Lebrun's taking off had left in the Lebrun household.

Clatter, clatter, bang, clatter!

[8.35] "I have a letter somewhere," looking in the machine drawer and finding the letter in the bottom of the workbasket. "He says to tell you he will be in Vera Cruz the beginning of next month,"-- clatter, clatter!--"and if you still have the intention of joining him"--bang! clatter, clatter, bang!

[8.36] "Why didn't you tell me so before, mother? You know I wanted--"Clatter, clatter, clatter!

[8.37] "Do you see Mrs. Pontellier starting back with the children? She will be in late to luncheon again. She never starts to get ready for luncheon till the last minute." Clatter, clatter! "Where are you going?"

[8.38] "Where did you say the Goncourt was?"

NOTES ON CHAPTER 8:

[8.4, 8.8-8.9] (Barrish 2000): At 26, Robert's main activities consist of helping his mother run the resort at Grand Isle and flirting with its female guests, none of whom respond to him seriously (67).

[8.8] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert's defensive stance when questioned about his relationship with Edna serves to emphasize his own questionable sexuality. He does not return women's amorous attentions, yet fears accusation as a homosexual (190).

[8.11] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Fearing unwitting disclosure, that he is gay, Robert quickly minimizes the argument (190).

[8.16] (Lippincott 2000): Adèle's finicky appetite here contrasts with Edna's voracious appetite later. Both finicky and voracious appetites were associated with pregnancy in nineteenth century medical works (59).

[8.18] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): The proximity of the lady in black to the lovers grows closer as their relationship becomes increasingly intimate, and therefore apparent to others (88).

[8.18] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): The lady in black does not appear behind the lovers until Robert and Edna have begun to pursue one another, stepping across acceptable boundaries (87).

[8.18] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): (87).

[8.18, 10.49, 12.29-12.30] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): As the relationship between Robert and Edna becomes increasingly intimate, the appearance of the lady in black becomes increasingly ominous (87).

[8.19] (Asbee 2001b): The subservient child who helps Mrs. Lebrun sew is one example of Chopin's voiceless characters of color (252).

[8.19] (Asbee 2001b): Chopin's intended meaning in this passage is unclear. The risk to Madame Lebrun's health may be a perceived gynecological one or a precautionary characteristic of Creole women in particular. Chopin leaves it to readers to determine whether she is being sarcastic (252).

CHAPTER 9

[9.1] Every light in the hall was ablaze; every lamp turned as high as it could be without smoking the chimney or threatening explosion. The lamps were fixed at intervals against the wall, encircling the whole room. Some one had gathered orange and lemon branches, and with these fashioned graceful festoons between. The dark green of the branches stood out and glistened against the white muslin curtains which draped the windows, and which puffed, floated, and flapped at the capricious will of a stiff breeze that swept up from the Gulf.

[9.2] It was Saturday night a few weeks after the intimate conversation held between Robert and Madame Ratignolle on their way from the beach. An unusual number of husbands, fathers, and friends had come down to stay over Sunday; and they were being suitably entertained by their families, with the material help of Madame Lebrun. The dining tables had all been removed to one end of the hall, and the chairs ranged about in rows and in clusters. Each little family group had had its say and exchanged its domestic gossip earlier in the evening. There was now an apparent disposition to relax; to widen the circle of confidences and give a more general tone to the conversation.

[9.3] Many of the children had been permitted to sit

up beyond their usual bedtime. A small band of them were lying on their stomachs on the floor looking at the colored sheets of the comic papers which Mr. Pontellier had brought down. The little Pontellier boys were permitting them to do so, and making their authority felt.

[9.4] Music, dancing, and a recitation or two were the entertainments furnished, or rather, offered. But there was nothing systematic about the programme, no appearance of prearrangement nor even premeditation.

[9.5] At an early hour in the evening the Farival twins were prevailed upon to play the piano. They were girls of fourteen, always clad in the Virgin's colors, blue and white, having been dedicated to the Blessed Virgin at their baptism. They played a duet from "Zampa," and at the earnest solicitation of every one present followed it with the overture to "The Poet and the Peasant."

[9.6] "*Allez vous-en! Sapristi!*" shrieked the parrot outside the door. He was the only being present who possessed sufficient candor to admit that he was not listening to these gracious performances for the first time that summer. Old Monsieur Farival, grandfather of the twins, grew indignant over the interruption, and insisted upon having the bird removed and consigned to regions of darkness. Victor Lebrun objected; and his decrees were as immutable as those of Fate. The parrot fortunately offered no further interruption to the entertainment, the whole

venom of his nature apparently having been cherished up and hurled against the twins in that one impetuous outburst.

[9.7] Later a young brother and sister gave recitations, which every one present had heard many times at winter evening entertainments in the city.

[9.8] A little girl performed a skirt dance in the center of the floor. The mother played her accompaniments and at the same time watched her daughter with greedy admiration and nervous apprehension. She need have had no apprehension. The child was mistress of the situation. She had been properly dressed for the occasion in black tulle and black silk tights. Her little neck and arms were bare, and her hair, artificially crimped, stood out like fluffy black plumes over her head. Her poses were full of grace, and her little black-shod toes twinkled as they shot out and upward with a rapidity and suddenness which were bewildering.

[9.9] But there was no reason why every one should not dance. Madame Ratignolle could not, so it was she who gaily consented to play for the others. She played very well, keeping excellent waltz time and infusing an expression into the strains which was indeed inspiring. 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.

[9.10] Almost every one danced but the twins, who

could not be induced to separate during the brief period when one or the other should be whirling around the room in the arms of a man. They might have danced together, but they did not think of it.

[9.11] The children were sent to bed. Some went submissively; others with shrieks and protests as they were dragged away. They had been permitted to sit up till after the ice-cream, which naturally marked the limit of human indulgence.

[9.12] The ice-cream was passed around with cake--gold and silver cake arranged on platters in alternate slices; it had been made and frozen during the afternoon back of the kitchen by two black women, under the supervision of Victor. It was pronounced a great success--excellent if it had only contained a little less vanilla or a little more sugar, if it had been frozen a degree harder, and if the salt might have been kept out of portions of it. Victor was proud of his achievement, and went about recommending it and urging every one to partake of it to excess.

[9.13] After Mrs. Pontellier had danced twice with her husband, once with Robert, and once with Monsieur Ratignolle, who was thin and tall and swayed like a reed in the wind when he danced, she went out on the gallery and seated herself on the low window-sill, where she commanded a view of all that went on in the hall and could look out

toward the Gulf. There was a soft effulgence in the east. The moon was coming up, and its mystic shimmer was casting a million lights across the distant, restless water.

[9.14] "Would you like to hear Mademoiselle Reisz play?" asked Robert, coming out on the porch where she was.

Of course Edna would like to hear Mademoiselle Reisz play; but she feared it would be useless to entreat her. "I'll ask her," he said.

[9.15] "I'll tell her that you want to hear her. She likes you. She will come." He turned and hurried away to one of the far cottages, where Mademoiselle Reisz was shuffling away. She was dragging a chair in and out of her room, and at intervals objecting to the crying of a baby, which a nurse in the adjoining cottage was endeavoring to put to sleep. 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. Robert prevailed upon her without any too great difficulty.

[9.16] She entered the hall with him during a lull in the dance. She made an awkward, imperious little bow as she went in. 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.

[9.17] "Ask Mrs. Pontellier what she would like to

hear me play," she requested of Robert. She sat perfectly still before the piano, not touching the keys, while Robert carried her message to Edna at the window. A general air of surprise and genuine satisfaction fell upon every one as they saw the pianist enter. There was a settling down, and a prevailing air of expectancy everywhere. Edna was a trifle embarrassed at being thus signaled out for the imperious little woman's favor. She would not dare to choose, and begged that Mademoiselle Reisz would please herself in her selections.

[9.18] Edna was what she herself called very fond of music. Musical strains, well rendered, had a way of evoking pictures in her mind. She sometimes liked to sit in the room of mornings when Madame Ratignolle played or practiced. One piece which that lady played Edna had entitled "Solitude." It was a short, plaintive, minor strain. The name of the piece was something else, but she called it "Solitude." when she heard it there came before her imagination the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him.

[9.19] Another piece called to her mind a dainty young woman clad in an Empire gown, taking mincing dancing steps as she came down a long avenue between tall hedges. Again, another reminded her of children at play, and still

another of nothing on earth but a demure lady stroking a cat.

[9.20] 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.

[9.21] She waited for the material pictures which she thought would gather and blaze before her imagination. She waited in vain. She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. 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.

[9.22] Mademoiselle had finished. She arose, and bowing her stiff, lofty bow, she went away, stopping for neither, thanks nor applause. As she passed along the gallery she patted Edna upon the shoulder.

[9.23] "Well, how did you like my music?" she asked. The young woman was unable to answer; she pressed the hand of the pianist convulsively. Mademoiselle Reisz perceived her agitation and even her tears. She patted her again upon the shoulder as she said:

[9.24] "You are the only one worth playing for. Those others? Bah!" and she went shuffling and sidling on

down the gallery toward her room.

[9.25] But she was mistaken about "those others." Her playing had aroused a fever of enthusiasm. "What passion!"

"What an artist!" "I have always said no one could play Chopin like Mademoiselle Reisz!" "That last prelude! Bon Dieu! It shakes a man!"

[9.26] It was growing late, and there was a general disposition to disband. But some one, perhaps it was Robert, thought of a bath at that mystic hour and under that mystic moon.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 9:

[9.15-9.16] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): The terms Chopin employs to describe Mademoiselle Reisz display neither total criticism nor pure praise of the woman-artist (277).

[9.18] (Muirhead 2000): The bird represents Edna's potential to free herself from a passionless life. However, in the novel's final scene, the bird's wing is broken, as too is Edna's dream of spiritual liberation (51).

[9.21] (Lippincott 2000): Having already been touched literally by Adèle, Edna is now touched figuratively by Madame Ratignolle (58).

[9.25] (Asbee 2001b): In Chapter 9 it is revealed that the music which affects Edna so deeply is that of Frederic Chopin, a favorite of dissolute authors of the late 1800s because he added so many flourishes to his compositions. His music was also associated with erotic licentiousness (266-267).

CHAPTER 10

[10.1] At all events Robert proposed it, and there was not a dissenting voice. There was not one but was ready to follow when he led the way. He did not lead the way, however, he directed the way; and he himself loitered behind with the lovers, who had betrayed a disposition to linger and hold themselves apart. He walked between them, whether with malicious or mischievous intent was not wholly clear, even to himself.

[10.2] The Pontelliers and Ratignolles walked ahead; the women leaning upon the arms of their husbands. Edna could hear Robert's voice behind them, and could sometimes hear what he said. She wondered why he did not join them. It was unlike him not to. Of late he had sometimes held away from her for an entire day, redoubling his devotion upon the next and the next, as though to make up for hours that had been lost. She missed him the days when some pretext served to take him away from her, just as one misses

the sun on a cloudy day without having thought much about the sun when it was shining.

[10.3] The people walked in little groups toward the beach. They talked and laughed; some of them sang. There was a band playing down at Klein's hotel, and the strains reached them faintly, tempered by the distance. There were strange, rare odors abroad-- a tangle of the sea smell and of weeds and damp, new-plowed earth, mingled with the heavy perfume of a field of white blossoms somewhere near. But the night sat lightly upon the sea and the land. There was no weight of darkness; there were no shadows. The white light of the moon had fallen upon the world like the mystery and the softness of sleep.

[10.4] Most of them walked into the water as though into a native element. The sea was quiet now, and swelled lazily in broad billows that melted into one another and did not break except upon the beach in little foamy crests that coiled back like slow, white serpents.

[10.5] Edna had attempted all summer to learn to swim. She had received instructions from both the men and women; in some instances from the children. Robert had pursued a system of lessons almost daily; and he was nearly at the point of discouragement in realizing the futility of his efforts. A certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand near by that might reach out and reassure her.

[10.6] 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.

[10.7] 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.

[10.8] Her unlooked-for achievement was the subject of wonder, applause, and admiration. Each one congratulated himself that his special teachings had accomplished this desired end.

[10.9] "How easy it is!" she thought. "It is nothing," she said aloud; "why did I not discover before that it was nothing. Think of the time I have lost splashing about like a baby!" She would not join the groups in their sports and bouts, but intoxicated with her newly conquered power, she swam out alone.

[10.10] She turned her face seaward to gather in an impression of space and solitude, which the vast expanse of water, meeting and melting with the moonlit sky, conveyed to her excited fancy. As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself.

[10.11] Once she turned and looked toward the shore, toward the people she had left there. She had not gone any great distance that is, what would have been a great distance for an experienced swimmer. But to her unaccustomed vision the stretch of water behind her assumed the aspect of a barrier which her unaided strength would never be able to overcome.

[10.12] A quick vision of death smote her soul, and for a second of time appalled and enfeebled her senses. But by an effort she rallied her staggering faculties and managed to regain the land.

[10.13] She made no mention of her encounter with death and her flash of terror, except to say to her husband, "I thought I should have perished out there alone."

[10.14] "You were not so very far, my dear; I was watching you", he told her.

[10.15] Edna went at once to the bath-house, and she had put on her dry clothes and was ready to return home before the others had left the water. She started to walk away alone. They all called to her and shouted to her. She waved a dissenting hand, and went on, paying no further heed to their renewed cries which sought to detain her.

[10.16] "Sometimes I am tempted to think that Mrs. Pontellier is capricious," said Madame Lebrun, who was amusing herself immensely and feared that Edna's abrupt departure might put an end to the pleasure.

[10.17] "I know she is," assented Mr. Pontellier; "sometimes, not often."

[10.18] Edna had not traversed a quarter of the distance on her way home before she was overtaken by Robert.

[10.19] "Did you think I was afraid?" she asked him, without a shade of annoyance.

[10.20] "No; I knew you weren't afraid."

[10.21] "Then why did you come? Why didn't you stay out there with the others?"

[10.22] "I never thought of it."

[10.23] "Thought of what?"

[10.24] "Of anything. What difference does it make?"

[10.25] "I'm very tired," she uttered, complainingly.

[10.26] "I know you are."

[10.27] "You don't know anything about it. Why should you know? I never was so exhausted in my life. But it isn't unpleasant. A thousand emotions have swept through me to-night. I don't comprehend half of them. Don't mind what I'm saying; I am just thinking aloud. I wonder if I shall ever be stirred again as Mademoiselle Reisz's playing moved me to-night. I wonder if any night on earth will ever again be like this one. 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."

[10.28] "There are," whispered Robert, "Didn't you know this was the twenty-eighth of August?"

[10.29] "The twenty-eighth of August?"

[10.30] "Yes. On the twenty-eighth of August, at the hour of midnight, and if the moon is shining--the moon must be shining--a spirit that has haunted these shores for ages rises up from the Gulf. With its own penetrating vision the spirit seeks some one mortal worthy to hold him company, worthy of being exalted for a few hours into realms of the semi-celestials. His search has always hitherto been fruitless, and he has sunk back, disheartened, into the sea. But to-night he found Mrs. Pontellier. Perhaps he will never wholly release her from the spell. Perhaps she will never again suffer a poor, unworthy earthling to walk in the shadow of her divine presence."

[10.31] "Don't banter me," she said, wounded at what appeared to be his flippancy. He did not mind the entreaty, but the tone with its delicate note of pathos was like a reproach. He could not explain; he could not tell her that he had penetrated her mood and understood. He said nothing except to offer her his arm, for, by her own admission, she was exhausted. She had been walking alone with her arms hanging limp, letting her white skirts trail along the dewy path. She took his arm, but she did not lean upon it. She let her hand lie listlessly, as though her thoughts were elsewhere--somewhere in advance of her body, and she was striving to overtake them.

[10.32] Robert assisted her into the hammock which

swung from the post before her door out to the trunk of a tree.

[10.33] "Will you stay out here and wait for Mr. Pontellier?" he asked.

[10.34] "I'll stay out here. Good-night."

[10.35] "Shall I get you a pillow?"

[10.36] "There's one here," she said, feeling about, for they were in the shadow.

[10.37] "It must be soiled; the children have been tumbling it about."

[10.38] "No matter." And having discovered the pillow, she adjusted it beneath her head. She extended herself in the hammock with a deep breath of relief. She was not a supercilious or an over-dainty woman. She was not much given to reclining in the hammock, and when she did so it was with no cat-like suggestion of voluptuous ease, but with a beneficent repose which seemed to invade her whole body.

[10.39] "Shall I stay with you till Mr. Pontellier comes?" asked Robert, seating himself on the outer edge of one of the steps and taking hold of the hammock rope which was fastened to the post.

[10.40] "If you wish. Don't swing the hammock. Will you get my white shawl which I left on the window-sill over at the house?"

[10.41] "Are you chilly?"

[10.42] "No; but I shall be presently."

[10.43] "Presently?" he laughed. "Do you know what time it is? How long are you going to stay out here?"

[10.44] "I don't know. Will you get the shawl?"

[10.45] "Of course I will," he said, rising. He went over to the house, walking along the grass. She watched his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight. It was past midnight. It was very quiet.

[10.46] When he returned with the shawl she took it and kept it in her hand. She did not put it around her.

[10.47] "Did you say I should stay till Mr. Pontellier came back?"

[10.48] "I said you might if you wished to."

[10.49] He seated himself again and rolled a cigarette, which he smoked in silence. Neither did Mrs. Pontellier speak. No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire.

[10.50] When the voices of the bathers were heard approaching, Robert said good-night. She did not answer him. He thought she was asleep. Again she watched his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight as he walked away.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 10:

[10.6-10.7] (Strozier 2002): When Edna learns to swim, Chopin compares her reaction to that of a baby taking its first steps (27).

[10.9] (Lippincott 2000): While Adèle pursues motherly distractions like sewing baby clothes and playing the piano, Edna seeks her own space, apart from her life as wife and mother, in which to paint (60).

[10.45] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): The source of the romantic feelings lie entirely within Edna. Robert shows no remorse at leaving Edna, believing she is asleep. Where Robert is unaffected by the romantic setting, Edna is aroused (191).

[8.18, 10.49, 12.29-12.30] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): As the relationship between Robert and Edna becomes increasingly intimate, the appearance of the lady in black becomes increasingly ominous (87).

[10.49] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's emotional awareness grows during an intimate moment with Robert after her swim. This is the only scene in the novel where Chopin uses the word "pregnant" (58).

[10.49] (Lippincott 2000): Chopin's intentional reference to pregnancy in this quiet

scene serves to draw the reader's attention to Edna's growing transformation (58).

[10.49] (Bunch 2001-2): Unlike the childish flirtations between Robert and Adèle, conversation between Edna and Robert is heavy with the anticipation of shared passion (52).

[10.49] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert does not use the scene to prompt Edna's desire, but instead smokes a cigarette (191).

CHAPTER 11

[11.1] "What are you doing out here, Edna? I thought I should find you in bed," said her husband, when he discovered her lying there. He had walked up with Madame Lebrun and left her at the house. His wife did not reply.

[11.2] "Are you asleep?" he asked, bending down close to look at her.

[11.3] "No." Her eyes gleamed bright and intense, with no sleepy shadows, as they looked into his.

[11.4] "Do you know it is past one o'clock? Come on," and he mounted the steps and went into their room.

[11.5] "Edna!" called Mr. Pontellier from within, after a few moments had gone by.

[11.6] "Don't wait for me," she answered. He thrust his head through the door.

[11.7] "You will take cold out there," he said, irritably. "What folly is this? why don't you come in?"

[11.8] "It isn't cold; I have my shawl."

[11.9] "The mosquitoes will devour you."

[11.10] "There are no mosquitoes."

[11.11] She heard him moving about the room; every sound indicating impatience and irritation. Another time she would have gone in at his request. She would, through habit, have yielded to his desire; not with any sense of submission or obedience to his compelling wishes, but unthinkingly, as we walk, move, sit, stand, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us.

[11.12] "Edna, dear, are you not coming in soon?" he asked again, this time fondly, with a note of entreaty.

[11.13] "No; I am going to stay out here."

[11.14] "This is more than folly," he blurted out. "I can't permit you to stay out there all night. You must come in the house instantly."

[11.15] With a writhing motion she settled herself more securely in the hammock. She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted. She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that

before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did.

[11.16] "Léonce, go to bed, " she said I mean to stay out here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you."

[11.17] Mr. Pontellier had prepared for bed, but he slipped on an extra garment. He opened a bottle of wine, of which he kept a small and select supply in a buffet of his own. He drank a glass of the wine and went out on the gallery and offered a glass to his wife. She did not wish any. He drew up the rocker, hoisted his slippered feet on the rail, and proceeded to smoke a cigar. He smoked two cigars; then he went inside and drank another glass of wine.

Mrs. Pontellier again declined to accept a glass when it was offered to her. Mr. Pontellier once more seated himself with elevated feet, and after a reasonable interval of time smoked some more cigars.

[11.18] 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. The physical need for sleep began to overtake her; the exuberance which had sustained and exalted her spirit left her helpless and yielding to the conditions which crowded

her in.

[11.19] The stillest hour of the night had come, the hour before dawn, when the world seems to hold its breath. The moon hung low, and had turned from silver to copper in the sleeping sky. The old owl no longer hooted, and the water-oaks had ceased to moan as they bent their heads.

[11.20] Edna arose, cramped from lying so long and still in the hammock. She tottered up the steps, clutching feebly at the post before passing into the house.

[11.21] "Are you coming in, Léonce?" she asked, turning her face toward her husband.

[11.22] "Yes, dear," he answered, with a glance following a misty puff of smoke. "Just as soon as I have finished my cigar."

NOTES ON CHAPTER 11:

[11.1, 11.4, 11.7] (Muirhead 2000): The questions Léonce asks Edna upon returning home late and finding her in the hammock take a very authoritative form, revealing Léonce's belief that he has command over his wife. By ignoring him, Edna takes the first step toward independence (44).

[11.4] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): In stark contrast to Robert's kindness toward Edna, Léonce uses intimidation to persuade Edna to go inside the house. When this fails, he tries a gentle appeal. Failing again, Léonce demands Edna return to the house. Ultimately, he uses his physical presence near her, where he smokes and drinks, to sway her. Though she rises to go inside, it is of her own volition. She enters the house alone (190-91)

[11.11] (Bunch 2001-2): Sex with Léonce is an economic exchange for Edna, securing her stake as his wife. Like Léonce's management of their finances, in this couple's life sex is a commodity to be traded to Edna's best advantage. Léonce treats his sexual relations with Edna as if they were a business transaction – part of the mechanical upkeep of his marriage (50).

[11.12, 11.14] (Muirhead 2000): By the scene's end, Edna takes on the role of questioner (44-45).

[11.18] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): In one sense, the annoying smoke from Léonce's cigar wins out over Edna (190).

[11.22] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Léonce believes he still holds power over Edna (191).

CHAPTER 12

[12.1] She slept but a few hours. They were troubled and feverish hours, disturbed with dreams that were intangible, that eluded her, leaving only an impression upon her half-awakened senses of something unattainable. She was up and dressed in the cool of the early morning. The air was invigorating and steadied somewhat her faculties. However, she was not seeking refreshment or help from any source, either external or from within. She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility.

[12.2] Most of the people at that early hour were still in bed and asleep. A few, who intended to go over to the *Chênrière* for mass, were moving about. The lovers, who had laid their plans the night before, were already strolling toward the wharf. The lady in black, with her Sunday prayer-book, velvet and gold-clasped, and her Sunday silver beads, was following them at no great distance. Old Monsieur Farival was up, and was more than half inclined to do anything that suggested itself. He put on his big straw hat, and taking his umbrella from the stand in the hall, followed the lady in black, never overtaking her.

[12.3] The little negro girl who worked Madame Lebrun's sewing-machine was sweeping the galleries with

long, absent-minded strokes of the broom. Edna sent her up into the house to awaken Robert.

[12.4] "Tell him I am going to the *Chênrière*. The boat is ready; tell him to hurry."

[12.5] He had soon joined her. She had never sent for him before. She had never asked for him. She had never seemed to want him before. She did not appear conscious that she had done anything unusual in commanding his presence. He was apparently equally unconscious of anything extraordinary in the situation. But his face was suffused with a quiet glow when he met her.

[12.6] They went together back to the kitchen to drink coffee. There was no time to wait for any nicety of service. They stood outside the window and the cook passed them their coffee and a roll, which they drank and ate from the window-sill. Edna said it tasted good. She had not thought of coffee nor of anything. He told her he had often noticed that she lacked forethought.

[12.7] "Wasn't it enough to think of going to the *Chênrière* and waking you up?" she laughed. "Do I have to think of everything?--as Léonce says when he's in a bad humor. I don't blame him; he'd never be in a bad humor if it weren't for me."

[12.8] They took a short cut across the sands. At a distance they could see the curious procession moving toward the wharf--the lovers, shoulder to shoulder, creeping; the

lady in black, gaining steadily upon them; old Monsieur Farival, losing ground inch by inch, and a young barefooted Spanish girl, with a red kerchief on her head and a basket on her arm, bringing up the rear.

[12.9] Robert knew the girl, and he talked to her a little in the boat. No one present understood what they said. Her name was Mariequita. She had a round, sly, piquant face and pretty black eyes. Her hands were small, and she kept them folded over the handle of her basket. Her feet were broad and coarse. She did not strive to hide them.

Edna looked at her feet, and noticed the sand and slime between her brown toes.

[12.10] Beaudélet grumbled because Mariequita was there, taking up so much room. In reality he was annoyed at having old Monsieur Farival, who considered himself the better sailor of the two. But he he would not quarrel with so old a man as Monsieur Farival, so he quarreled with Mariequita. The girl was deprecatory at one moment, appealing to Robert. She was saucy the next, moving her head up and down, making "eyes" at Robert and making "mouths" at Beaudélet.

[12.11] The lovers were all alone. They saw nothing, they heard nothing. The lady in black was counting her beads for the third time. Old Monsieur Farival talked incessantly of what he knew about handling a boat, and of what Beaudélet did not know on the same subject.

[12.12] Edna liked it all. She looked Mariequita up and down, from her ugly brown toes to her pretty black eyes, and back again.

[12.13] "Why does she look at me like that?" inquired the girl of Robert.

[12.14] "Maybe she thinks you are pretty. Shall I ask her?"

[12.15] "No. Is she your sweetheart?"

[12.16] "She's a married lady, and has two children."

[12.17] "Oh! well! Francisco ran away with Sylvano's wife, who had four children. They took all his money and one of the children and stole his boat."

[12.18] "Shut up!"

[12.19] "Does she understand?"

[12.20] "Oh, hush!"

[12.21] "Are those two married over there--leaning on each other?"

[12.22] "Of course not," laughed Robert.

[12.23] "Of course not," echoed Mariequita, with a serious, confirmatory bob of the head.

[12.24] The sun was high up and beginning to bite. The swift breeze seemed to Edna to bury the sting of it into the pores of her face and hands. Robert held his umbrella over her.

[12.25] As they went cutting sidewise through the water, the sails bellied taut, with the wind filling and

overflowing them. Old Monsieur Farival laughed sardonically at something as he looked at the sails, and Beaufelet swore at the old man under his breath.

[12.26] Sailing across the bay to the *Chênrière Caminada*, Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening--had snapped the night before when the mystic spirit was abroad, leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails. Robert spoke to her incessantly; he no longer noticed Mariequita. The girl had shrimps in her bamboo basket. They were covered with Spanish moss. She beat the moss down impatiently, and muttered to herself sullenly.

[12.27] "Let us go to Grande Terre to-morrow?" said Robert in a low voice.

[12.28] "What shall we do there?"

[12.29] "Climb up the hill to the old fort and look at the little wriggling gold snakes, and watch the lizards sun themselves."

[12.30] She gazed away toward Grande Terre and thought she would like to be alone there with Robert, in the sun, listening to the ocean's roar and watching the slimy lizards writhe in and out among the ruins of the old fort.

[12.31] "And the next day or the next we can sail to the Bayou Brulow," he went on.

[12.32] "What shall we do there?"

[12.33] "Anything--cast bait for fish."

[12.34] "No; we'll go back to Grande Terre. Let the fish alone."

[12.35] "We'll go wherever you like," he said. "I'll have Tonie come over and help me patch and trim my boat. We shall not need Beaufilet nor any one. Are you afraid of the pirogue?"

[12.36] "Oh, no."

[12.37] "Then I'll take you some night in the pirogue when the moon shines. Maybe your Gulf spirit will whisper to you in which of these islands the treasures are hidden--direct you to the very spot, perhaps."

[12.38] "And in a day we should be rich!" she laughed. "I'd give it all to you, the pirate gold and every bit of treasure we could dig up. I think you would know how to spend it. Pirate gold isn't a thing to be hoarded or utilized. It is something to squander and throw to the four winds, for the fun of seeing the golden specks fly."

[12.39] "We'd share it, and scatter it together," he said. His face flushed.

[12.40] They all went together up to the quaint little Gothic church of Our Lady of Lourdes, gleaming all brown and yellow with paint in the sun's glare.

[12.41] Only Beaufilet remained behind, tinkering at his boat, and Mariequita walked away with her basket of

shrimps, casting a look of childish ill humor and reproach at Robert from the corner of her eye.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 12:

[12.1] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): (89).

[12.2] (Asbee 2001b): While the lovers whom the lady in black follows seem to pay no attention to her presence, the reader is never permitted to forget her (254).

[12.2, 12.8] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): As Robert and Edna wait for a boat to take them to Cheniere Caminada, their first outing alone, the lovers are followed with increased fervor by the lady in black. As if knowing their desire to be alone, the lady makes her presence ever more conspicuous. Similarly, as Robert and Edna slowly break from the constraints of the moral code, the lady in black is said to gain on the lovers (89).

[12.9] (Barrish 2000): While no obvious innuendos are made concerning the sexuality of the black women in *The Awakening*, Chopin does draw clear attention to the unrestrained sexuality of Mariequita, a Hispanic girl on Grand Isle. The book suggests that Mariequita has had sexual relationships with both Robert and Victor LeBrun and later makes it clear

that she views Edna as a rival for Robert's sexual attention. Mariequita is the only woman in the book who seems obviously comfortable with the idea of extramarital sex (66-67).

[12.11] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): The lovers now represent unsanctioned love, and the lady in black has begun praying repetitively as if to intercede for the transgressors (89).

[12.15] (Barrish 2000): (67).

[12.21-12.22] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): Where the lovers' relationship was once depicted as childlike, it has now grown intimate to the point that they are mistaken for a married couple. This scene follows one in which the relationship between Edna and Robert is also questioned by Mariequita (89).

[12.22-12.23] (Asbee 2001b): The symbolic relationship between Edna and the lovers and the lady in black is unclear, but the lady and the lovers represent options of either asceticism or achieved satisfaction. Edna, however, seems to follow neither of these paths (255).

[12.22-12.23] (Asbee 2001b): Robert's comment here suggests that a husband and wife cannot enjoy the kind of affection the lovers share. His comment thus reveals something

significant about his own attitude toward marriage, but Edna fails to hear his remark (255).

[12.26] (Asbee 2001b): In Chapter 12, Chopin uses mythic imagery to communicate Edna's transformation. There is an obvious tension between Edna's desire to be free of the bonds of custom and her plan of operation once liberty is attained. Chopin contrasts Edna's feelings about sailing with those of the two older men with whom she sails in this chapter. However, the language Chopin uses to describe Edna's attitudes toward sailing is ambiguous; it suggests both purposefulness and aimlessness. This kind of ambiguity foreshadows the dilemmas she will face when she later does achieve a measure of freedom (255).

[12.26] (Bunch 2001-2): Traveling with Robert along with others from Grand Isle, Edna feels the first tug of liberation (52).

[8.18, 10.49, 12.29-12.30] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): As the relationship between Robert and Edna becomes increasingly intimate, the appearance of the lady in black becomes increasingly ominous (87).

[12.37] (Bunch 2001-2): Robert speaks to Edna in an alluring manner of new, undiscovered opportunities (52).

[8.18, 12.37-12.39] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): The lovers' growing infatuation mirrors that of Robert and Edna, who make plans to spend increasingly more time together (90).

[12.38] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna sees the potential for unrestrictive new experience with Robert. She hopes to draw from Robert a response without restraint that would elevate the sensual nature of their relationship. To spend money carelessly with no anticipation of return is Edna's ultimate erotic expression of freedom from the restraints of tradition (52-53).

[12.40] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): Our Lady of Lourdes was the first Marian apparition, again setting Robert's and Edna's relationship against the backdrop of a Catholic image (90).

CHAPTER 13

[13.1] A feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame Edna during the service. Her head began to ache, and the lights on the altar swayed before her eyes. Another time she might have made an effort to regain her composure; but her one thought was to quit the stifling atmosphere of the church and reach the open air. She arose, climbing over Robert's feet with a muttered apology. Old Monsieur

Farival, flurried, curious, stood up, but upon seeing that Robert had followed Mrs. Pontellier, he sank back into his seat. He whispered an anxious inquiry of the lady in black, who did not notice him or reply, but kept her eyes fastened upon the pages of her velvet prayer-book.

[13.2] "I felt giddy and almost overcome," Edna said, lifting her hands instinctively to her head and pushing her straw hat up from her forehead. "I couldn't have stayed through the service." They were outside in the shadow of the church. Robert was full of solicitude.

[13.3] "It was folly to have thought of going in the first place, let alone staying. Come over to Madame Antoine's; you can rest there." He took her arm and led her away, looking anxiously and continuously down into her face.

[13.4] How still it was, with only the voice of the sea whispering through the reeds that grew in the salt-water pools! The long line of little gray, weather-beaten houses nestled peacefully among the orange trees. It must always have been God's day on that low, drowsy island, Edna thought. They stopped, leaning over a jagged fence made of sea-drift, to ask for water. A youth, a mild-faced Acadian, was drawing water from the cistern, which was nothing more than a rusty buoy, with an opening on one side, sunk in the ground. The water which the youth handed to them in a tin pail was not cold to taste, but it was cool to her heated face, and it greatly revived and refreshed her.

[13.5] Madame Antoine's cot was at the far end of the village. She welcomed them with all the native hospitality, as she would have opened her door to let the sunlight in. She was fat, and walked heavily and clumsily across the floor. She could speak no English, but when Robert made her understand that the lady who accompanied him was ill and desired to rest, she was all eagerness to make Edna feel at home and to dispose of her comfortably.

[13.6] The whole place was immaculately clean, and the big, four-posted bed, snow-white, invited one to repose. It stood in a small side room which looked out across a narrow grass plot toward the shed, where there was a disabled boat lying keel upward.

[13.7] Madame Antoine had not gone to mass. Her son Tonie had, but she supposed he would soon be back, and she invited Robert to be seated and wait for him. But he went and sat outside the door and smoked. Madame Antoine busied herself in the large front room preparing dinner. She was boiling mullets over a few red coals in the huge fireplace.

[13.8] Edna, left alone in the little side room, loosened her clothes, removing the greater part of them. She bathed her face, her neck and arms in the basin that stood between the windows. She took off her shoes and stockings and stretched herself in the very center of the high, white bed. How luxurious it felt to rest thus in a strange, quaint bed, with its sweet country odor of laurel

lingering about the sheets and mattress! She stretched her strong limbs that ached a little. She ran her fingers through her loosened hair for a while. She looked at her round arms as she held them straight up and rubbed them one after the other, observing closely, as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh. She clasped her hands easily above her head, and it was thus she fell asleep.

[13.9] She slept lightly at first, half awake and drowsily attentive to the things about her. She could hear Madame Antoine's heavy, scraping tread as she walked back and forth on the sanded floor. Some chickens were clucking outside the windows, scratching for bits of gravel in the grass. Later she half heard the voices of Robert and Tonie talking under the shed. She did not stir. Even her eyelids rested numb and heavily over her sleepy eyes. The voices went on--Tonie's slow, Acadian drawl, Robert's quick, soft, smooth French. She understood French imperfectly unless directly addressed, and the voices were only part of the other drowsy, muffled sounds lulling her senses.

[13.10] When Edna awoke it was with the conviction that she had slept long and soundly. The voices were hushed under the shed. Madame Antoine's step was no longer to be heard in the adjoining room. Even the chickens had gone elsewhere to scratch and cluck. The mosquito bar was drawn over her; the old woman had come in while she slept and let

down the bar. Edna arose quietly from the bed, and looking between the curtains of the window, she saw by the slanting rays of the sun that the afternoon was far advanced. Robert was out there under the shed, reclining in the shade against the sloping keel of the overturned boat. He was reading from a book. Tonie was no longer with him. She wondered what had become of the rest of the party. She peeped out at him two or three times as she stood washing herself in the little basin between the windows.

[13.11] Madame Antoine had laid some coarse, clean towels upon a chair, and had placed a box of *poudre de riz* within easy reach. Edna dabbed the powder upon her nose and cheeks as she looked at herself closely in the little distorted mirror which hung on the wall above the basin. Her eyes were bright and wide awake and her face glowed.

[13.12] 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. Then she went softly out of doors, and plucking an orange from the low-hanging bough of a tree, threw it at Robert, who did not know she was awake and up.

[13.13] An illumination broke over his whole face

when he saw her and joined her under the orange tree.

[13.14] "How many years have I slept?" she inquired.

"The whole island seems changed. A new race of beings must have sprung up, leaving only you and me as past relics. How many ages ago did Madame Antoine and Tonie die? and when did our people from Grand Isle disappear from the earth?"

[13.15] He familiarly adjusted a ruffle upon her shoulder.

[13.16] "You have slept precisely one hundred years.

I was left here to guard your slumbers; and for one hundred years I have been out under the shed reading a book. The only evil I couldn't prevent was to keep a broiled fowl from drying up."

[13.17] "If it has turned to stone, still will I eat it," said Edna, moving with him into the house. "But really, what has become of Monsieur Farival and the others?"

[13.18] "Gone hours ago. When they found that you were sleeping they thought it best not to awake you. Any way, I wouldn't have let them. What was I here for?"

[13.19] "I wonder if Léonce will be uneasy!" she speculated, as she seated herself at table.

[13.20] "Of course not; he knows you are with me," Robert replied, as he busied himself among sundry pans and covered dishes which had been left standing on the hearth.

[13.21] "Where are Madame Antoine and her son?" asked Edna.

[13.22] "Gone to Vespers, and to visit some friends, I believe. I am to take you back in Tonie's boat whenever you are ready to go."

[13.23] He stirred the smoldering ashes till the broiled fowl began to sizzle afresh. He served her with no mean repast, dripping the coffee anew and sharing it with her. Madame Antoine had cooked little else than the mullets, but while Edna slept Robert had foraged the island. He was childishly gratified to discover her appetite, and to see the relish with which she ate the food which he had procured for her.

[13.24] "Shall we go right away?" she asked, after draining her glass and brushing together the crumbs of the crusty loaf.

[13.25] "The sun isn't as low as it will be in two hours," he answered. [13.26] "The sun will be gone in two hours."

[13.27] "Well, let it go; who cares!"

[13.28] They waited a good while under the orange trees, till Madame Antoine came back, panting, waddling, with a thousand apologies to explain her absence. Tonie did not dare to return. He was shy, and would not willingly face any woman except his mother.

[13.29] It was very pleasant to stay there under the orange trees, while the sun dipped lower and lower, turning the western sky to flaming copper and gold. The shadows

lengthened and crept out like stealthy, grotesque monsters across the grass.

[13.30] Edna and Robert both sat upon the ground--that is, he lay upon the ground beside her, occasionally picking at the hem of her muslin gown.

[13.31] Madame Antoine seated her fat body, broad and squat, upon a bench beside the door. She had been talking all the afternoon, and had wound herself up to the storytelling pitch.

[13.32] And what stories she told them! But twice in her life she had left the *Chênière Caminada*, and then for the briefest span. All her years she had squatted and waddled there upon the island, gathering legends of the Baratarians and the sea. The night came on, with the moon to lighten it. Edna could hear the whispering voices of dead men and the click of muffled gold.

[13.33] When she and Robert stepped into Tonie's boat, with the red lateen sail, misty spirit forms were prowling in the shadows and among the reeds, and upon the water were phantom ships, speeding to cover.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 13:

[13.1] (Asbee 2001b): Significantly, the lady in black ignores Edna's departure (255).

[13.1] (Asbee 2001b): The phrasing here characterizes Edna's feelings toward Catholicism (261).

[2.1, 13.11] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's glow – indicating that she is metaphorically pregnant with a new self - causes others to take notice and even comment on her physical appearance (61).

[13.14] (McGee 2000): (48).

[13.14] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna's growing sensual attraction for Robert induces her to long for their complete separation from the time and place that restrains them (54).

[13.16] (Asbee 2001b): In typical fashion, Chopin makes Robert's comments here combine both a romantic and a realistic tone (256).

[13.23] (McGee 2000): Edna enjoys this meal, the first to draw such a response, which significantly Robert serves to her. For the first time in this novel, we witness a meal that seems authentic (48).

[13.23] (Lippincott 2000): Robert is rewarded by Edna's enjoyment of a meal he prepares for her, after having earlier served Adèle a cup of broth and a few crackers (59).

[13.32] (Bunch 2001-2): Listening to Madame Antoine tell tales of the Baratarian pirates, Edna fantasizes of living within their sexually liberated, economically unfettered culture (54).

[13.32] (Bunch 2001-2): Once Edna opens the door to fantasies of an erotic, wasteful, dangerous life, she cannot remain as she was (54).

[13.33] (Asbee 2001b): As subsequent chapters will show, Edna's mythic transformation holds true only as long as she is alone with Robert (256).

CHAPTER 14

[14.1] The youngest boy, Etienne, had been very naughty, Madame Ratignolle said, as she delivered him into the hands of his mother. He had been unwilling to go to bed and had made a scene; whereupon she had taken charge of him and pacified him as well as she could. Raoul had been in bed and asleep for two hours.

[14.2] The youngster was in his long white nightgown, that kept tripping him up as Madame Ratignolle led him along by the hand. With the other chubby fist he rubbed his eyes, which were heavy with sleep and ill humor. Edna took him in her arms, and seating herself in the

rocker, began to coddle and caress him, calling him all manner of tender names, soothing him to sleep.

[14.3] It was not more than nine o'clock. No one had yet gone to bed but the children.

[14.4] Léonce had been very uneasy at first, Madame Ratignolle said, and had wanted to start at once for the *Chênrière*. But Monsieur Farival had assured him that his wife was only overcome with sleep and fatigue, that Tonie would bring her safely back later in the day; and he had thus been dissuaded from crossing the bay. He had gone over to Klein's, looking up some cotton broker whom he wished to see in regard to securities, exchanges, stocks, bonds, or something of the sort, Madame Ratignolle did not remember what. He said he would not remain away late. She herself was suffering from heat and oppression, she said. She carried a bottle of salts and a large fan. She would not consent to remain with Edna, for Monsieur Ratignolle was alone, and he detested above all things to be left alone.

[14.5] When Etienne had fallen asleep Edna bore him into the back room, and Robert went and lifted the mosquito bar that she might lay the child comfortably in his bed. The quadron had vanished. When they emerged from the cottage Robert bade Edna good-night.

[14.6] "Do you know we have been together the whole livelong day, Robert--since early this morning?" she said at parting.

[14.7] "All but the hundred years when you were sleeping. Goodnight."

[14.8] He pressed her hand and went away in the direction of the beach. He did not join any of the others, but walked alone toward the Gulf.

[14.9] Edna stayed outside, awaiting her husband's return. She had no desire to sleep or to retire; nor did she feel like going over to sit with the Ratignolles, or to join Madame Lebrun and a group whose animated voices reached her as they sat in conversation before the house. She let her mind wander back over her stay at Grand Isle; and she tried to discover wherein this summer had been different from any and every other summer of her life. She could only realize that she herself--her present self--was in some way different from the other self. That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect.

[14.10] She wondered why Robert had gone away and left her. It did not occur to her to think he might have grown tired of being with her the livelong day. She was not tired, and she felt that he was not. She regretted that he had gone. It was so much more natural to have him stay when he was not absolutely required to leave her.

[14.11] As Edna waited for her husband she sang low a little song that Robert had sung as they crossed the bay.

It began with "Ah! *Si tu savais*," and every verse ended with "*si tu savais*."

[14.12] Robert's voice was not pretentious. It was musical and true. The voice, the notes, the whole refrain haunted her memory.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 14:

[14.1] (Asbee 2001b): Chapters 13 and 14 reveal the opposition that exists between Edna's mythic adventure with Robert and the realities of her life as a mother, emphasizing the contradictory natures of seduction and parenthood (256).

[14.9] (Lippincott 2000): Edna has only a vague awareness of the changes occurring within her (58-59).

[14.11] (Asbee 2001a): The French words here are part of a lyric that can be translated as: "if you knew/ what your eyes are telling me" (282).

[14.11] (Asbee 2001b): The words of the song – "If only you knew!" – will come to seem increasingly ironic, and the irony will foreshadow Edna's doom (264).

CHAPTER 15

[15.1] When Edna entered the dining-room one evening a little late, as was her habit, an unusually animated conversation seemed to be going on. Several persons were talking at once, and Victor's voice was predominating, even over that of his mother. Edna had returned late from her bath, had dressed in some haste, and her face was flushed. Her head, set off by her dainty white gown, suggested a rich, rare blossom. She took her seat at table between old Monsieur Farival and Madame Ratignolle.

[15.2] As she seated herself and was about to begin to eat her soup, which had been served when she entered the room, several persons informed her simultaneously that Robert was going to Mexico. She laid her spoon down and looked about her bewildered. He had been with her, reading to her all the morning, and had never even mentioned such a place as Mexico. She had not seen him during the afternoon; she had heard some one say he was at the house, upstairs with his mother. This she had thought nothing of, though she was surprised when he did not join her later in the afternoon, when she went down to the beach.

[15.3] She looked across at him, where he sat beside Madame Lebrun, who presided. Edna's face was a blank picture of bewilderment, which she never thought of disguising. He lifted his eyebrows with the pretext of a

smile as he returned her glance. He looked embarrassed and uneasy.

[15.4] "When is he going?" she asked of everybody in general, as if Robert were not there to answer for himself.

[15.5] "To-night!" "This very evening!" "Did you ever!" "What possesses him!" were some of the replies she gathered, uttered simultaneously in French and English.

[15.6] "Impossible!" she exclaimed. "How can a person start off from Grand Isle to Mexico at a moment's notice, as if he were going over to Klein's or to the wharf or down to the beach?"

[15.7] "I said all along I was going to Mexico; I've been saying so for years!" cried Robert, in an excited and irritable tone, with the air of a man defending himself against a swarm of stinging insects.

[15.8] Madame Lebrun knocked on the table with her knife handle.

[15.9] "Please let Robert explain why he is going, and why he is going to-night," she called out. "Really, this table is getting to be more and more like Bedlam every day, with everybody talking at once. Sometimes--I hope God will forgive me--but positively, sometimes I wish Victor would lose the power of speech."

[15.10] Victor laughed sardonically as he thanked his mother for her holy wish, of which he failed to see the benefit to anybody, except that it might afford her a more

ample opportunity and license to talk herself.

[15.11] Monsieur Farival thought that Victor should have been taken out in mid-ocean in his earliest youth and drowned. Victor thought there would be more logic in thus disposing of old people with an established claim for making themselves universally obnoxious. Madame Lebrun grew a trifle hysterical; Robert called his brother some sharp, hard names.

[15.12] "There's nothing much to explain, mother," he said; though he explained, nevertheless--looking chiefly at Edna--that he could only meet the gentleman whom he intended to join at Vera Cruz by taking such and such a steamer, which left New Orleans on such a day; that Beaufort was going out with his lugger-load of vegetables that night, which gave him an opportunity of reaching the city and making his vessel in time.

[15.13] "But when did you make up your mind to all this?" demanded Monsieur Farival.

[15.14] "This afternoon," returned Robert, with a shade of annoyance.

[15.15] "At what time this afternoon?" persisted the old gentleman, with nagging determination, as if he were cross-questioning a criminal in a court of justice.

[15.16] "At four o'clock this afternoon, Monsieur Farival," Robert replied, in a high voice and with a lofty air, which reminded Edna of some gentleman on the stage.

[15.17] She had forced herself to eat most of her soup, and now she was picking the flaky bits of a *court bouillon* with her fork.

[15.18] The lovers were profiting by the general conversation on Mexico to speak in whispers of matters which they rightly considered were interesting to no one but themselves. The lady in black had once received a pair of prayer-beads of curious workmanship from Mexico, with very special indulgence attached to them, but she had never been able to ascertain whether the indulgence extended outside the Mexican border. Father Fochel of the Cathedral had attempted to explain it; but he had not done so to her satisfaction. And she begged that Robert would interest himself, and discover, if possible, whether she was entitled to the indulgence accompanying the remarkably curious Mexican prayer-beads.

[15.19] Madame Ratignolle hoped that Robert would exercise extreme caution in dealing with the Mexicans, who, she considered, were a treacherous people, unscrupulous and revengeful. She trusted she did them no injustice in thus condemning them as a race. She had known personally but one Mexican, who made and sold excellent tamales, and whom she would have trusted implicitly, so softspoken was he. One day he was arrested for stabbing his wife. She never knew whether he had been hanged or not.

[15.20] Victor had grown hilarious, and was

attempting to tell an anecdote about a Mexican girl who served chocolate one winter in a restaurant in Dauphine Street. No one would listen to him but old Monsieur Farival, who went into convulsions over the droll story.

[15.21] Edna wondered if they had all gone mad, to be talking and clamoring at that rate. She herself could think of nothing to say about Mexico or the Mexicans.

[15.22] "At what time do you leave?" she asked Robert.

[15.23] "At ten," he told her. "Beaudeflet wants to wait for the moon."

[15.24] "Are you all ready to go?"

[15.25] "Quite ready. I shall only take a hand-bag, and shall pack my trunk in the city."

[15.26] He turned to answer some question put to him by his mother, and Edna, having finished her black coffee, left the table.

[15.27] She went directly to her room. The little cottage was close and stuffy after leaving the outer air. But she did not mind; there appeared to be a hundred different things demanding her attention indoors. She began to set the toilet-stand to rights, grumbling at the negligence of the quadroon, who was in the adjoining room putting the children to bed. She gathered together stray garments that were hanging on the backs of chairs, and put each where it belonged in closet or bureau drawer. She

changed her gown for a more comfortable and commodious wrapper. She rearranged her hair, combing and brushing it with unusual energy. Then she went in and assisted the quadroon in getting the boys to bed.

[15.28] They were very playful and inclined to talk--to do anything but lie quiet and go to sleep. Edna sent the quadroon away to her supper and told her she need not return. Then she sat and told the children a story. Instead of soothing it excited them, and added to their wakefulness. She left them in heated argument, speculating about the conclusion of the tale which their mother promised to finish the following night.

[15.29] The little black girl came in to say that Madame Lebrun would like to have Mrs. Pontellier go and sit with them over at the house till Mr. Robert went away. Edna returned answer that she had already undressed, that she did not feel quite well, but perhaps she would go over to the house later. She started to dress again, and got as far advanced as to remove her *peignoir*. But changing her mind once more she resumed the *peignoir*, and went outside and sat down before her door. She was overheated and irritable, and fanned herself energetically for a while. Madame Ratignolle came down to discover what was the matter.

[15.30] "All that noise and confusion at the table must have upset me," replied Edna, "and moreover, I hate shocks and surprises. The idea of Robert starting off in

such a ridiculously sudden and dramatic way! As if it were a matter of life and death! Never saying a word about it all morning when he was with me."

[15.31] "Yes," agreed Madame Ratignolle. "I think it was showing us all--you especially--very little consideration. It wouldn't have surprised me in any of the others; those Lebruns are all given to heroics. But I must say I should never have expected such a thing from Robert. Are you not coming down? Come on, dear; it doesn't look friendly."

[15.32] "No," said Edna, a little sullenly. "I can't go to the trouble of dressing again; I don't feel like it."

[15.33] "You needn't dress; you look all right; fasten a belt around your waist. Just look at me!"

[15.34] "No," persisted Edna; "but you go on. Madame Lebrun might be offended if we both stayed away."

[15.35] Madame Ratignolle kissed Edna good-night, and went away, being in truth rather desirous of joining in the general and animated conversation which was still in progress concerning Mexico and the Mexicans.

[15.36] Somewhat later Robert came up, carrying his hand-bag.

[15.37] "Aren't you feeling well?" he asked.

[15.38] "Oh, well enough. Are you going right away?"

[15.39] He lit a match and looked at his watch. "In twenty minutes," he said. The sudden and brief flare of the

match emphasized the darkness for a while. He sat down upon a stool which the children had left out on the porch.

[15.40] "Get a chair," said Edna.

[15.41] "This will do," he replied. He put on his soft hat and nervously took it off again, and wiping his face with his handkerchief, complained of the heat.

[15.42] "Take the fan," said Edna, offering it to him.

[15.43] "Oh, no! Thank you. It does no good; you have to stop fanning some time, and feel all the more uncomfortable afterward."

[15.44] "That's one of the ridiculous things which men always say. I have never known one to speak otherwise of fanning. How long will you be gone?"

[15.45] "Forever, perhaps. I don't know. It depends upon a good many things."

[15.46] "Well, in case it shouldn't be forever, how long will it be?"

[15.47] "I don't know."

[15.48] "This seems to me perfectly preposterous and uncalled for. I don't like it. I don't understand your motive for silence and mystery, never saying a word to me about it this morning." He remained silent, not offering to defend himself. He only said, after a moment:

[15.49] "Don't part from me in any ill humor. I never knew you to be out of patience with me before."

[15.50] "I don't want to part in any ill humor," she said. "But can't you understand? I've grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your action seems unfriendly, even unkind. You don't even offer an excuse for it. Why, I was planning to be together, thinking of how pleasant it would be to see you in the city next winter."

[15.51] "So was I," he blurted. "Perhaps that's the--" He stood up suddenly and held out his hand. "Good-by, my dear Mrs. Pontellier; good-by. You won't--I hope you won't completely forget me." She clung to his hand, striving to detain him.

[15.52] "Write to me when you get there, won't you, Robert?" she entreated.

[15.53] "I will, thank you. Good-by."

[15.54] How unlike Robert! The merest acquaintance would have said something more emphatic than "I will, thank you; good-by," to such a request.

[15.55] He had evidently already taken leave of the people over at the house, for he descended the steps and went to join Beaudet, who was out there with an oar across his shoulder waiting for Robert. They walked away in the darkness. She could only hear Beaudet's voice; Robert had apparently not even spoken a word of greeting to his companion.

[15.56] Edna bit her handkerchief convulsively,

striving to hold back and to hide, even from herself as she would have hidden from another, the emotion which was troubling--tearing--her. Her eyes were brimming with tears.

[15.57] For the first time she recognized the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as a young woman. The recognition did not lessen the reality, the poignancy of the revelation by any suggestion or promise of instability. The past was nothing to her; offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 15:

[15.7, 16.8] (Barrish 2000): Robert's trip to Mexico serves to alter his image from boyish innocent to adult male in the eyes of Edna, Mrs. LeBrun, and especially Léonce (70).

[15.12] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Vera Cruz, the place to which Robert departs, was, during the time of *The Awakening*'s writing, heavily populated with bisexual men. Chopin would probably have been aware of this fact (192).

[15.12] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): The relationship Robert shares with this man is never completely defined, leaving it open to suspicion (192).

[15.18] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): The last scene in which the lovers and the lady in black appear is during the dinner at which Robert reveals his plans to go to Mexico, severing any potential for a long term relationship with Edna. As communication between Robert and Edna will soon come to a close, the lovers' voices turn to quiet whispers inaudible to the others at the table (90-91).

[15.18] (Disheroon-Green 2002b): Upon Robert's announcing his imminent departure for Mexico, the lady in black becomes vocal for the first time, as if realizing that now that he is parting from Edna and their potentially illicit relationship, there is now an opportunity to pull him back into the ranks of the faithful, the moral. He does not answer the lady and she and the lovers no longer appear in the novel (91).

[15.19, 15.35] (Barrish 2000): In what are possibly the most openly racist remarks in *The Awakening*, the narrative voice suddenly becomes indirect as if to differentiate the ideas of Madame Ratignolle from those of the novel's narrator, thus serving two purposes:

to keep with the realist genre, and further to juxtapose Edna's enlightened universal femininity with Madame Ratignolle's traditional femininity, which expresses itself as ignorance and racial bias (73).

[15.45] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert informs Edna of his sudden departure in a cold manner, in spite of her apprehension (192).

[15.49] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Edna's emotions become obvious as she questions Robert (192).

[15.51] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert leaves abruptly, in spite of Edna's show of emotion (192).

[15.57, 16.22-16.24] (Barrish 2000): Shortly after Robert leaves Grand Isle for Mexico, Mademoiselle Reisz tells Edna about the fight between Robert and Victor concerning Mariequita. Robert's association with this highly sexualized woman changes Edna's and the reader's perspective on him – he becomes an aggressive, sexual man toward whom her awakening desire is fitting (68).

CHAPTER 16

[16.1] "Do you miss your friend greatly?" asked Mademoiselle Reisz one morning as she came creeping up behind Edna, who had just left her cottage on her way to the beach. She spent much of her time in the water since she had acquired finally the art of swimming. As their stay at Grand Isle drew near its close, she felt that she could not give too much time to a diversion which afforded her the only real pleasurable moments that she knew. When Mademoiselle Reisz came and touched her upon the shoulder and spoke to her, the woman seemed to echo the thought which was ever in Edna's mind; or, better, the feeling which constantly possessed her.

[16.2] Robert's going had some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything. The conditions of her life were in no way changed, but her whole existence was dulled, like a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing. She sought him everywhere--in others whom she induced to talk about him. She went up in the mornings to Madame Lebrun's room, braving the clatter of the old sewing-machine. She sat there and chatted at intervals as Robert had done. She gazed around the room at the pictures and photographs hanging upon the wall, and discovered in some corner an old family album, which she

examined with the keenest interest, appealing to Madame Lebrun for enlightenment concerning the many figures and faces which she discovered between its pages.

[16.3] There was a picture of Madame Lebrun with Robert as a baby, seated in her lap, a round-faced infant with a fist in his mouth. The eyes alone in the baby suggested the man. And that was he also in kilts, at the age of five, wearing long curls and holding a whip in his hand. It made Edna laugh, and she laughed, too, at the portrait in his first long trousers; while another interested her, taken when he left for college, looking thin, long-faced, with eyes full of fire, ambition and great intentions. But there was no recent picture, none which suggested the Robert who had gone away five days ago, leaving a void and wilderness behind him.

[16.4] "Oh, Robert stopped having his pictures taken when he had to pay for them himself! He found wiser use for his money, he says," explained Madame Lebrun. She had a letter from him, written before he left New Orleans. Edna wished to see the letter, and Madame Lebrun told her to look for it either on the table or the dresser, or perhaps it was on the mantelpiece.

[16.5] The letter was on the bookshelf. It possessed the greatest interest and attraction for Edna; the envelope, its size and shape, the post-mark, the handwriting. She examined every detail of the outside before opening it.

There were only a few lines, setting forth that he would leave the city that afternoon, that he had packed his trunk in good shape, that he was well, and sent her his love and begged to be affectionately remembered to all. There was no special message to Edna except a postscript saying that if Mrs. Pontellier desired to finish the book which he had been reading to her, his mother would find it in his room, among other books there on the table. Edna experienced a pang of jealousy because he had written to his mother rather than to her.

[16.6] Every one seemed to take for granted that she missed him. Even her husband, when he came down the Saturday following Robert's departure, expressed regret that he had gone.

[16.7] "How do you get on without him, Edna?" he asked.

[16.8] "It's very dull without him," she admitted. Mr. Pontellier had seen Robert in the city, and Edna asked him a dozen questions or more. Where had they met? On Carondelet Street, in the morning. They had gone "in" and had a drink and a cigar together. What had they talked about? Chiefly about his prospects in Mexico, which Mr. Pontellier thought were promising. How did he look? How did he seem--grave, or gay, or how? Quite cheerful, and wholly taken up with the idea of his trip, which Mr. Pontellier found altogether natural in a young fellow about

to seek fortune and adventure in a strange, queer country.

[16.9] Edna tapped her foot impatiently, and wondered why the children persisted in playing in the sun when they might be under the trees. She went down and led them out of the sun, scolding the quadron for not being more attentive.

[16.10] It did not strike her as in the least grotesque that she should be making of Robert the object of conversation and leading her husband to speak of him. The sentiment which she entertained for Robert in no way resembled that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel. She had all her life long been accustomed to harbor thoughts and emotions which never voiced themselves. They had never taken the form of struggles. They belonged to her and were her own, and she entertained the conviction that she had a right to them and that they concerned no one but herself. Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children, or for any one. Then had followed a rather heated argument; the two women did not appear to understand each other or to be talking the same language. Edna tried to appease her friend, to explain.

[16.11] "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."

[16.12] "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."

[16.13] "Oh, yes you could!" laughed Edna.

[16.14] She was not surprised at Mademoiselle Reisz's question the morning that lady, following her to the beach, tapped her on the shoulder and asked if she did not greatly miss her young friend.

[16.15] "Oh, good morning, Mademoiselle; is it you? why, of course I miss Robert. Are you going down to bathe?"

[16.16] "why should I go down to bathe at the very end of the season when I haven't been in the surf all summer," replied the woman, disagreeably.

[16.17] "I beg your pardon," offered Edna, in some embarrassment, for she should have remembered that Mademoiselle Reisz's avoidance of the water had furnished a theme for much pleasantry. Some among them thought it was on account of her false hair, or the dread of getting the violets wet, while others attributed it to the natural aversion for water sometimes believed to accompany the artistic temperament. Mademoiselle offered Edna some chocolates in a paper bag, which she took from her pocket, by way of showing that she bore no ill feeling. She habitually ate chocolates for their sustaining quality; they

contained much nutriment in small compass, she said. They saved her from starvation, as Madame Lebrun's table was utterly impossible; and no one save so impertinent a woman as Madame Lebrun could think of offering such food to people and requiring them to pay for it.

[16.18] "She must feel very lonely without her son," said Edna, desiring to change the subject. "Her favorite son, too. It must have been quite hard to let him go."

[16.19] Mademoiselle laughed maliciously.

[16.20] "Her favorite son! Oh, dear! who could have been imposing such a tale upon you? Aline Lebrun lives for Victor, and for Victor alone. She has spoiled him into the worthless creature he is. She worships him and the ground he walks on. Robert is very well in a way, to give up all the money he can earn to the family, and keep the barest pittance for himself. Favorite son, indeed! I miss the poor fellow myself, my dear. I liked to see him and to hear him about the place the only Lebrun who is worth a pinch of salt. He comes to see me often in the city. I like to play to him. That Victor! hanging would be too good for him. It's a wonder Robert hasn't beaten him to death long ago."

[16.21] "I thought he had great patience with his brother," offered Edna, glad to be talking about Robert, no matter what was said.

[16.22] "Oh! he thrashed him well enough a year or two ago," said Mademoiselle. "It was about a Spanish girl,

whom Victor considered that he had some sort of claim upon.

He met Robert one day talking to the girl, or walking with her, or bathing with her, or carrying her basket--I don't remember what;--and he became so insulting and abusive that Robert gave him a thrashing on the spot that has kept him comparatively in order for a good while. It's about time he was getting another."

[16.23] "Was her name Mariequita?" asked Edna.

[16.24] "Mariequita--yes, that was it; Mariequita. I had forgotten. Oh, she's a sly one, and a bad one, that Mariequita!"

[16.25] Edna looked down at Mademoiselle Reisz and wondered how she could have listened to her venom so long. For some reason she felt depressed, almost unhappy. She had not intended to go into the water; but she donned her bathing suit, and left Mademoiselle alone, seated under the shade of the children's tent. The water was growing cooler as the season advanced. Edna plunged and swam about with an abandon that thrilled and invigorated her. She remained a long time in the water, half hoping that Mademoiselle Reisz would not wait for her.

[16.26] But Mademoiselle waited. She was very amiable during the walk back, and raved much over Edna's appearance in her bathing suit. She talked about music. She hoped that Edna would go to see her in the city, and wrote her address with the stub of a pencil on a piece of card

which she found in her pocket.

[16.27] "When do you leave?" asked Edna.

[16.28] "Next Monday; and you?"

[16.29] "The following week," answered Edna, adding, "It has been a pleasant summer, hasn't it, Mademoiselle?"

[16.30] "Well," agreed Mademoiselle Reisz, with a shrug, "rather pleasant, if it hadn't been for the mosquitoes and the Farival twins."

NOTES ON CHAPTER 16:

[15.7, 16.8] (Barrish 2000): Robert's trip to Mexico serves to alter his image from boyish innocent to adult male in the eyes of Edna, Mrs. LeBrun, and especially Leonce (70).

[16.8, 36.42] (Barrish 2000): While Robert's Mexican quest increases his sexual appeal to Edna it also places him among the ranks of Leonce Pontellier, to whom Edna is a possession. This shift closes the door to Robert sharing a long-term relationship with Edna, as he has now become a part of a system to which she will not adhere (70-71).

[16.11] (Rich 2003): Chopin's phrasing here resembles sentiments expressed by a critic about the feminist author George Egerton (132).

[16.11] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Edna's identity is not dependent upon her children and her devotion to them, as is Adèle's. By rejecting this expectation of women, Edna also rejects the patriarchal system which endorses it (277).

[4.3, 16.11] (Bunch 2001-2): Adèle's pleas only reinforce Edna's resolve to live outside the realms of marriage and motherhood (59).

[16.12] (Asbee 2001b): This image is used both to describe Edna's state of mind when Robert leaves Grand Isle for Mexico and also the state of Edna's bathing suit in the final scene of the novel (245).

[15.57, 16.22-16.24] (Barrish 2000): Shortly after Robert leaves Grand Isle for Mexico, Mademoiselle Reisz tells Edna about the fight between Robert and Victor concerning Mariequita. Robert's association with this highly sexualized woman changes Edna's and the reader's perspective on him – he becomes an aggressive, sexual man toward whom her awakening desire is fitting (68).

CHAPTER 17

[17.1] The Pontelliers possessed a very charming home on Esplanade Street in New Orleans. It was a large, double cottage, with a broad front veranda, whose round, fluted columns supported the sloping roof. The house was painted a dazzling white; the outside shutters, or jalousies, were green. In the yard, which was kept scrupulously neat, were flowers and plants of every description which flourishes in South Louisiana. Within doors the appointments were perfect after the conventional type. The softest carpets and rugs covered the floors; rich and tasteful draperies hung at doors and windows. There were paintings, selected with judgment and discrimination, upon the walls. The cut glass, the silver, the heavy damask which daily appeared upon the table were the envy of many women whose husbands were less generous than Mr. Pontellier.

[17.2] Mr. Pontellier was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details, to see that nothing was amiss. He greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain--no matter what--after he had bought it and placed it among his household gods.

[17.3] On Tuesday afternoons--Tuesday being Mrs.

Pontellier's reception day--there was a constant stream of callers--women who came in carriages or in the street cars, or walked when the air was soft and distance permitted. A light-colored mulatto boy, in dress coat and bearing a diminutive silver tray for the reception of cards, admitted them. A maid, in white fluted cap, offered the callers liqueur, coffee, or chocolate, as they might desire. Mrs. Pontellier, attired in a handsome reception gown, remained in the drawing-room the entire afternoon receiving her visitors. Men sometimes called in the evening with their wives.

[17.4] This had been the programme which Mrs. Pontellier had religiously followed since her marriage, six years before. Certain evenings during the week she and her husband attended the opera or sometimes the play.

[17.5] Mr. Pontellier left his home in the mornings between nine and ten o'clock, and rarely returned before half-past six or seven in the evening--dinner being served at half-past seven.

[17.6] He and his wife seated themselves at table one Tuesday evening, a few weeks after their return from Grand Isle. They were alone together. The boys were being put to bed; the patter of their bare, escaping feet could be heard occasionally, as well as the pursuing voice of the quadron, lifted in mild protest and entreaty. Mrs. Pontellier did not wear her usual Tuesday reception gown; she was in

ordinary house dress. Mr. Pontellier, who was observant about such things, noticed it, as he served the soup and handed it to the boy in waiting.

[17.7] "Tired out, Edna? Whom did you have? Many callers?" he asked. He tasted his soup and began to season it with pepper, salt, vinegar, mustard--everything within reach.

[17.88] "There were a good many," replied Edna, who was eating her soup with evident satisfaction. "I found their cards when I got home; I was out."

[17.9] "Out!" exclaimed her husband, with something like genuine consternation in his voice as he laid down the vinegar cruet and looked at her through his glasses. "why, what could have taken you out on Tuesday? What did you have to do?"

[17.10] "Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out."

[17.11] "Well, I hope you left some suitable excuse," said her husband, somewhat appeased, as he added a dash of cayenne pepper to the soup.

[17.12] "No, I left no excuse. I told Joe to say I was out, that was all."

[17.13] "why, my dear, I should think you'd understand by this time that people don't do such things; we've got to observe *Tes convenances* if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession. If you felt that

you had to leave home this afternoon, you should have left some suitable explanation for your absence.

[17.14] "This soup is really impossible; it's strange that woman hasn't learned yet to make a decent soup. Any free-lunch stand in town serves a better one. Was Mrs. Belthrop here?"

[17.15] "Bring the tray with the cards, Joe. I don't remember who was here."

[17.16] The boy retired and returned after a moment, bringing the tiny silver tray, which was covered with ladies' visiting cards. He handed it to Mrs. Pontellier.

[17.17] "Give it to Mr. Pontellier," she said.

[17.18] Joe offered the tray to Mr. Pontellier, and removed the soup.

[17.19] Mr. Pontellier scanned the names of his wife's callers, reading some of them aloud, with comments as he read.

[17.20] "'The Misses Delasidas.' I worked a big deal in futures for their father this morning; nice girls; it's time they were getting married. 'Mrs. Belthrop.' I tell you what it is, Edna; you can't afford to snub Mrs. Belthrop. Why, Belthrop could buy and sell us ten times over. His business is worth a good, round sum to me. You'd better write her a note. 'Mrs. James Highcamp.' Hugh! the less you have to do with Mrs. Highcamp, the better. 'Madame Laforcé.' Came all the way from Carrolton, too, poor old

soul. 'Miss Wiggs,' 'Mrs. Eleanor Boltons.'" He pushed the cards aside.

[17.21] "Mercy!" exclaimed Edna, who had been fuming. "Why are you taking the thing so seriously and making such a fuss over it?"

[17.22] "I'm not making any fuss over it. But it's just such seeming trifles that we've got to take seriously; such things count."

[17.23] The fish was scorched. Mr. Pontellier would not touch it. Edna said she did not mind a little scorched taste. The roast was in some way not to his fancy, and he did not like the manner in which the vegetables were served.

[17.24] "It seems to me," he said, "we spend money enough in this house to procure at least one meal a day which a man could eat and retain his self-respect."

[17.25] "You used to think the cook was a treasure," returned Edna, indifferently.

[17.26] "Perhaps she was when she first came; but cooks are only human. They need looking after, like any other class of persons that you employ. Suppose I didn't look after the clerks in my office, just let them run things their own way; they'd soon make a nice mess of me and my business."

[17.27] "Where are you going?" asked Edna, seeing that her husband arose from table without having eaten a morsel except a taste of the highly-seasoned soup.

[17.28] "I'm going to get my dinner at the club. Good night." He went into the hall, took his hat and stick from the stand, and left the house.

[17.29] She was somewhat familiar with such scenes. They had often made her very unhappy. On a few previous occasions she had been completely deprived of any desire to finish her dinner. Sometimes she had gone into the kitchen to administer a tardy rebuke to the cook. Once she went to her room and studied the cookbook during an entire evening, finally writing out a menu for the week, which left her harassed with a feeling that, after all, she had accomplished no good that was worth the name.

[17.30] But that evening Edna finished her dinner alone, with forced deliberation. Her face was flushed and her eyes flamed with some inward fire that lighted them. After finishing her dinner she went to her room, having instructed the boy to tell any other callers that she was indisposed.

[17.31] It was a large, beautiful room, rich and picturesque in the soft, dim light which the maid had turned low. She went and stood at an open window and looked out upon the deep tangle of the garden below. All the mystery and witchery of the night seemed to have gathered there amid the perfumes and the dusky and tortuous outlines of flowers and foliage. She was seeking herself and finding herself in just such sweet, half-darkness which met her moods. But the

voices were not soothing that came to her from the darkness and the sky above and the stars. They jeered and sounded mournful notes without promise, devoid even of hope. She turned back into the room and began to walk to and fro down its whole length, without stopping, without resting. She carried in her hands a thin handkerchief, which she tore into ribbons, rolled into a ball, and flung from her. 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. But her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circlet.

[17.32] In a sweeping passion she seized a glass vase from the table and flung it upon the tiles of the hearth. She wanted to destroy something. The crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear.

[17.33] A maid, alarmed at the din of breaking glass, entered the room to discover what was the matter.

[17.34] "A vase fell upon the hearth," said Edna. "Never mind; leave it till morning."

[17.35] "Oh! you might get some of the glass in your feet, ma'am," insisted the young woman, picking up bits of the broken vase that were scattered upon the carpet. "And here's your ring, ma'am, under the chair."

[17.36] Edna held out her hand, and taking the ring, slipped it upon her finger.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 17:

[17.1] (Barrish 2000): (67).

[17.2] (Bunch 2001-2): Although the appearance of wealth in himself and others is important to Léonce, he shows at an early age the physical signs of such intense focus: his posture is bent and he must use glasses (50).

[17.29, 17.30] (Asbee 2001a): Food represents the Pontelliers' unfulfilling sexual relationship (280).

[17.29-17.30] (McGee 2000): With Léonce, Edna's roles in society (as his wife) and at home (as supervisor of meals and mother) are interwoven. When she fails as his social representative, he grumbles about dinner (48).

[17.31] (Bunch 2001-2): As much as Edna tries to recapture the sensuality she awakened while with Robert, she realizes that in Léonce's house she will be nothing more than another one of his possessions (55).

[17.31 – 17.32] (Bunch 2001-2): Once Edna returns to New Orleans, she tries to fulfill her obligations as Léonce's wife. Longing to revive the sensual awakening she experienced on Grand Isle with Robert, Edna physically arouses herself then smashes all

physical representations of her emotional bondage (55).

[17.32] (Bunch 2001-2): When stomping on her wedding ring, the ultimate symbol of her emotional enslavement, does not satisfy Edna, the noise of breaking a vase does (55).

CHAPTER 18

[18.1] The following morning Mr. Pontellier, upon leaving for his office, asked Edna if she would not meet him in town in order to look at some new fixtures for the library.

[18.2] "I hardly think we need new fixtures, Léonce. Don't let us get anything new; you are too extravagant. I don't believe you ever think of saving or putting by."

[18.3] "The way to become rich is to make money, my dear Edna, not to save it," he said. He regretted that she did not feel inclined to go with him and select new fixtures. He kissed her good-by, and told her she was not looking well and must take care of herself. She was unusually pale and very quiet.

[18.4] She stood on the front veranda as he quitted the house, and absently picked a few sprays of jessamine that grew upon a trellis near by. She inhaled the odor of the blossoms and thrust them into the bosom of her white

morning gown. The boys were dragging along the banquette a small "express wagon," which they had filled with blocks and sticks. The quadron was following them with little quick steps, having assumed a fictitious animation and alacrity for the occasion. A fruit vender was crying his wares in the street.

[18.5] Edna looked straight before her with a self-absorbed expression upon her face. She felt no interest in anything about her. The street, the children, the fruit vender, the flowers growing there under her eyes, were all part and parcel of an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic.

[18.6] She went back into the house. She had thought of speaking to the cook concerning her blunders of the previous night; but Mr. Pontellier had saved her that disagreeable mission, for which she was so poorly fitted. Mr. Pontellier's arguments were usually convincing with those whom he employed. He left home feeling quite sure that he and Edna would sit down that evening, and possibly a few subsequent evenings, to a dinner deserving of the name.

[18.7] Edna spent an hour or two in looking over some of her old sketches. She could see their shortcomings and defects, which were glaring in her eyes. She tried to work a little, but found she was not in the humor. Finally she gathered together a few of the sketches--those which she considered the least discreditable; and she carried them

with her when, a little later, she dressed and left the house. She looked handsome and distinguished in her street gown. The tan of the seashore had left her face, and her forehead was smooth, white, and polished beneath her heavy, yellow-brown hair. There were a few freckles on her face, and a small, dark mole near the under lip and one on the temple, half-hidden in her hair.

[18.8] As Edna walked along the street she was thinking of Robert. She was still under the spell of her infatuation. She had tried to forget him, realizing the inutility of remembering. But the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her. It was not that she dwelt upon details of their acquaintance, or recalled in any special or peculiar way his personality; it was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought, fading sometimes as if it would melt into the mist of the forgotten, reviving again with an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing.

[18.9] Edna was on her way to Madame Ratignolle's. Their intimacy, begun at Grand Isle, had not declined, and they had seen each other with some frequency since their return to the city. The Ratignolles lived at no great distance from Edna's home, on the corner of a side street, where Monsieur Ratignolle owned and conducted a drug store which enjoyed a steady and prosperous trade. His father had been in the business before him, and Monsieur Ratignolle

stood well in the community and bore an enviable reputation for integrity and clearheadedness. His family lived in commodious apartments over the store, having an entrance on the side within the *porte cochère*. There was something which Edna thought very French, very foreign, about their whole manner of living. In the large and pleasant salon which extended across the width of the house, the Ratignolles entertained their friends once a fortnight with a *soirée musicale*, sometimes diversified by card-playing. There was a friend who played upon the 'cello. One brought his flute and another his violin, while there were some who sang and a number who performed upon the piano with various degrees of taste and agility. The Ratignolles' *soirées musicales* were widely known, and it was considered a privilege to be invited to them.

[18.10] Edna found her friend engaged in assorting the clothes which had returned that morning from the laundry. She at once abandoned her occupation upon seeing Edna, who had been ushered without ceremony into her presence.

[18.11] "'Cité can do it as well as I; it is really her business," she explained to Edna, who apologized for interrupting her. And she summoned a young black woman, whom she instructed, in French, to be very careful in checking off the list which she handed her. She told her to notice particularly if a fine linen handkerchief of Monsieur

Ratignolle's, which was missing last week, had been returned; and to be sure to set to one side such pieces as required mending and darning.

[18.12] Then placing an arm around Edna's waist, she led her to the front of the house, to the salon, where it was cool and sweet with the odor of great roses that stood upon the hearth in jars.

[18.13] Madame Ratignolle looked more beautiful than ever there at home, in a negligé which left her arms almost wholly bare and exposed the rich, melting curves of her white throat.

[18.14] "Perhaps I shall be able to paint your picture some day," said Edna with a smile when they were seated. She produced the roll of sketches and started to unfold them. "I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something. What do you think of them? Do you think it worth while to take it up again and study some more? I might study for a while with Laidpore."

[18.15] She knew that Madame Ratignolle's opinion in such a matter would be next to valueless, that she herself had not alone decided, but determined; but she sought the words of praise and encouragement that would help her to put heart into her venture.

[18.16] "Your talent is immense, dear!"

[18.17] "Nonsense!" protested Edna, well pleased.

[18.18] "Immense, I tell you," persisted Madame

Ratignolle, surveying the sketches one by one, at close range, then holding them at arm's length, narrowing her eyes, and dropping her head on one side. "Surely, this Bavarian peasant is worthy of framing; and this basket of apples! never have I seen anything more lifelike. One might almost be tempted to reach out a hand and take one."

[18.19] Edna could not control a feeling which bordered upon complacency at her friend's praise, even realizing, as she did, its true worth. She retained a few of the sketches, and gave all the rest to Madame Ratignolle, who appreciated the gift far beyond its value and proudly exhibited the pictures to her husband when he came up from the store a little later for his midday dinner.

[18.20] Mr. Ratignolle was one of those men who are called the salt of the earth. His cheerfulness was unbounded, and it was matched by his goodness of heart, his broad charity, and common sense. He and his wife spoke English with an accent which was only discernible through its un-English emphasis and a certain carefulness and deliberation. Edna's husband spoke English with no accent whatever. 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.

[18.21] As Edna seated herself at table with them she thought, "Better a dinner of herbs," though it did not take her long to discover that it was no dinner of herbs, but a

delicious repast, simple, choice, and in every way satisfying.

[18.22] Monsieur Ratignolle was delighted to see her, though he found her looking not so well as at Grand Isle, and he advised a tonic. He talked a good deal on various topics, a little politics, some city news and neighborhood gossip. He spoke with an animation and earnestness that gave an exaggerated importance to every syllable he uttered.

His wife was keenly interested in everything he said, laying down her fork the better to listen, chiming in, taking the words out of his mouth.

[18.23] Edna felt depressed rather than soothed after leaving them. The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She 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. Edna vaguely wondered what she meant by "life's delirium." It had crossed her thought like some unsought, extraneous impression.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 18:

[18.5] (Lippincott 2000): As with a literal pregnancy, Edna begins to feel unfamiliarity with her own body and immediate environment (62).

[18.21] (McGee 2000): Dinner with Adèle Ratignolle's family, though pleasant, is upsetting to Edna, possibly because (as one critic has suggested) Adèle seems so subservient to her husband as they all eat (48).

[18.23] (McGee 2000): (48).

[18.23] (Lippincott 2000): Edna experiences sudden elucidations of the mundane nature of life, representing the longing of her unrealized self to be born (61).

CHAPTER 19

[19.1] Edna could not help but think that it was very foolish, very childish, to have stamped upon her wedding ring and smashed the crystal vase upon the tiles. She was visited by no more outbursts, moving her to such futile expedients. She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and

did not return the visits of those who had called upon her. She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household *en bonne ménagère*, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice.

[19.2] Mr. Pontellier had been a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward.

[19.3] "It seems to me 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."

[19.4] "I feel like painting," answered Edna. "Perhaps I shan't always feel like it."

[19.5] "Then in God's name paint! but don't let the family go to the devil. There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter."

[19.6] "She isn't a musician, and I'm not a painter. It isn't on account of painting that I let things go."

[19.7] "On account of what, then?"

[19.8] "Oh! I don't know. Let me alone; you bother me."

[19.9] It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. 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.

[19.10] Her husband let her alone as she requested, and went away to his office. Edna went up to her atelier--a bright room in the top of the house. She was working with great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything, however, which satisfied her even in the smallest degree. For a time she had the whole household enrolled in the service of art. The boys posed for her. They thought it amusing at first, but the occupation soon lost its attractiveness when they discovered that it was not a game arranged especially for their entertainment. The quadron sat for hours before Edna's palette, patient as a savage, while the house-maid took charge of the children, and the drawing-room went undusted. But the housemaid, too, served her term as model when Edna perceived that the young woman's back and shoulders were molded on classic lines, and that her hair, loosened from its confining cap, became an inspiration. While Edna worked she sometimes sang low the little air, "*Ah! si tu savais!*"

[19.11] It moved her with recollections. She could hear again the ripple of the water, the flapping sail. She could see the glint of the moon upon the bay, and could feel the soft, gusty beating of the hot south wind. A subtle current of desire passed through her body, weakening her hold upon the brushes and making her eyes burn.

[19.12] There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. 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. She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places. She discovered many a sunny, sleepy corner, fashioned to dream in. And she found it good to dream and to be alone and unmolested.

[19.13] 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. She could not work on such a day, nor weave fancies to stir her pulses and warm her blood.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 19:

[19.1] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Tension develops between Léonce and Edna as he interprets her behavior as failure in her social duties (277).

[19.2] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): (278).

[19.2] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Léonce Pontellier can only understand Edna's inattention to home and family as being a result of feminine hysteria (278).

[19.3] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Edna's decision to return to painting and take instruction in the discipline further confuses Leonce (277).

[19.5] (McGee 2000): Although it is not uncommon for women to pursue artistic endeavors, Edna replaces meeting her social obligations with her painting (49).

[19.9] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): (277).

[19.11] (Asbee 2001b): The word "current" here suggests both the ocean and electricity (264).

[19.12] (Lippincott 2000): During the second trimester of Edna's metaphorical pregnancy, recorded in Chapter 20, dreams become frequent and vivid (60-61).

[19.12] (Asbee 2001b): Edna experiences joy in the sensual aspects of nature, including

seeing/hearing/feeling the ocean, experiencing moonlight, and basking in the summer breeze (264).

[19.11-19.13] (Asbee 2001b): Music spurs Edna's memories and causes her to realize the animal nature that prompts the continuation of life (264).

[19.9] (Lippincott 2000): Léonce does not recognize the positive change Edna is undergoing as everyone else does, but simply notes that she has changed (62).

CHAPTER 20

[20.1] It was during such a mood that Edna hunted up Mademoiselle Reisz. She had not forgotten the rather disagreeable impression left upon her by their last interview; but she nevertheless felt a desire to see her--above all, to listen while she played upon the piano. Quite early in the afternoon she started upon her quest for the pianist. Unfortunately she had mislaid or lost Mademoiselle Reisz's card, and looking up her address in the city directory, she found that the woman lived on Bienville Street, some distance away. The directory which fell into her hands was a year or more old, however, and upon reaching the number indicated, Edna discovered that the house was

occupied by a respectable family of mulattoes who had *chambres garnies* to let. They had been living there for six months, and knew absolutely nothing of a Mademoiselle Reisz.

In fact, they knew nothing of any of their neighbors; their lodgers were all people of the highest distinction, they assured Edna. She did not linger to discuss class distinctions with Madame Pouponne, but hastened to a neighboring grocery store, feeling sure that Mademoiselle would have left her address with the proprietor.

[20.2] He knew Mademoiselle Reisz a good deal better than he wanted to know her, he informed his questioner. In truth, he did not want to know her at all, or anything concerning her--the most disagreeable and unpopular woman who ever lived in Bienville Street. He thanked heaven she had left the neighborhood, and was equally thankful that he did not know where she had gone.

[20.3] Edna's desire to see Mademoiselle Reisz had increased tenfold since these unlooked-for obstacles had arisen to thwart it. She was wondering who could give her the information she sought, when it suddenly occurred to her that Madame Lebrun would be the one most likely to do so. She knew it was useless to ask Madame Ratignolle, who was on the most distant terms with the musician, and preferred to know nothing concerning her. She had once been almost as emphatic in expressing herself upon the subject as the corner grocer.

[20.4] Edna knew that Madame Lebrun had returned to the city, for it was the middle of November. And she also knew where the Lebruns lived, on Chartres Street.

[20.5] Their home from the outside looked like a prison, with iron bars before the door and lower windows. The iron bars were a relic of the old *régime*, and no one had ever thought of dislodging them. At the side was a high fence enclosing the garden. A gate or door opening upon the street was locked. Edna rang the bell at this side garden gate, and stood upon the banquette, waiting to be admitted.

[20.6] It was Victor who opened the gate for her. A black woman, wiping her hands upon her apron, was close at his heels. Before she saw them Edna could hear them in altercation, the woman--plainly an anomaly--claiming the right to be allowed to perform her duties, one of which was to answer the bell.

[20.7] Victor was surprised and delighted to see Mrs. Pontellier, and he made no attempt to conceal either his astonishment or his delight. He was a dark-browed, good-looking youngster of nineteen, greatly resembling his mother, but with ten times her impetuosity. He instructed the black woman to go at once and inform Madame Lebrun that Mrs. Pontellier desired to see her. The woman grumbled a refusal to do part of her duty when she had not been permitted to do it all, and started back to her interrupted task of weeding the garden. Whereupon Victor administered a

rebuke in the form of a volley of abuse, which, owing to its rapidity and incoherence, was all but incomprehensible to Edna. Whatever it was, the rebuke was convincing, for the woman dropped her hoe and went mumbling into the house.

[20.8] Edna did not wish to enter. It was very pleasant there on the side porch, where there were chairs, a wicker lounge, and a small table. She seated herself, for she was tired from her long tramp; and she began to rock gently and smooth out the folds of her silk parasol. Victor drew up his chair beside her. He at once explained that the black woman's offensive conduct was all due to imperfect training, as he was not there to take her in hand. He had only come up from the island the morning before, and expected to return next day. He stayed all winter at the island; he lived there, and kept the place in order and got things ready for the summer visitors.

[20.9] But a man needed occasional relaxation, he informed Mrs. Pontellier, and every now and again he drummed up a pretext to bring him to the city. My! but he had had a time of it the evening before! He wouldn't want his mother to know, and he began to talk in a whisper. He was scintillant with recollections. Of course, he couldn't think of telling Mrs. Pontellier all about it, she being a woman and not comprehending such things. But it all began with a girl peeping and smiling at him through the shutters as he passed by. Oh! but she was a beauty! Certainly he

smiled back, and went up and talked to her. Mrs. Pontellier did not know him if she supposed he was one to let an opportunity like that escape him. Despite herself, the youngster amused her. She must have betrayed in her look some degree of interest or entertainment. The boy grew more daring, and Mrs. Pontellier might have found herself, in a little while, listening to a highly colored story but for the timely appearance of Madame Lebrun.

[20.10] That lady was still clad in white, according to her custom of the summer. Her eyes beamed an effusive welcome. Would not Mrs. Pontellier go inside? Would she partake of some refreshment? Why had she not been there before? How was that dear Mr. Pontellier and how were those sweet children? Had Mrs. Pontellier ever known such a warm November?

[20.11] Victor went and reclined on the wicker lounge behind his mother's chair, where he commanded a view of Edna's face. He had taken her parasol from her hands while he spoke to her, and he now lifted it and twirled it above him as he lay on his back. When Madame Lebrun complained that it was so dull coming back to the city; that she saw so few people now; that even Victor, when he came up from the island for a day or two, had so much to occupy him and engage his time; then it was that the youth went into contortions on the lounge and winked mischievously at Edna. She somehow felt like a confederate in crime, and tried to

look severe and disapproving.

[20.12] There had been but two letters from Robert, with little in them, they told her. Victor said it was really not worth while to go inside for the letters, when his mother entreated him to go in search of them. He remembered the contents, which in truth he rattled off very glibly when put to the test.

[20.13] One letter was written from Vera Cruz and the other from the City of Mexico. He had met Montel, who was doing everything toward his advancement. So far, the financial situation was no improvement over the one he had left in New Orleans, but of course the prospects were vastly better. He wrote of the City of Mexico, the buildings, the people and their habits, the conditions of life which he found there. He sent his love to the family. He inclosed a check to his mother, and hoped she would affectionately remember him to all his friends. That was about the substance of the two letters. Edna felt that if there had been a message for her, she would have received it. The despondent frame of mind in which she had left home began again to overtake her, and she remembered that she wished to find Mademoiselle Reisz.

[20.14] Madame Lebrun knew where Mademoiselle Reisz lived. She gave Edna the address, regretting that she would not consent to stay and spend the remainder of the afternoon, and pay a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz some other

day. The afternoon was already well advanced.

[20.15] Victor escorted her out upon the banquette, lifted her parasol, and held it over her while he walked to the car with her. He entreated her to bear in mind that the disclosures of the afternoon were strictly confidential. She laughed and bantered him a little, remembering too late that she should have been dignified and reserved.

[20.16] "How handsome Mrs. Pontellier looked!" said Madame Lebrun to her son.

[20.17] "Ravishing!" he admitted. "The city atmosphere has improved her. Some way she doesn't seem like the same woman."

NOTES ON CHAPTER 20:

[20.5] (Asbee 2001b): The iron bars on the doors and windows of the Lebruns' New Orleans home serve as a symbol of past domination of Louisiana by Spain. The bars, however, may also symbolize domination in a broader and deeper sense (247).

[20.17, 21.5, 23.13] (Lippincott 2000): The positive change in Edna's outer appearance as a result of her metaphoric pregnancy is apparent to all (61).

CHAPTER 21

[21.1] Some people contended that the reason Mademoiselle Reisz always chose apartments up under the roof was to discourage the approach of beggars, peddlars and callers. There were plenty of windows in her little front room. They were for the most part dingy, but as they were nearly always open it did not make so much difference. They often admitted into the room a good deal of smoke and soot; but at the same time all the light and air that there was came through them. From her windows could be seen the crescent of the river, the masts of ships and the big chimneys of the Mississippi steamers. A magnificent piano crowded the apartment. In the next room she slept, and in the third and last she harbored a gasoline stove on which she cooked her meals when disinclined to descend to the neighboring restaurant. It was there also that she ate, keeping her belongings in a rare old buffet, dingy and battered from a hundred years of use.

[21.2] When Edna knocked at Mademoiselle Reisz's front room door and entered, she discovered that person standing beside the window, engaged in mending or patching an old prunella gaiter. The little musician laughed all over when she saw Edna. Her laugh consisted of a contortion of the face and all the muscles of the body. She seemed strikingly homely, standing there in the afternoon light.

She still wore the shabby lace and the artificial bunch of violets on the side of her head.

[21.3] "So you remembered me at last," said Mademoiselle. "I had said to myself, 'Ah, bah! she will never come.'"

[21.4] "Did you want me to come?" asked Edna with a smile.

[21.5] "I had not thought much about it," answered Mademoiselle. The two had seated themselves on a little bumpy sofa which stood against the wall. "I am glad, however, that you came. I have the water boiling back there, and was just about to make some coffee. You will drink a cup with me. And how is *la belle dame*? Always handsome! always healthy! always contented!" She took Edna's hand between her strong wiry fingers, holding it loosely without warmth, and executing a sort of double theme upon the back and palm.

[21.6] "Yes," she went on; "I sometimes thought: 'She will never come. She promised as those women in society always do, without meaning it. She will not come.' For I really don't believe you like me, Mrs. Pontellier."

[21.7] "I don't know whether I like you or not," replied Edna, gazing down at the little woman with a quizzical look.

[21.8] The candor of Mrs. Pontellier's admission greatly pleased Mademoiselle Reisz. She expressed her

gratification by repairing forthwith to the region of the gasoline stove and rewarding her guest with the promised cup of coffee. The coffee and the biscuit accompanying it proved very acceptable to Edna, who had declined refreshment at Madame Lebrun's and was now beginning to feel hungry. Mademoiselle set the tray which she brought in upon a small table near at hand, and seated herself once again on the lumpy sofa.

[21.9] "I have had a letter from your friend," she remarked, as she poured a little cream into Edna's cup and handed it to her.

[21.10] "My friend?"

[21.11] "Yes, your friend Robert. He wrote to me from the City of Mexico."

[21.12] "Wrote to *you*?" repeated Edna in amazement, stirring her coffee absently.

[21.13] "Yes, to me. Why not? Don't stir all the warmth out of your coffee; drink it. Though the letter might as well have been sent to you; it was nothing but Mrs. Pontellier from beginning to end."

[21.14] "Let me see it," requested the young woman, entreatingly.

[21.15] "No; a letter concerns no one but the person who writes it and the one to whom it is written."

[21.16] "Haven't you just said it concerned me from beginning to end?"

[21.17] "It was written about you, not to you. 'Have you seen Mrs. Pontellier? How is she looking?' he asks. 'As Mrs. Pontellier says,' or 'as Mrs. Pontellier once said.' 'If Mrs. Pontellier should call upon you, play for her that Impromptu of Chopin's, my favorite. I heard it here a day or two ago, but not as you play it. I should like to know how it affects her,' and so on, as if he supposed we were constantly in each other's society."

[21.18] "Let me see the letter."

[21.19] "Oh, no."

[21.20] "Have you answered it?"

[21.21] "No."

[21.22] "Let me see the letter."

[21.23] "No, and again, no."

[21.24] "Then play the Impromptu for me."

[21.25] "It is growing late; what time do you have to be home?"

[21.26] "Time doesn't concern me. Your question seems a little rude. Play the Impromptu."

[21.27] "But you have told me nothing of yourself. What are you doing?"

[21.28] "Painting!" laughed Edna. "I am becoming an artist. Think of it!"

[21.29] "Ah! an artist! You have pretensions, Madame."

[21.30] "Why pretensions? Do you think I could not

become an artist?"

[21.31] "I do not know you well enough to say. I do not know your talent or your temperament. 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."

[21.32] "What do you mean by the courageous soul?"

[21.33] "Courageous, *ma foi!* The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies."

[21.34] "Show me the letter and play for me the Impromptu. You see that I have persistence. Does that quality count for anything in art?"

[21.35] "It counts with a foolish old woman whom you have captivated," replied Mademoiselle, with her wriggling laugh.

[21.36] The letter was right there at hand in the drawer of the little table upon which Edna had just placed her coffee cup. Mademoiselle opened the drawer and drew forth the letter, the topmost one. She placed it in Edna's hands, and without further comment arose and went to the piano.

[21.37] Mademoiselle played a soft interlude. It was an improvisation. She sat low at the instrument, and the lines of her body settled into ungraceful curves and angles that gave it an appearance of deformity. Gradually and

imperceptibly the interlude melted into the soft opening minor chords of the Chopin Impromptu.

[21.38] Edna did not know when the Impromptu began or ended. She sat in the sofa corner reading Robert's letter by the fading light. Mademoiselle had glided from the Chopin into the quivering lovenotes of Isolde's song, and back again to the Impromptu with its soulful and poignant longing.

[21.39] The shadows deepened in the little room. The music grew strange and fantastic--turbulent, insistent, plaintive and soft with entreaty. The shadows grew deeper.

The music filled the room. It floated out upon the night, over the housetops, the crescent of the river, losing itself in the silence of the upper air.

[21.40] Edna was sobbing, just as she had wept one midnight at Grand Isle when strange, new voices awoke in her. She arose in some agitation to take her departure. "May I come again, Mademoiselle?" she asked at the threshold.

[21.41] "Come whenever you feel like it. Be careful; the stairs and landings are dark; don't stumble."

[21.42] Mademoiselle reentered and lit a candle. Robert's letter was on the floor. She stooped and picked it up. It was crumpled and damp with tears. Mademoiselle smoothed the letter out, restored it to the envelope, and replaced it in the table drawer.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 21:

[26.4, 21.1] (McGee 2000): Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment bears testament to the material humility that may come with pursuing one's independence (49).

[20.17, 21.5, 23.13] (Lippincott 2000): The positive change in Edna's outer appearance as a result of her metaphoric pregnancy is apparent to all (61).

[21.8] (Muirhead 2000): Mademoiselle Reisz utilizes uncharacteristically vague rhetoric, possibly in the hope that Edna will reconsider her place further (45).

[21.31] (McGee 2000): Mademoiselle Reisz's attitude about the artistic temperament is shared by Edna, and underlies their friendship (49).

CHAPTER 22

[22.1] One morning on his way into town Mr. Pontellier stopped at the house of his old friend and family physician, Doctor Mandelet. The Doctor was a semi-retired physician, resting, as the saying is, upon his laurels. He bore a reputation for wisdom rather than skill--leaving the active practice of medicine to his assistants and younger

contemporaries--and was much sought for in matters of consultation. A few families, united to him by bonds of friendship, he still attended when they required the services of a physician. The Pontelliers were among these.

[22.2] Mr. Pontellier found the Doctor reading at the open window of his study. His house stood rather far back from the street, in the center of a delightful garden, so that it was quiet and peaceful at the old gentleman's study window. He was a great reader. He stared up disapprovingly over his eye-glasses as Mr. Pontellier entered, wondering who had the temerity to disturb him at that hour of the morning.

[22.3] "Ah, Pontellier! Not sick, I hope. Come and have a seat. What news do you bring this morning?" He was quite portly, with a profusion of gray hair, and small blue eyes which age had robbed of much of their brightness but none of their penetration.

[22.4] "Oh! I'm never sick, Doctor. You know that I come of tough fiber--of that old Creole race of Pontelliers that dry up and finally blow away. I came to consult--no, not precisely to consult--to talk to you about Edna. I don't know what ails her."

[22.5] "Madame Pontellier not well," marveled the Doctor. "Why, I saw her--I think it was a week ago--walking along Canal Street, the picture of health, it seemed to me."

[22.6] "Yes, yes; she seems quite well," said Mr.

Pontellier, leaning forward and whirling his stick between his two hands; "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."

[22.7] "How does she act?" inquired the Doctor.

[22.8] "Well, it isn't easy to explain," said Mr. Pontellier, throwing himself back in his chair. "She lets the housekeeping go to the dickens."

[22.9] "Well, well; women are not all alike, my dear Pontellier. We've got to consider--"

[22.10] "I know that; I told you I couldn't explain. Her whole attitude--toward me and everybody and everything--has changed. You know I have a quick temper, but I don't want to quarrel or be rude to a woman, especially my wife; yet I'm driven to it, and feel like ten thousand devils after I've made a fool of myself. She's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me," he went on nervously. "She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women; and--you understand--we meet in the morning at the breakfast table."

[22.11] The old gentleman lifted his shaggy eyebrows, protruded his thick nether lip, and tapped the arms of his chair with his cushioned fingertips.

[22.12] "What have you been doing to her, Pontellier?"

[22.13] "Doing! *Parbleu!*"

[22.14] "Has she," asked the Doctor, with a smile, "has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women--super-spiritual superior beings? My wife has been telling me about them."

[22.15] "That's the trouble," broke in Mr. Pontellier, "she hasn't been associating with any one. She has abandoned her Tuesdays at home, has thrown over all her acquaintances, and goes tramping about by herself, moping in the street-cars, getting in after dark. I tell you she's peculiar. I don't like it; I feel a little worried over it."

[22.16] This was a new aspect for the Doctor. "Nothing hereditary?" he asked, seriously. "Nothing peculiar about her family antecedents, is there?"

[22.17] "Oh, no, indeed! She comes of sound old Presbyterian Kentucky stock. The old gentleman, her father, I have heard, used to atone for his weekday sins with his Sunday devotions. I know for a fact, that his race horses literally ran away with the prettiest bit of Kentucky farming land I ever laid eyes upon. Margaret--you know Margaret--she has all the Presbyterianism undiluted. And the youngest is something of a vixen. By the way, she gets married in a couple of weeks from now."

[22.18] "Send your wife up to the wedding," exclaimed the Doctor, foreseeing a happy solution. "Let her stay among her own people for a while; it will do her good."

[22.19] "That's what I want her to do. She won't go to the marriage. She says a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. Nice thing for a woman to say to her husband!" exclaimed Mr. Pontellier, fuming anew at the recollection.

[22.20] "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."

[22.21] "Oh! I couldn't do that; there'd be no reason for it," objected Mr. Pontellier.

[22.22] "Then I'll go around and see her," said the Doctor. "I'll drop in to dinner some evening *en bon ami*."

[22.23] "Do! by all means," urged Mr. Pontellier. "What evening will you come? Say Thursday. Will you come Thursday?" he asked, rising to take his leave.

[22.24] "Very well; Thursday. My wife may possibly

have some engagement for me Thursday. In case she has, I shall let you know. Otherwise, you may expect me."

[22.25] Mr. Pontellier turned before leaving to say:

[22.26] "I am going to New York on business very soon. I have a big scheme on hand, and want to be on the field proper to pull the ropes and handle the ribbons. We'll let you in on the inside if you say so, Doctor," he laughed.

[22.27] "No, I thank you, my dear sir," returned the Doctor. "I leave such ventures to you younger men with the fever of life still in your blood."

[22.28] "What I wanted to say," continued Mr. Pontellier, with his hand on the knob; "I may have to be absent a good while. Would you advise me to take Edna along?"

[22.29] "By all means, if she wishes to go. If not, leave her here. Don't contradict her. The mood will pass, I assure you. It may take a month, two, three months--possibly longer, but it will pass; have patience."

[22.30] "Well, good-by, *a jeudi*," said Mr. Pontellier, as he let himself out.

[22.31] The Doctor would have liked during the course of conversation to ask, "Is there any man in the case?" but he knew his Creole too well to make such a blunder as that.

[22.32] He did not resume his book immediately, but sat for a while meditatively looking out into the garden.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 22:

[22.3] (Muirhead 2000): The word “penetration” implies intellect but also domination (50).

[22.10] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): (278).

[22.14] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): (278).

[22.14] (Muirhead 2000): Dr. Mandelet’s comments concerning feminists reveal a deeper disapproval of such women and an inability to reconcile them within a patriarchal society. The doctor’s choice of words would imply that these women are not capable of authentic intellectualism, that they operate outside mainstream religion, and that they are unnatural (43).

[22.16] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Dr. Mandelet’s second possible explanation for Edna’s unusual behavior suggests a more organized origin (278).

[22.19, 38.10] (Rich 2003): Edna is disillusioned by the Victorian ideals of romantic love and matrimony (128).

[22.19] (Muirhead 2000): Edna disputes widely held assumptions about traditional institutions (46).

[22.20] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Dr. Mandelet's final diagnosis for Edna's unusual behavior rests in the belief that women are by nature lacking in reason, stability, or logic (278).

[22.20] (Lippincott 2000): Chopin juxtaposes the two pregnancies in the novel by comparing Edna's voracious, ever-increasing appetite with Adèle's pickiness (59).

[22.20] (Muirhead 2000): Dr. Mandelet's ways of classifying women are influenced by the ideas of Darwin and Freud and suggest that women are fundamentally different from men. The Doctor's views lack overtly offensive stereotyping, but they imply the same secondary role for women (51).

[22.20] (Muirhead 2000): Doctor Mandelet's suggestion that Léonce should leave Edna alone implies that her difficulties are not worth exploring and will soon fade away (51).

CHAPTER 23

[23.1] Edna's father was in the city, and had been with them several days. She was not very warmly or deeply attached to him, but they had certain tastes in common, and when together they were companionable. His coming was in

the nature of a welcome disturbance; it seemed to furnish a new direction for her emotions.

[23.2] He had come to purchase a wedding gift for his daughter, Janet, and an outfit for himself in which he might make a creditable appearance at her marriage. Mr. Pontellier had selected the bridal gift, as every one immediately connected with him always deferred to his taste in such matters. And his suggestions on the question of dress--which too often assumes the nature of a problem were of inestimable value to his father-in-law. But for the past few days the old gentleman had been upon Edna's hands, and in his society she was becoming acquainted with a new set of sensations. He had been a colonel in the Confederate army, and still maintained, with the title, the military bearing which had always accompanied it. His hair and mustache were white and silky, emphasizing the rugged bronze of his face.

He was tall and thin, and wore his coats padded, which gave a fictitious breadth and depth to his shoulders and chest. Edna and her father looked very distinguished together, and excited a good deal of notice during their perambulations. Upon his arrival she began by introducing him to her atelier and making a sketch of him. He took the whole matter very seriously. If her talent had been ten-fold greater than it was, it would not have surprised him, convinced as he was that he had bequeathed to all of his daughters the germs of a masterful capability, which only depended upon their own

efforts to be directed toward successful achievement.

[23.3] Before her pencil he sat rigid and unflinching, as he had faced the cannon's mouth in days gone by. He resented the intrusion of the children, who gaped with wondering eyes at him, sitting so stiff up there in their mother's bright atelier. When they drew near he motioned them away with an expressive action of the foot, loath to disturb the fixed lines of his countenance, his arms, or his rigid shoulders.

[23.4] Edna, anxious to entertain him, invited Mademoiselle Reisz to meet him, having promised him a treat in her piano playing; but Mademoiselle declined the invitation. So together they attended a *soirée musicale* at the Ratignolles'. Monsieur and Madame Ratignolle made much of the Colonel, installing him as the guest of honor and engaging him at once to dine with them the following Sunday, or any day which he might select. Madame coquetted with him in the most captivating and naive manner, with eyes, gestures, and a profusion of compliments, till the Colonel's old head felt thirty years younger on his padded shoulders.

Edna marveled, not comprehending. She herself was almost devoid of coquetry.

[23.5] There were one or two men whom she observed at the *soirée musicale*; but she would never have felt moved to any kittenish display to attract their notice--to any feline or feminine wiles to express herself toward them. Their

personality attracted her in an agreeable way. Her fancy selected them, and she was glad when a lull in the music gave them an opportunity to meet her and talk with her. Often on the street the glance of strange eyes had lingered in her memory, and sometimes had disturbed her.

[23.6] Mr. Pontellier did not attend these *soirées musicales*. He considered them *bourgeois*, and found more diversion at the club. To Madame Ratignolle he said the music dispensed at her *soirées* was too "heavy," too far beyond his untrained comprehension. His excuse flattered her. But she disapproved of Mr. Pontellier's club, and she was frank enough to tell Edna so.

[23.7] "It's a pity Mr. Pontellier doesn't stay home more in the evenings. I think you would be more--well, if you don't mind my saying it--more united, if he did."

[23.8] "Oh! dear no!" said Edna, with a blank look in her eyes. "What should I do if he stayed home? We wouldn't have anything to say to each other."

[23.9] She had not much of anything to say to her father, for that matter; but he did not antagonize her. She discovered that he interested her, though she realized that he might not interest her long; and for the first time in her life she felt as if she were thoroughly acquainted with him. He kept her busy serving him and ministering to his wants. It amused her to do so. She would not permit a servant or one of the children to do anything for him which

she might do herself. Her husband noticed, and thought it was the expression of a deep filial attachment which he had never suspected.

[23.10] The Colonel drank numerous "toddlies" during the course of the day, which left him, however, imperturbed. He was an expert at concocting strong drinks. He had even invented some, to which he had given fantastic names, and for whose manufacture he required diverse ingredients that it devolved upon Edna to procure for him.

[23.11] When Doctor Mandelet dined with the Pontelliers on Thursday he could discern in Mrs. Pontellier no trace of that morbid condition which her husband had reported to him. She was excited and in a manner radiant. She and her father had been to the race course, and their thoughts when they seated themselves at table were still occupied with the events of the afternoon, and their talk was still of the track. The Doctor had not kept pace with turf affairs. He had certain recollections of racing in what he called "the good old times" when the Lecompte stables flourished, and he drew upon this fund of memories so that he might not be left out and seem wholly devoid of the modern spirit. But he failed to impose upon the Colonel, and was even far from impressing him with this trumped-up knowledge of bygone days. Edna had staked her father on his last venture, with the most gratifying results to both of them. Besides, they had met some very charming

people, according to the Colonel's impressions. Mrs. Mortimer Merriman and Mrs. James Highcamp, who were there with Alcée Arobin, had joined them and had enlivened the hours in a fashion that warmed him to think of.

[23.12] Mr. Pontellier himself had no particular leaning toward horseracing, and was even rather inclined to discourage it as a pastime, especially when he considered the fate of that blue-grass farm in Kentucky. He endeavored, in a general way, to express a particular disapproval, and only succeeded in arousing the ire and opposition of his father-in-law. A pretty dispute followed, in which Edna warmly espoused her father's cause and the Doctor remained neutral.

[23.13] He observed his hostess attentively from under his shaggy brows, and noted a subtle change which had transformed her from the listless woman he had known into a being who, for the moment, seemed palpitant with the forces of life. Her speech was warm and energetic. There was no repression in her glance or gesture. She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun.

[23.14] The dinner was excellent. The claret was warm and the champagne was cold, and under their beneficent influence the threatened unpleasantness melted and vanished with the fumes of the wine.

[23.15] Mr. Pontellier warmed up and grew reminiscent. He told some amusing plantation experiences,

recollections of old Iberville and his youth, when he hunted 'possum in company with some friendly darky; thrashed the pecan trees, shot the grosbec, and roamed the woods and fields in mischievous idleness.

[23.16] The Colonel, with little sense of humor and of the fitness of things, related a somber episode of those dark and bitter days, in which he had acted a conspicuous part and always formed a central figure. Nor was the Doctor happier in his selection, when he told the old, ever new and curious story of the waning of a woman's love, seeking strange, new channels, only to return to its legitimate source after days of fierce unrest. It was one of the many little human documents which had been unfolded to him during his long career as a physician. The story did not seem especially to impress Edna. She had one of her own to tell, of a woman who paddled away with her lover one night in a pirogue and never came back. They were lost amid the Baratarian Islands, and no one ever heard of them or found trace of them from that day to this. It was a pure invention. She said that Madame Antoine had related it to her. That, also, was an invention. Perhaps it was a dream she had had. But every glowing word seemed real to those who listened. They could feel the hot breath of the southern night; they could hear the long sweep of the pirogue through the glistening moonlit water, the beating of birds' wings, rising startled from among the reeds in the salt-water

pools; they could see the faces of the lovers, pale, close together, rapt in oblivious forgetfulness, drifting into the unknown.

[23.17] The champagne was cold, and its subtle fumes played fantastic tricks with Edna's memory that night.

[23.18] Outside, away from the glow of the fire and the soft lamplight, the night was chill and murky. The Doctor doubled his old-fashioned cloak across his breast as he strode home through the darkness. He knew his fellow-creatures better than most men; knew that inner life which so seldom unfolds itself to unanointed* eyes. He was sorry he had accepted Pontellier's invitation. He was growing old, and beginning to need rest and an imperturbed spirit. He did not want the secrets of other lives thrust upon him.

[23.19] "I hope it isn't Arobin," he muttered to himself as he walked. "I hope to heaven it isn't Alcée Arobin."

NOTES ON CHAPTER 23:

[23.2] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna's father, a staunch Kentucky Presbyterian and Confederate Colonel, exemplifies the internal decay of the patriarchal system he represents (49).

[23.3] (Asbee 2001a): Edna's father, the Colonel, retains his Confederate officer's title and manner. Together he and Edna later attract a great degree of public notice (278).

[23.4] (Bunch 2001-2): Though his external appearance invokes a past of glory, he is but an effigy to patriarchy (49).

[23.4, 23.5] (Asbee 2001b): While Edna is attracted to men, she assumes a passive role when it comes to initiating relationships (262).

[23.7, 23.8] (Asbee 2001a): The lack of intimacy between Edna and Léonce has not gone unnoticed by their friends (280).

[20.17, 21.5, 23.13] (Lippincott 2000): The positive change in Edna's outer appearance as a result of her metaphoric pregnancy is apparent to all (61).

[23.14, 23.16] (McGee 2000): In a session of storytelling following a dinner attended by Edna, Léonce, Edna's father, and Dr. Mandelet each storyteller is defined by his or her tale: Léonce recalls fond moments of his youth, the Colonel recalls war incidents, the Doctor moralizes about a woman tempted to leave her husband, and Edna shares a romantic tale of star crossed lovers (49).

CHAPTER 24

[24.1] Edna and her father had a warm, and almost violent dispute upon the subject of her refusal to attend her sister's wedding. Mr. Pontellier declined to interfere, to interpose either his influence or his authority. He was following Doctor Mandelet's advice, and letting her do as she liked. The Colonel reproached his daughter for her lack of filial kindness and respect, her want of sisterly affection and womanly consideration. His arguments were labored and unconvincing. He doubted if Janet would accept any excuse--forgetting that Edna had offered none. He doubted if Janet would ever speak to her again, and he was sure Margaret would not.

[24.2] Edna was glad to be rid of her father when he finally took himself off with his wedding garments and his bridal gifts, with his padded shoulders, his Bible reading, his "toddlies" and ponderous oaths.

[24.3] Mr. Pontellier followed him closely. He meant to stop at the wedding on his way to New York and endeavor by every means which money and love could devise to atone somewhat for Edna's incomprehensible action.

[24.4] "You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Léonce," asserted the Colonel. "Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it."

[24.5] The Colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his own wife into her grave. Mr. Pontellier had a vague suspicion of it which he thought it needless to mention at that late day.

[24.6] Edna was not so consciously gratified at her husband's leaving home as she had been over the departure of her father. As the day approached when he was to leave her for a comparatively long stay, she grew melting and affectionate, remembering his many acts of consideration and his repeated expressions of an ardent attachment. She was solicitous about his health and his welfare. She bustled around, looking after his clothing, thinking about heavy underwear, quite as Madame Ratignolle would have done under similar circumstances. She cried when he went away, calling him her dear, good friend, and she was quite certain she would grow lonely before very long and go to join him in New York.

[24.7] But after all, a radiant peace settled upon her when she at last found herself alone. Even the children were gone. Old Madame Pontellier had come herself and carried them off to Iberville with their quadron. The old madame did not venture to say she was afraid they would be neglected during Léonce's absence; she hardly ventured to think so. She was hungry for them--even a little fierce in her attachment. She did not want them to be wholly "children of the pavement," she always said when begging to

have them for a space. She wished them to know the country, with its streams, its fields, its woods, its freedom, so delicious to the young. She wished them to taste something of the life their father had lived and known and loved when he, too, was a little child.

[24.8] 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. The garden walks were damp, and Edna called to the maid to bring out her rubber sandals. And there she stayed, and stooped, digging around the plants, trimming, picking dead, dry leaves. The children's little dog came out, interfering, getting in her way. She scolded him, laughed at him, played with him. The garden smelled so good and looked so pretty in the afternoon sunlight. Edna plucked all the bright flowers she could find, and went into the house with them, she and the little dog.

[24.9] Even the kitchen assumed a sudden interesting

character which she had never before perceived. She went in to give directions to the cook, to say that the butcher would have to bring much less meat, that they would require only half their usual quantity of bread, of milk and groceries. She told the cook that she herself would be greatly occupied during Mr. Pontellier's absence, and she begged her to take all thought and responsibility of the larder upon her own shoulders.

[24.10] That night Edna dined alone. The candelabra, with a few candles in the center of the table, gave all the light she needed. Outside the circle of light in which she sat, the large dining-room looked solemn and shadowy. The cook, placed upon her mettle, served a delicious repast--a luscious tenderloin broiled à point. The wine tasted good; the marron glacé seemed to be just what she wanted. It was so pleasant, too, to dine in a comfortable peignoir.

[24.11] She thought a little sentimentally about Léonce and the children, and wondered what they were doing.

As she gave a dainty scrap or two to the doggie, she talked intimately to him about Etienne and Raoul. He was beside himself with astonishment and delight over these companionable advances, and showed his appreciation by his little quick, snappy barks and a lively agitation.

[24.12] Then Edna sat in the library after dinner and read Emerson until she grew sleepy. She realized that she had neglected her reading, and determined to start anew upon

a course of improving studies, now that her time was completely her own to do with as she liked.

[24.13] After a refreshing bath, Edna went to bed. And as she snuggled comfortably beneath the eiderdown a sense of restfulness invaded her, such as she had not known before.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 24:

[24.1] (Asbee 2001a): (278).

[24.4 – 24.5] (Asbee 2001a): Though Edna's father gives Leonce stern advice of how to deal with his wife's behavior, Léonce takes the advice of Dr. Mandelet, leaving Edna alone in hope that the situation will resolve itself. The scene is the most telling about inter-generational and gender conflicts (279).

[24.10] (McGee 2000): In Léonce's absence, Edna enjoys dining by herself (48).

CHAPTER 25

[25.1] 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. She had reached a stage when she seemed to be no longer feeling her way, working, when in the humor, with sureness and ease. And being devoid of ambition, and striving not toward accomplishment, she drew satisfaction from the work in itself.

[25.2] 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.

[25.3] She went again to the races, and again. Alcée Arobin and Mrs. Highcamp called for her one bright afternoon in Arobin's drag. Mrs. Highcamp was a worldly but unaffected, intelligent, slim, tall blonde woman in the forties, with an indifferent manner and blue eyes that stared. She had a daughter who served her as a pretext for cultivating the society of young men of fashion. Alcée

Arobin was one of them. 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. His manner was quiet, and at times a little insolent. He possessed a good figure, a pleasing face, not overburdened with depth of thought or feeling; and his dress was that of the conventional man of fashion.

[25.4] He admired Edna extravagantly, after meeting her at the races with her father. He had met her before on other occasions, but she had seemed to him unapproachable until that day. It was at his instigation that Mrs. Highcamp called to ask her to go with them to the Jockey Club to witness the turf event of the season.

[25.5] There were possibly a few track men out there who knew the race horse as well as Edna, but there was certainly none who knew it better. She sat between her two companions as one having authority to speak. She laughed at Arobin's pretensions, and deplored Mrs. Highcamp's ignorance. The race horse was a friend and intimate associate of her childhood. The atmosphere of the stables and the breath of the blue grass paddock revived in her memory and lingered in her nostrils. She did not perceive that she was talking like her father as the sleek geldings ambled in review before them. She played for very high

stakes, and fortune favored her. The fever of the game flamed in her cheeks and eyes, and it got into her blood and into her brain like an intoxicant. People turned their heads to look at her, and more than one lent an attentive ear to her utterances, hoping thereby to secure the elusive but ever-desired "tip." Arobin caught the contagion of excitement which drew him to Edna like a magnet. Mrs. Highcamp remained, as usual, unmoved, with her indifferent stare and uplifted eyebrows.

[25.6] Edna stayed and dined with Mrs. Highcamp upon being urged to do so. Arobin also remained and sent away his drag.

[25.7] The dinner was quiet and uninteresting, save for the cheerful efforts of Arobin to enliven things. Mrs. Highcamp deplored the absence of her daughter from the races, and tried to convey to her what she had missed by going to the "Dante reading" instead of joining them. The girl held a geranium leaf up to her nose and said nothing, but looked knowing and noncommittal. Mr. Highcamp was a plain, bald-headed man, who only talked under compulsion. He was unresponsive. Mrs. Highcamp was full of delicate courtesy and consideration toward her husband. She addressed most of her conversation to him at table. They sat in the library after dinner and read the evening papers together under the droplight; while the younger people went into the drawing-room near by and talked. Miss Highcamp

played some selections from Grieg upon the piano. She seemed to have apprehended all of the composer's coldness and none of his poetry. While Edna listened she could not help wondering if she had lost her taste for music.

[25.8] When the time came for her to go home, Mr. Highcamp grunted a lame offer to escort her, looking down at his slippered feet with tactless concern. It was Arobin who took her home. The car ride was long, and it was late when they reached Esplanade Street. Arobin asked permission to enter for a second to light his cigarette--his match safe was empty. He filled his match safe, but did not light his cigarette until he left her, after she had expressed her willingness to go to the races with him again.

[25.9] Edna was neither tired nor sleepy. She was hungry again, for the Highcamp dinner, though of excellent quality, had lacked abundance. 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. Edna felt extremely restless and excited. She vacantly hummed a fantastic tune as she poked at the wood embers on the hearth and munched a cracker.

[25.10] She wanted something to happen--something, anything; she did not know what. She regretted that she had not made Arobin stay a half hour to talk over the horses with her. She counted the money she had won. But there was nothing else to do, so she went to bed, and tossed there for

hours in a sort of monotonous agitation.

[25.11] In the middle of the night she remembered that she had forgotten to write her regular letter to her husband; and she decided to do so next day and tell him about her afternoon at the Jockey Club. She lay wide awake composing a letter which was nothing like the one which she wrote next day. When the maid awoke her in the morning Edna was dreaming of Mr. Highcamp playing the piano at the entrance of a music store on Canal Street, while his wife was saying to Alcée Arobin, as they boarded an Esplanade Street car:

[25.12] "What a pity that so much talent has been neglected! but I must go."

[25.13] When, a few days later, Alcée Arobin again called for Edna in his drag, Mrs. Highcamp was not with him.

He said they would pick her up. But as that lady had not been apprised of his intention of picking her up, she was not at home. The daughter was just leaving the house to attend the meeting of a branch Folk Lore Society, and regretted that she could not accompany them. Arobin appeared nonplused, and asked Edna if there were any one else she cared to ask.

[25.14] She did not deem it worth while to go in search of any of the fashionable acquaintances from whom she had withdrawn herself. She thought of Madame Ratignolle, but knew that her fair friend did not leave the house,

except to take a languid walk around the block with her husband after nightfall. Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed at such a request from Edna. Madame Lebrun might have enjoyed the outing, but for some reason Edna did not want her. So they went alone, she and Arobin.

[25.15] The afternoon was intensely interesting to her. The excitement came back upon her like a remittent fever. Her talk grew familiar and confidential. It was no labor to become intimate with Arobin. His manner invited easy confidence. The preliminary stage of becoming acquainted was one which he always endeavored to ignore when a pretty and engaging woman was concerned.

[25.16] He stayed and dined with Edna. He stayed and sat beside the wood fire. They laughed and talked; and before it was time to go he was telling her how different life might have been if he had known her years before. With ingenuous frankness he spoke of what a wicked, ill-disciplined boy he had been, and impulsively drew up his cuff to exhibit upon his wrist the scar from a saber cut which he had received in a duel outside of Paris when he was nineteen. She touched his hand as she scanned the red cicatrice on the inside of his white wrist. A quick impulse that was somewhat spasmodic impelled her fingers to close in a sort of clutch upon his hand. He felt the pressure of her pointed nails in the flesh of his palm.

[25.17] She arose hastily and walked toward the

mantel.

[25.18] "The sight of a wound or scar always agitates and sickens me," she said. "I shouldn't have looked at it."

[25.19] "I beg your pardon," he entreated, following her; "it never occurred to me that it might be repulsive."

[25.20] He stood close to her, and the effrontery in his eyes repelled the old, vanishing self in her, yet drew all her awakening sensuousness. He saw enough in her face to impel him to take her hand and hold it while he said his lingering good night.

[25.21] "Will you go to the races again?" he asked.

[25.22] "No," she said. "I've had enough of the races. I don't want to lose all the money I've won, and I've got to work when the weather is bright, instead of--"

[25.23] "Yes; work; to be sure. You promised to show me your work. What morning may I come up to your atelier? To-morrow?"

[25.24] "No!"

[25.25] "Day after?"

[25.26] "No, no."

[25.27] "Oh, please don't refuse me! I know something of such things. I might help you with a stray suggestion or two."

[25.28] "No. Good night. Why don't you go after you have said good night? I don't like you," she went on in a high, excited pitch, attempting to draw away her hand. She

felt that her words lacked dignity and sincerity, and she knew that he felt it.

[25.29] "I'm sorry you don't like me. I'm sorry I offended you. How have I offended you? What have I done? Can't you forgive me?" And he bent and pressed his lips upon her hand as if he wished never more to withdraw them.

[25.30] "Mr. Arobin," she complained, "I'm greatly upset by the excitement of the afternoon; I'm not myself. My manner must have misled you in some way. I wish you to go, please." She spoke in a monotonous, dull tone. He took his hat from the table, and stood with eyes turned from her, looking into the dying fire. For a moment or two he kept an impressive silence.

[25.31] "Your manner has not misled me, Mrs. Pontellier," he said finally. "My own emotions have done that. I couldn't help it. When I'm near you, how could I help it? Don't think anything of it, don't bother, please. You see, I go when you command me. If you wish me to stay away, I shall do so. If you let me come back, I--oh! you will let me come back?"

[25.32] He cast one appealing glance at her, to which she made no response. Alcée Arobin's manner was so genuine that it often deceived even himself.

[25.33] Edna did not care or think whether it were genuine or not. When she was alone she looked mechanically at the back of her hand which he had kissed so warmly. Then

she leaned her head down on the mantelpiece. She felt somewhat like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity, and realizes the significance of the act without being wholly awakened from its glamour. The thought was passing vaguely through her mind, "What would he think?"

[25.34] She did not mean her husband; she was thinking of Robert Lebrun. Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse.

[25.35] She lit a candle and went up to her room. Alcée Arobin was absolutely nothing to her. Yet his presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her.

[25.36] She slept a languorous sleep, interwoven with vanishing dreams.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 25:

[25.10] (McGee 2000): Following a day at the racetrack and dinner with a woman and Alcée Arobin, Edna partakes of an impromptu late night meal of cheese, crackers, and beer, an act she would have never considered as Leonce's wife (48-49).

[25.12] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's realization, via a dream, that she has subverted her talent to social convention reflects Chopin's attitude that pregnancy is a time of positive change and increased self-awareness (61).

[25.14] (Lippincott 2000): While Adèle remains sedentary during her pregnancy, Edna practices a routine of long walks uncommon among pregnant women of her era (59-60).

[25.21-25.23, 25.25, 25.27] (Muirhead 2000): Edna's response to Alcée's insistent inquiries is very high pitched, indicating a level of discomfort with her new authority (47).

[25.29-25.30, 25.32] (Muirhead 2000): This tête-à-tête between Edna and Alcée serves to demonstrate the ongoing battle for authority within Edna and between herself and social constructs (47).

CHAPTER 26

[26.1] Alcée Arobin wrote Edna an elaborate note of apology, palpitant with sincerity. It embarrassed her; for in a cooler, quieter moment it appeared to her, absurd that she should have taken his action so seriously, so dramatically. She felt sure that the significance of the whole occurrence had lain in her own self-consciousness. If

she ignored his note it would give undue importance to a trivial affair. If she replied to it in a serious spirit it would still leave in his mind the impression that she had in a susceptible moment yielded to his influence. After all, it was no great matter to have one's hand kissed. She was provoked at his having written the apology. She answered in as light and bantering a spirit as she fancied it deserved, and said she would be glad to have him look in upon her at work whenever he felt the inclination and his business gave him the opportunity.

[26.2] He responded at once by presenting himself at her home with all his disarming naïveté. And then there was scarcely a day which followed that she did not see him or was not reminded of him. He was prolific in pretexts. His attitude became one of good-humored subservience and tacit adoration. He was ready at all times to submit to her moods, which were as often kind as they were cold. She grew accustomed to him. 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.

[26.3] There was nothing which so quieted the turmoil of Edna's senses as a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz. 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.

[26.4] It was misty, with heavy, lowering atmosphere, one afternoon, when Edna climbed the stairs to the pianist's apartments under the roof. Her clothes were dripping with moisture. She felt chilled and pinched as she entered the room. Mademoiselle was poking at a rusty stove that smoked a little and warmed the room indifferently. She was endeavoring to heat a pot of chocolate on the stove. The room looked cheerless and dingy to Edna as she entered. A bust of Beethoven, covered with a hood of dust, scowled at her from the mantelpiece.

[26.5] "Ah! here comes the sunlight!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, rising from her knees before the stove. "Now it will be warm and bright enough; I can let the fire alone."

[26.6] She closed the stove door with a bang, and approaching, assisted in removing Edna's dripping mackintosh.

[26.7] "You are cold; you look miserable. The chocolate will soon be hot. But would you rather have a taste of brandy? I have scarcely touched the bottle which you brought me for my cold." A piece of red flannel was wrapped around Mademoiselle's throat; a stiff neck compelled her to hold her head on one side.

[26.8] "I will take some brandy," said Edna,

shivering as she removed her gloves and overshoes. She drank the liquor from the glass as a man would have done. Then flinging herself upon the uncomfortable sofa she said, "Mademoiselle, I am going to move away from my house on Esplanade Street."

[26.9] "Ah!" ejaculated the musician, neither surprised nor especially interested. Nothing ever seemed to astonish her very much. She was endeavoring to adjust the bunch of violets which had become loose from its fastening in her hair. Edna drew her down upon the sofa, and taking a pin from her own hair, secured the shabby artificial flowers in their accustomed place.

[26.10] "Aren't you astonished?"

[26.11] "Passably. Where are you going? to New York? to Iberville? to your father in Mississippi? where?"

[26.12] "Just two steps away," laughed Edna, "in a little four-room house around the corner. It looks so cozy, so inviting and restful, whenever I pass by; and it's for rent. I'm tired looking after that big house. It never seemed like mine, anyway--like home. It's too much trouble. I have to keep too many servants. I am tired bothering with them."

[26.13] "That is not your true reason, *ma belle*. There is no use in telling me lies. I don't know your reason, but you have not told me the truth." Edna did not protest or endeavor to justify herself.

[26.14] "The house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn't that enough reason?"

[26.15] "They are your husband's," returned Mademoiselle, with a shrug and a malicious elevation of the eyebrows.

[26.16] "Oh! I see there is no deceiving you. Then let me tell you: It is a caprice. I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by dribblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches. Laidpore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge of that myself, but I feel that I have gained in ease and confidence. However, as I said, I have sold a good many through Laidpore. I can live in the tiny house for little or nothing, with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence."

[26.17] "What does your husband say?"

[26.18] "I have not told him yet. I only thought of it this morning. He will think I am demented, no doubt. Perhaps you think so."

[26.19] Mademoiselle shook her head slowly. "Your reason is not yet clear to me," she said.

[26.20] 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.

[26.21] "I shall give a grand dinner before I leave the old house!" Edna exclaimed. "You will have to come to it, Mademoiselle. I will give you everything that you like to eat and to drink. We shall sing and laugh and be merry for once." And she uttered a sigh that came from the very depths of her being.

[26.22] If Mademoiselle happened to have received a letter from Robert during the interval of Edna's visits, she would give her the letter unsolicited. And she would seat herself at the piano and play as her humor prompted her while the young woman read the letter.

[26.23] The little stove was roaring; it was red-hot, and the chocolate in the tin sizzled and sputtered. Edna went forward and opened the stove door, and Mademoiselle rising, took a letter from under the bust of Beethoven and handed it to Edna.

[26.24] "Another! so soon!" she exclaimed, her eyes filled with delight. "Tell me, Mademoiselle, does he know that I see his letters?"

[26.25] "Never in the world! He would be angry and

would never write to me again if he thought so. Does he write to you? Never a line. Does he send you a message? Never a word. It is because he loves you, poor fool, and is trying to forget you, since you are not free to listen to him or to belong to him."

[26.26] "Why do you show me his letters, then?"

[26.27] "Haven't you begged for them? Can I refuse you anything? Oh! you cannot deceive me," and Mademoiselle approached her beloved instrument and began to play. Edna did not at once read the letter. She sat holding it in her hand, while the music penetrated her whole being like an effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul. It prepared her for joy and exultation.

[26.28] "Oh!" she exclaimed, letting the letter fall to the floor. "Why did you not tell me?" She went and grasped Mademoiselle's hands up from the keys. "Oh! unkind! malicious! why did you not tell me?"

[26.29] "That he was coming back? No great news, *ma foi*. I wonder he did not come long ago."

[26.30] "But when, when?" cried Edna, impatiently. "He does not say when."

[26.31] "He says 'very soon.' You know as much about it as I do; it is all in the letter."

[26.32] "But why? why is he coming? Oh, if I thought--" and she snatched the letter from the floor and turned the pages this way and that way, looking for the

reason, which was left untold.

[26.33] "If I were young and in love with a man," said Mademoiselle, turning on the stool and pressing her wiry hands between her knees as she looked down at Edna, who sat on the floor holding the letter, "it seems to me he would have to be some *grand esprit*; a man with lofty aims and ability to reach them; one who stood high enough to attract the notice of his fellow-men. It seems to me if I were young and in love I should never deem a man of ordinary caliber worthy of my devotion."

[26.34] "Now it is you who are telling lies and seeking to deceive me, Mademoiselle; or else you have never been in love, and know nothing about it. Why," went on Edna, clasping her knees and looking up into Mademoiselle's twisted face, "do you suppose a woman knows why she loves? Does she select? Does she say to herself: 'Go to! Here is a distinguished statesman with presidential possibilities; I shall proceed to fall in love with him.' Or, 'I shall set my heart upon this musician, whose fame is on every tongue?' Or, 'This financier, who controls the world's money markets?'

[26.35] "You are purposely misunderstanding me, *ma reine*. Are you in love with Robert?"

[26.36] "Yes," said Edna. It was the first time she had admitted it, and a glow overspread her face, blotching it with red spots.

[26.37] "why?" asked her companion. "why do you love him when you ought not to?"

[26.38] Edna, with a motion or two, dragged herself on her knees before Mademoiselle Reisz, who took the glowing face between her two hands.

[26.39] "why? Because his 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. Because--"

[26.40] "Because you do, in short," laughed Mademoiselle. "what will you do when he comes back?" she asked.

[26.41] "Do? Nothing, except feel glad and happy to be alive."

[26.42] She was already glad and happy to be alive at the mere thought of his return. The murky, lowering sky, which had depressed her a few hours before, seemed bracing and invigorating as she splashed through the streets on her way home.

[26.43] She stopped at a confectioner's and ordered a huge box of bonbons for the children in Iberville. She slipped a card in the box, on which she scribbled a tender message and sent an abundance of kisses.

[26.44] Before dinner in the evening Edna wrote a

charming letter to her husband, telling him of her intention to move for a while into the little house around the block, and to give a farewell dinner before leaving, regretting that he was not there to share it, to help out with the menu and assist her in entertaining the guests. Her letter was brilliant and brimming with cheerfulness.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 26:

[26.2] (Bunch 2001-2): The elation Edna earlier felt at breaking the vase foreshadows her decision to pursue a liaison with Alcée Arobin that ultimately destroys her marriage (56).

[26.2] (Bunch 2001-2): Alcée induces feelings in Edna that draw her further past the boundaries of polite society into the realm of eroticism (56).

[26.4, 21.1] (McGee 2000): Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment bears testament to the material humility that may come with pursuing one's independence (49).

[26.16] (Asbee 2001a): Edna has planned how she will support herself: her inheritance from her mother, working as an artist (a respectable plan), and making up the rest by

gambling (279).

[26.16] (McGee 2000): Edna plans to support her new independent lifestyle with monies inherited from her mother, money won at the race track, and proceeds from the sale of her art – an income hardly enough to allow such lavish entertainment in the future (50).

[26.20] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Edna makes a conscious decision to never again allow social mandates to determine her personal choices (278).

CHAPTER 27

[27.1] "what is the matter with you?" asked Arabin that evening. "I never found you in such a happy mood." Edna was tired by that time, and was reclining on the lounge before the fire.

[27.2] "Don't you know the weather prophet has told us we shall see the sun pretty soon?"

[27.3] "well, that ought to be reason enough," he acquiesced. "You wouldn't give me another if I sat here all night imploring you." He sat close to her on a low tabouret, and as he spoke his fingers lightly touched the hair that fell a little over her forehead. She liked the touch of his fingers through her hair, and closed her eyes sensitively.

[27.4] "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."

[27.5] "Don't. What's the use? Why should you bother thinking about it when I can tell you what manner of woman you are." His fingers strayed occasionally down to her warm, smooth cheeks and firm chin, which was growing a little full and double.

[27.6] "Oh, yes! You will tell me that I am adorable; everything that is captivating. Spare yourself the effort."

[27.7] "No; I shan't tell you anything of the sort, though I shouldn't be lying if I did."

[27.8] "Do you know Mademoiselle Reisz?" she asked irrelevantly.

[27.9] "The pianist? I know her by sight. I've heard her play."

[27.10] "She says queer things sometimes in a bantering way that you don't notice at the time and you find yourself thinking about afterward."

[27.11] "For instance?"

[27.12] "Well, for instance, when I left her to-day, she put her arms around me and felt my shoulder blades, to see if my wings were strong, she said. 'The bird that would

soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth.'" "

[27.13] "Whither would you soar?"

[27.14] "I'm not thinking of any extraordinary flights. I only half comprehend her."

[27.15] "I've heard she's partially demented," said Arobin.

[27.16] "She seems to me wonderfully sane," Edna replied.

[27.17] "I'm told she's extremely disagreeable and unpleasant. Why have you introduced her at a moment when I desired to talk of you?"

[27.18] "Oh! talk of me if you like," cried Edna, clasping her hands beneath her head; "but let me think of something else while you do."

[27.19] "I'm jealous of your thoughts tonight. They're making you a little kinder than usual; but some way I feel as if they were wandering, as if they were not here with me." She only looked at him and smiled. His eyes were very near. He leaned upon the lounge with an arm extended across her, while the other hand still rested upon her hair. They continued silently to look into each other's eyes. When he leaned forward and kissed her, she clasped his head, holding his lips to hers.

[27.20] It was the first kiss of her life to which

her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 27:

[27.4] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Edna realizes that the steps she has taken toward self-fulfillment have irreversibly moved her out of the realm of normalcy (278-79).

[27.4] (Lippincott 2000): As Edna nears the full-term of her metaphorical pregnancy she becomes increasingly focused upon the new woman nearing viability (62).

[27.4] (Muirhead 2000): Edna expresses concern at the contradictory nature of her being: she feels that her spiritual and social identities do not mesh (45).

[27.5] (Lippincott 2000): In what would correspond to Edna's third trimester, she begins to show signs of slight weight gain, associated with her metaphoric pregnancy (62).

[27.12] (McGee 2000): Mademoiselle Reisz warns Edna that independence demands strength (49).

[27.12] (Rich 2003): Edna's desire to be more than her society allows (wife and mother) is symbolized by constant references comparing her to a bird. In this respect, Chopin's

phrasing resembles the phrasing in a story by George Egerton (128).

[27.12] (Muirhead 2000): Mademoiselle Reisz, who contrasts in many ways with Adèle, serves to illuminate Edna about the harsh life of a woman who lives outside socially mandated strictures. She reveals Edna's personal weaknesses and speaks to her bluntly about how these will affect her pursuit of an independent life. The bird metaphor Mademoiselle Reisz uses in describing Edna has complex implications; it suggests liberty, the spirit, and untapped possibilities, but it also suggests behavior that resembles that of an animal; partly it implies that the younger woman is unstable and led by instinct traits possibly contributing to her inability to verbalize her internal struggle (48-49).

[27.16] (Muirhead 2000): Edna prefers Mademoiselle Reisz's philosophy to tradition or what is socially dominant in spite of others' attitudes toward it (45).

[27.20] (Asbee 2001b): Chopin subtly allows readers themselves to infer just how much this torch inflames Edna (263).

[27.20, 28.1, 31.27] (Rich 2003): *The Awakening* contains erotic descriptions of Edna's adulterous liaisons, which led reviewers of Chopin's day to label the novel explicitly sexual writing. In this respect as in others, Chopin's writing resembles that of George Egerton (129).

CHAPTER 28

[28.1] Edna cried a little that night after Arabin left her. It was only one phase of the multitudinous emotions which had assailed her. There was with her an overwhelming feeling of irresponsibility. There was the shock of the unexpected and the unaccustomed. There was her husband's reproach looking at her from the external things around her which he had provided for her external existence. There was Robert's reproach making itself felt by a quicker, fiercer, more overpowering love, which had awakened within her toward him. Above all, there was understanding. She felt as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to take 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.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 28:

[27.20, 28.1, 31.27] (Rich 2003): *The Awakening* contains erotic descriptions of Edna's

adulterous liaisons, which led reviewers of Chopin's day to label the novel explicitly sexual writing. In this respect as in others, Chopin's writing resembles that of George Egerton (129).

[28.1] (Rich 2003): *The Awakening* contains erotic descriptions of Edna's adulterous liaisons, which lead reviewers of Chopin's day to label the novel explicitly sexual (129).

[28.1] (Asbee 2001b): Interestingly, Chopin begins four sentences in a row in this brief chapter with the same two-word phrase (263).

[28.1] (Asbee 2001b): Edna's liaison with Alcée Arobin leads not to guilt, but to a new level of comprehension about the nature of love and sex – a comprehension in line with the theories of Charles Darwin (263).

[28.1] (Asbee 2001b): Edna's unhappiness begins when she responds cognitively rather than instinctively to life (264).

CHAPTER 29

[29.1] without even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter, Edna

hastened her preparations for quitting her home on Esplanade Street and moving 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. Early upon the morning following those hours passed in Arobin's society, Edna set about securing her new abode and hurrying her arrangements for occupying it. 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.

[29.2] whatever was her own in the house, everything which she had acquired aside from her husband's bounty, she caused to be transported to the other house, supplying simple and meager deficiencies from her own resources.

[29.3] Arobin found her with rolled sleeves, working in company with the house-maid when he looked in during the afternoon. She was splendid and robust, and had never appeared handsomer than in the old blue gown, with a red silk handkerchief knotted at random around her head to protect her hair from the dust. She was mounted upon a high stepladder, unhooking a picture from the wall when he entered. He had found the front door open, and had followed his ring by walking in unceremoniously.

[29.4] "Come down!" he said. "Do you want to kill yourself?" she greeted him with affected carelessness, and

appeared absorbed in her occupation.

[29.5] If he had expected to find her languishing, reproachful, or indulging in sentimental tears, he must have been greatly surprised.

[29.6] He was no doubt prepared for any emergency, ready for any one of the foregoing attitudes, just as he bent himself easily and naturally to the situation which confronted him.

[29.7] "Please come down," he insisted, holding the ladder and looking up at her.

[29.8] "No," she answered; "Ellen is afraid to mount the ladder. Joe is working over at the 'pigeon house'--that's the name Ellen gives it, because it's so small and looks like a pigeon house--and some one has to do this."

[29.9] Arabin pulled off his coat, and expressed himself ready and willing to tempt fate in her place. Ellen brought him one of her dust-caps, and went into contortions of mirth, which she found it impossible to control, when she saw him put it on before the mirror as grotesquely as he could. Edna herself could not refrain from smiling when she fastened it at his request. So it was he who in turn mounted the ladder, unhooking pictures and curtains, and dislodging ornaments as Edna directed. When he had finished he took off his dust-cap and went out to wash his hands.

[29.10] Edna was sitting on the tabouret, idly

brushing the tips of a feather duster along the carpet when he came in again.

[29.11] "Is there anything more you will let me do?" he asked.

[29.12] "That is all," she answered. "Ellen can manage the rest." She kept the young woman occupied in the drawing-room, unwilling to be left alone with Arobin.

[29.13] "What about the dinner?" he asked; "the grand event, the *coup d'état*?"

[29.14] "It will be day after to-morrow. Why do you call it the '*coup d'état*?' Oh! it will be very fine; all my best of everything--crystal, silver and gold, Sevres, flowers, music, and champagne to swim in. I'll let Léonce pay the bills. I wonder what he'll say when he sees the bills.

[29.15] "And you ask me why I call it a *coup d'état*?" Arobin had put on his coat, and he stood before her and asked if his cravat was plumb. She told him it was, looking no higher than the tip of his collar.

[29.16] "When do you go to the 'pigeon house?'--with all due acknowledgment to Ellen."

[29.17] "Day after to-morrow, after the dinner. I shall sleep there."

[29.18] "Ellen, will you very kindly get me a glass of water?" asked Arobin. "The dust in the curtains, if you will pardon me for hinting such a thing, has parched my

throat to a crisp."

[29.19] "While Ellen gets the water," said Edna, rising, "I will say good-by and let you go. I must get rid of this grime, and I have a million things to do and think of."

[29.20] "When shall I see you?" asked Arobin, seeking to detain her, the maid having left the room.

[29.21] "At the dinner, of course. You are invited."

[29.22] "Not before?--not to-night or to-morrow morning or tomorrow noon or night? or the day after morning or noon? Can't you see yourself, without my telling you, what an eternity it is?"

[29.23] He had followed her into the hall and to the foot of the stairway, looking up at her as she mounted with her face half turned to him.

[29.24] "Not an instant sooner," she said. But she laughed and looked at him with eyes that at once gave him courage to wait and made it torture to wait.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 29:

[29.1] (Lippincott 2000): When Edna moves from the family's mansion to a small rental home of her own choosing, nesting behaviors begin, as in preparation for a literal birth

(62).

[29.8] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Edna quickly finds a home of her own (192).

[29.13 – 29.15] (Asbee 2001a): The extravagant dinner party Edna plans to celebrate her twenty-ninth birthday, and the notion that Léonce will finance the event, are equally ostentatious. The repeated use of the term “coup d’etat” in her conversation with Alcée perhaps indicates some subliminal misgivings that she is officially putting off the restrictions of marriage and motherhood to pursue a self-determined life (279-80).

CHAPTER 30

[30.1] Though Edna had spoken of the dinner as a very grand affair, it was in truth a very small affair and very select, in so much as the guests invited were few and were selected with discrimination. She had counted upon an even dozen seating themselves at her round mahogany board, forgetting for the moment that Madame Ratignolle was to the last degree *souffrante* and unrepresentable, and not foreseeing that Madame Lebrun would send a thousand regrets at the last moment. So there were only ten, after all, which made a cozy, comfortable number.

[30.2] There were Mr. and Mrs. Merriman, a pretty,

vivacious little woman in the thirties; her husband, a jovial fellow, something of a shallow-pate, who laughed a good deal at other people's witticisms, and had thereby made himself extremely popular. Mrs. Highcamp had accompanied them. Of course, there was Alcée Arobin; and Mademoiselle Reisz had consented to come. Edna had sent her a fresh bunch of violets with black lace trimmings for her hair. Monsieur Ratignolle brought himself and his wife's excuses. Victor Lebrun, who happened to be in the city, bent upon relaxation, had accepted with alacrity. There was a Miss Mayblunt, no longer in her teens, who looked at the world through lorgnettes and with the keenest interest. It was thought and said that she was intellectual; it was suspected of her that she wrote under a *nom de guerre*. She had come with a gentleman by the name of Gouvernail, connected with one of the daily papers, of whom nothing special could be said, except that he was observant and seemed quiet and inoffensive. Edna herself made the tenth, and at half-past eight they seated themselves at table, Arobin and Monsieur Ratignolle on either side of their hostess.

[30.3] Mrs. Highcamp sat between Arobin and Victor Lebrun. Then came Mrs. Merriman, Mr. Gouvernail, Miss Mayblunt, Mr. Merriman, and Mademoiselle Reisz next to Monsieur Ratignolle.

[30.4] There was something extremely gorgeous about the appearance of the table, an effect of splendor conveyed

by a cover of pale yellow satin under strips of lace-work. There were wax candles, in massive brass candelabra, burning softly under yellow silk shades; full, fragrant roses, yellow and red, abounded. There were silver and gold, as she had said there would be, and crystal which glittered like the gems which the women wore.

[30.5] The ordinary stiff dining chairs had been discarded for the occasion and replaced by the most commodious and luxurious which could be collected throughout the house. Mademoiselle Reisz, being exceedingly diminutive, was elevated upon cushions, as small children are sometimes hoisted at table upon bulky volumes.

[30.6] "Something new, Edna?" exclaimed Miss Mayblunt, with lorgnette directed toward a magnificent cluster of diamonds that sparkled, that almost sputtered, in Edna's hair, just over the center of her forehead.

[30.7] "Quite new; 'brand' new, in fact; a present from my husband. It arrived this morning from New York. I may as well admit that this is my birthday, and that I am twenty-nine. In good time I expect you to drink my health.

Meanwhile, I shall ask you to begin with this cocktail, composed--would you say 'composed?'" with an appeal to Miss Mayblunt--"composed by my father in honor of Sister Janet's wedding."

[30.8] Before each guest stood a tiny glass that looked and sparkled like a garnet gem.

[30.9] "Then, all things considered," spoke Arobin, "it might not be amiss to start out by drinking the Colonel's health in the cocktail which he composed, on the birthday of the most charming of women--the daughter whom he invented."

[30.10] Mr. Merriman's laugh at this sally was such a genuine outburst and so contagious that it started the dinner with an agreeable swing that never slackened.

[30.11] Miss Mayblunt begged to be allowed to keep her cocktail untouched before her, just to look at. The color was marvelous! She could compare it to nothing she had ever seen, and the garnet lights which it emitted were unspeakably rare. She pronounced the Colonel an artist, and stuck to it.

[30.12] Monsieur Ratignolle was prepared to take things seriously; the mets, the *entre-mets*, the service, the decorations, even the people. He looked up from his pompano and inquired of Arobin if he were related to the gentleman of that name who formed one of the firm of Laitner and Arobin, lawyers. The young man admitted that Laitner was a warm personal friend, who permitted Arobin's name to decorate the firm's letterheads and to appear upon a shingle that graced Perdido Street.

[30.13] "There are so many inquisitive people and institutions abounding," said Arobin, "that one is really forced as a matter of convenience these days to assume the

virtue of an occupation if he has it not."

[30.14] Monsieur Ratignolle stared a little, and turned to ask Mademoiselle Reisz if she considered the symphony concerts up to the standard which had been set the previous winter. Mademoiselle Reisz answered Monsieur Ratignolle in French, which Edna thought a little rude, under the circumstances, but characteristic. Mademoiselle had only disagreeable things to say of the symphony concerts, and insulting remarks to make of all the musicians of New Orleans, singly and collectively. All her interest seemed to be centered upon the delicacies placed before her.

[30.15] Mr. Merriman said that Mr. Arabin's remark about inquisitive people reminded him of a man from Waco the other day at the St. Charles Hotel--but as Mr. Merriman's stories were always lame and lacking point, his wife seldom permitted him to complete them. She interrupted him to ask if he remembered the name of the author whose book she had bought the week before to send to a friend in Geneva. She was talking "books" with Mr. Gouvernail and trying to draw from him his opinion upon current literary topics. Her husband told the story of the Waco man privately to Miss Mayblunt, who pretended to be greatly amused and to think it extremely clever.

[30.16] Mrs. Highcamp hung with languid but unaffected interest upon the warm and impetuous volubility of her left-hand neighbor, Victor Lebrun. Her attention was

never for a moment withdrawn from him after seating herself at table; and when he turned to Mrs. Merriman, who was prettier and more vivacious than Mrs. Highcamp, she waited with easy indifference for an opportunity to reclaim his attention. There was the occasional sound of music, of mandolins, sufficiently removed to be an agreeable accompaniment rather than an interruption to the conversation. Outside the soft, monotonous splash of a fountain could be heard; the sound penetrated into the room with the heavy odor of jessamine that came through the open windows.

[30.17] The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. There was a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders. It was the color of her skin, without the glow, the myriad living tints that one may sometimes discover in vibrant flesh. 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.

[30.18] 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. It was something which announced itself; a chill breath that seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords waited.

There came over her the acute longing which always summoned into her spiritual vision the presence of the beloved one, overpowering her at once with a sense of the unattainable.

[30.19] The moments glided on, while a feeling of good fellowship passed around the circle like a mystic cord, holding and binding these people together with jest and laughter. Monsieur Ratignolle was the first to break the pleasant charm. At ten o'clock he excused himself. Madame Ratignolle was waiting for him at home. She was *bien souffrante*, and she was filled with vague dread, which only her husband's presence could allay.

[30.20] Mademoiselle Reisz arose with Monsieur Ratignolle, who offered to escort her to the car. She had eaten well; she had tasted the good, rich wines, and they must have turned her head, for she bowed pleasantly to all as she withdrew from table. She kissed Edna upon the shoulder, and whispered: "*Bonne nuit, ma reine; soyez sage.*"

She had been a little bewildered upon rising, or rather, descending from her cushions, and Monsieur Ratignolle gallantly took her arm and led her away.

[30.21] Mrs. Highcamp was weaving a garland of roses, yellow and red. When she had finished the garland, she laid it lightly upon Victor's black curls. He was reclining far back in the luxurious chair, holding a glass of champagne to the light.

[30.22] As if a magician's wand had touched him, the

garland of roses transformed him into a vision of Oriental beauty. His cheeks were the color of crushed grapes, and his dusky eyes glowed with a languishing fire.

[30.23] "*Sapristi!*" exclaimed Arobin.

[30.24] But Mrs. Highcamp had one more touch to add to the picture. She took from the back of her chair a white silken scarf, with which she had covered her shoulders in the early part of the evening. She draped it across the boy in graceful folds, and in a way to conceal his black, conventional evening dress. He did not seem to mind what she did to him, only smiled, showing a faint gleam of white teeth, while he continued to gaze with narrowing eyes at the light through his glass of champagne.

[30.25] "Oh! to be able to paint in color rather than in words!" exclaimed Miss Mayblunt, losing herself in a rhapsodic dream as she looked at him,

"'There was a graven image of Desire
Painted with red blood on a ground of gold.'"

murmured Gouvernail, under his breath.

[30.26] The effect of the wine upon Victor was to change his accustomed volubility into silence. He seemed to have abandoned himself to a reverie, and to be seeing pleasing visions in the amber bead.

[30.27] "Sing," entreated Mrs. Highcamp. "Won't you

sing to us?"

[30.28] "Let him alone," said Arobin.

[30.29] "He's posing," offered Mr. Merriman; "let him have it out."

[30.30] "I believe he's paralyzed," laughed Mrs. Merriman. And leaning over the youth's chair, she took the glass from his hand and held it to his lips. He sipped the wine slowly, and when he had drained the glass she laid it upon the table and wiped his lips with her little filmy handkerchief.

[30.31] "Yes, I'll sing for you," he said, turning in his chair toward Mrs. Highcamp. He clasped his hands behind his head, and looking up at the ceiling began to hum a little, trying his voice like a musician tuning an instrument. Then, looking at Edna, he began to sing:

"Ah! si tu savais!"

[30.32] "Stop!" she cried, "don't sing that. I don't want you to sing it," and she laid her glass so impetuously and blindly upon the table as to shatter it against a carafe. The wine spilled over Arobin's legs and some of it trickled down upon Mrs. Highcamp's black gauze gown. Victor had lost all idea of courtesy, or else he thought his hostess was not in earnest, for he laughed and went on:

"Ah! si tu savais

Ce que tes yeux me disent"--

[30.33] "Oh! you mustn't! you mustn't," exclaimed Edna, and pushing back her chair she got up, and going behind him placed her hand over his mouth. He kissed the soft palm that pressed upon his lips.

[30.34] "No, no, I won't, Mrs. Pontellier. I didn't know you meant it," looking up at her with caressing eyes. The touch of his lips was like a pleasing sting to her hand. She lifted the garland of roses from his head and flung it across the room.

[30.35] "Come, Victor; you've posed long enough. Give Mrs. Highcamp her scarf."

[30.36] Mrs. Highcamp undraped the scarf from about him with her own hands. Miss Mayblunt and Mr. Gouvernail suddenly conceived the notion that it was time to say good night. And Mr. and Mrs. Merriman wondered how it could be so late.

[30.37] Before parting from Victor, Mrs. Highcamp invited him to call upon her daughter, who she knew would be charmed to meet him and talk French and sing French songs with him. Victor expressed his desire and intention to call upon Miss Highcamp at the first opportunity which presented itself. He asked if Arobin were going his way. Arobin was not.

[30.38] The mandolin players had long since stolen away. A profound stillness had fallen upon the broad, beautiful street. The voices of Edna's disbanding guests jarred like a discordant note upon the quiet harmony of the night.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 30:

[30.1] (Lippincott 2000): (59).

[30.2] (Asbee 2001a): Miss Mayblunt represents the "new woman": she is intellectual, romantically unattached, and, some would say, peculiar (281).

[30.2] (Martin-Gonzalez 2001): (278).

[30.4] (Asbee 2001a): Though Chopin links the elements of food and erotic desire frequently in *The Awakening*, the setting rather than the food plays center stage in the description of Edna's birthday dinner (280).

[30.4] (McGee 2000): Much like a painting, Edna's dinner party is described in vivid detail, marking the close of her life as a woman of society and the beginning of her

greatest work of art: an independent life. Paradoxically, the party, in its lavishness, seems to symbolize the kind of life Edna has chosen to abandon (49-50).

[30.4-30.5, 30.14] (Bunch 2001-2): Throwing an elaborate feast to celebrate her birthday, Edna furnishes the dining room with extravagance and sensual titillation in mind (56).

[30.8] (Bunch 2001-2): Alcée aids in Edna's violation of her father's authority, her husband's authority, and her marriage vows when he toasts the Colonel using the very cocktail Edna's father created for her sister's wedding. Alcée freely partakes of the Colonel's and Leonce's privileges, including Edna herself (56-57).

[30.14] (McGee 2000): The infrequency of creature comforts in Mademoiselle Reisz's life is made evident by her reaction to the food at Edna's party (49).

[30.17] (McGee 2000): With Edna's self-declared independence comes feelings of anxiety about the future and a general sense of disappointment (50).

[30.17] (Bunch 2001-2): Alcée's toast marks Edna's shift from object to be bestowed to bestower; she alone offers her body to another (57).

[30.18] (Asbee 2001a): Edna's gloom may stem from Robert's absence or simply

represent the spirit of the end of the century (283).

[30.19, 38.8] (Lippincott 2000): Edna mirrors Adele's labor emotionally, experiencing fear, anxiety, and racing thoughts (63).

[30.21 – 30.22] (Asbee 2001a): Gouvernail quotes poet Algernon Swinburne, a leader in the fin de siècle aesthetic movement, while gazing at Victor crowned with roses – a subtle reference to “decadent” homosexuality (282).

[30.24] (Asbee 2001a): Gouvernail quotes the opening two lines of Algernon Swinburne's sonnet “A Cameo” while observing Victor's transformation into an androgynous, seductive, Bacchus-like figure as the evening progresses (282).

[30.34] (Asbee 2001a): Death and seduction linger heavily in the imagery of the dinner party (282).

CHAPTER 31

[31.1] “Well?” questioned Arabin, who had remained with Edna after the others had departed.

[31.2] “Well,” she reiterated, and stood up,

stretching her arms, and feeling the need to relax her muscles after having been so long seated.

[31.3] "What next?" he asked.

[31.4] "The servants are all gone. They left when the musicians did. I have dismissed them. The house has to be closed and locked, and I shall trot around to the pigeon house, and shall send Celestine over in the morning to straighten things up."

[31.5] He looked around, and began to turn out some of the lights.

[31.6] "What about upstairs?" he inquired.

[31.7] "I think it is all right; but there may be a window or two unlatched. We had better look; you might take a candle and see. And bring me my wrap and hat on the foot of the bed in the middle room."

[31.8] He went up with the light, and Edna began closing doors and windows. She hated to shut in the smoke and the fumes of the wine. Arabin found her cape and hat, which he brought down and helped her to put on.

[31.9] When everything was secured and the lights put out, they left through the front door, Arabin locking it and taking the key, which he carried for Edna. He helped her down the steps.

[31.10] "Will you have a spray of jessamine?" he asked, breaking off a few blossoms as he passed.

[31.11] "No; I don't want anything."

[31.12] She seemed disheartened, and had nothing to say. She took his arm, which he offered her, holding up the weight of her satin train with the other hand. She looked down, noticing the black line of his leg moving in and out so close to her against the yellow shimmer of her gown. There was the whistle of a railway train somewhere in the distance, and the midnight bells were ringing. They met no one in their short walk.

[31.13] The "pigeon house" stood behind a locked gate, and a shallow *parterre* that had been somewhat neglected. There was a small front porch, upon which a long window and the front door opened. The door opened directly into the parlor; there was no side entry. Back in the yard was a room for servants, in which old Celestine had been ensconced.

[31.14] Edna had left a lamp burning low upon the table. She had succeeded in making the room look habitable and homelike. There were some books on the table and a lounge near at hand. On the floor was a fresh matting, covered with a rug or two; and on the walls hung a few tasteful pictures. But the room was filled with flowers. These were a surprise to her. Arabin had sent them, and had had Celestine distribute them during Edna's absence. Her bedroom was adjoining, and across a small passage were the diningroom and kitchen.

[31.15] Edna seated herself with every appearance of

discomfort.

[31.16] "Are you tired?" he asked.

[31.17] "Yes, and chilled, and miserable. I feel as if I had been wound up to a certain pitch--too tight--and something inside of me had snapped." She rested her head against the table upon her bare arm.

[31.18] "You want to rest," he said, "and to be quiet. I'll go; I'll leave you and let you rest."

[31.19] "Yes," she replied.

[31.20] He stood up beside her and smoothed her hair with his soft, magnetic hand. His touch conveyed to her a certain physical comfort. She could have fallen quietly asleep there if he had continued to pass his hand over her hair. He brushed the hair upward from the nape of her neck.

[31.21] "I hope you will feel better and happier in the morning," he said. "You have tried to do too much in the past few days. The dinner was the last straw; you might have dispensed with it."

[31.22] "Yes," she admitted; "it was stupid."

[31.23] "No, it was delightful; but it has worn you out." His hand had strayed to her beautiful shoulders, and he could feel the response of her flesh to his touch. He seated himself beside her and kissed her lightly upon the shoulder.

[31.24] "I thought you were going away," she said, in an uneven voice.

[31.25] "I am, after I have said good night."

[31.26] "Good night," she murmured.

[31.27] He did not answer, except to continue to caress her. He did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 31:

[31.12] (McGee 2000): Though Edna's station in society and home have changed, allowing greater sexual freedom, her use of sexuality as a source of power has not. After the party, Edna wishes for solitude, but instead involves herself in a highly charged sensual interplay with Alcee Arobin. From this night on, all Edna's liaisons are associated with intimate dinners, though none provide gratification (50).

[27.20, 28.1, 31.27] (Rich 2003): *The Awakening* contains erotic descriptions of Edna's adulterous liaisons, which led reviewers of Chopin's day to label the novel explicitly sexual. In this respect as in others, Chopin's writing resembles that of George Egerton (129).

CHAPTER 32

[32.1] When Mr. Pontellier learned of his wife's intention to abandon her home and take up her residence elsewhere, he immediately wrote her a letter of unqualified disapproval and remonstrance. She had given reasons which he was unwilling to acknowledge as adequate. He hoped she had not acted upon her rash impulse; and he begged her to consider first, foremost, and above all else, what people would say. He was not dreaming of scandal when he uttered this warning; that was a thing which would never have entered into his mind to consider in connection with his wife's name or his own. He was simply thinking of his financial integrity. It might get noised about that the Pontelliers had met with reverses, and were forced to conduct their *ménage* on a humbler scale than heretofore. It might do incalculable mischief to his business prospects.

[32.2] But remembering Edna's whimsical turn of mind of late, and foreseeing that she had immediately acted upon her impetuous determination, he grasped the situation with his usual promptness and handled it with his well-known business tact and cleverness.

[32.3] The same mail which brought to Edna his letter of disapproval carried instructions--the most minute instructions--to a well-known architect concerning the remodeling of his home, changes which he had long

contemplated, and which he desired carried forward during his temporary absence.

[32.4] Expert and reliable packers and movers were engaged to convey the furniture, carpets, pictures --everything movable, in short--to places of security. And in an incredibly short time the Pontellier house was turned over to the artisans. There was to be an addition--a small snugger; there was to be frescoing, and hardwood flooring was to be put into such rooms as had not yet been subjected to this improvement.

[32.5] Furthermore, in one of the daily papers appeared a brief notice to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier were contemplating a summer sojourn abroad, and that their handsome residence on Esplanade Street was undergoing sumptuous alterations, and would not be ready for occupancy until their return. Mr. Pontellier had saved appearances!

[32.6] Edna admired the skill of his maneuver, and avoided any occasion to balk his intentions. When the situation as set forth by Mr. Pontellier was accepted and taken for granted, she was apparently satisfied that it should be so.

[32.7] 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.

[32.8] After a little while, a few days, in fact, Edna went up and spent a week with her children in Iberville. They were delicious February days, with all the summer's promise hovering in the air.

[32.9] How glad she was to see the children! She wept for very pleasure when she felt their little arms clasping her; their hard, ruddy cheeks pressed against her own glowing cheeks. She looked into their faces with hungry eyes that could not be satisfied with looking. And what stories they had to tell their mother! About the pigs, the cows, the mules! About riding to the mill behind Gluglu; fishing back in the lake with their Uncle Jasper; picking pecans with Lidie's little black brood, and hauling chips in their express wagon. It was a thousand times more fun to haul real chips for old lame Susie's real fire than to drag painted blocks along the banquette on Esplanade Street!

[32.10] She went with them herself to see the pigs and the cows, to look at the darkies laying the cane, to thrash the pecan trees, and catch fish in the back lake.

She lived with them a whole week long, giving them all of herself, and gathering and filling herself with their young existence. They listened, breathless, when she told them the house in Esplanade Street was crowded with workmen, hammering, nailing, sawing, and filling the place with clatter. They wanted to know where their bed was; what had been done with their rocking-horse; and where did Joe sleep, and where had Ellen gone, and the cook? But, above all, they were fired with a desire to see the little house around the block. Was there any place to play? Were there any boys next door? Raoul, with pessimistic foreboding, was convinced that there were only girls next door. Where would they sleep, and where would papa sleep? She told them the fairies would fix it all right.

[32.11] The old Madame was charmed with Edna's visit, and showered all manner of delicate attentions upon her. She was delighted to know that the Esplanade Street house was in a dismantled condition. It gave her the promise and pretext to keep the children indefinitely.

[32.12] It was with a wrench and a pang that Edna left her children. She carried away with her the sound of their voices and the touch of their cheeks. All along the journey homeward their presence lingered with her like the memory of a delicious song. But by the time she had regained the city the song no longer echoed in her soul. She was again alone.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 32:

[32.1] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Léonce's letter bears no weight in Edna's decision to rent a home of her own (192).

[32.5] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): There is no mention of Léonce's cigar in this heated encounter (192).

[32.6] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Though Léonce's phallic power no longer sways Edna, she concedes to his public explanation of her relocation – that the family home is undergoing renovation (192).

[32.7] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna's decision to move from the elaborate family home she shared with Léonce and her sons to the pigeon house, simplifying both its furnishings and her wardrobe, is made in order to maximize her focus on sensual stimulation rather than to economize (57).

[32.9] (Pizer 2001): Though her children and husband are away, Edna cannot fully separate herself from her role as mother to pursue a self-determined life (8).

CHAPTER 33

[33.1] It happened sometimes when Edna went to see Mademoiselle Reisz that the little musician was absent, giving a lesson or making some small necessary household purchase. The key was always left in a secret hiding-place in the entry, which Edna knew. If Mademoiselle happened to be away, Edna would usually enter and wait for her return.

[33.2] when she knocked at Mademoiselle Reisz's door one afternoon there was no response; so unlocking the door, as usual, she entered and found the apartment deserted, as she had expected. Her day had been quite filled up, and it was for a rest, for a refuge, and to talk about Robert, that she sought out her friend.

[33.3] She had worked at her canvas--a young Italian character study--all the morning, completing the work without the model; but there had been many interruptions, some incident to her modest housekeeping, and others of a social nature.

[33.4] Madame Ratignolle had dragged herself over, avoiding the too public thoroughfares, she said. She complained that Edna had neglected her much of late. Besides, she was consumed with curiosity to see the little house and the manner in which it was conducted. She wanted to hear all about the dinner party; Monsieur Ratignolle had left so early. What had happened after he left? The

champagne and grapes which Edna sent over were *too* delicious. She had so little appetite; they had refreshed and toned her stomach. Where on earth was she going to put Mr. Pontellier in that little house, and the boys? And then she made Edna promise to go to her when her hour of trial overtook her.

[33.5] "At any time--any time of the day or night, dear," Edna assured her.

[33.6] Before leaving Madame Ratignolle said:

[33.7] "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. That is the reason I want to say you mustn't mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living here alone. Why don't you have some one come and stay with you? Wouldn't Mademoiselle Reisz come?"

[33.8] "No; she wouldn't wish to come, and I shouldn't want her always with me."

[33.9] "Well, the reason--you know how evil-minded the world is--some one was talking of Alcée Arobin visiting you. Of course, it wouldn't matter if Mr. Arobin had not such a dreadful reputation. Monsieur Ratignolle was telling me that his attentions alone are considered enough to ruin a woman's name."

[33.10] "Does he boast of his successes?" asked Edna, indifferently, squinting at her picture.

[33.11] "No, I think not. I believe he is a decent fellow as far as that goes. But his character is so well known among the men. I shan't be able to come back and see you; it was very, very imprudent to-day."

[33.12] "Mind the step!" cried Edna.

[33.13] "Don't neglect me," entreated Madame Ratignolle; "and don't mind what I said about Arobin, or having some one to stay with you."

[33.14] "Of course not," Edna laughed. "You may say anything you like to me." They kissed each other good-by. Madame Ratignolle had not far to go, and Edna stood on the porch a while watching her walk down the street.

[33.15] Then in the afternoon Mrs. Merriman and Mrs. Highcamp had made their "party call." Edna felt that they might have dispensed with the formality. They had also come to invite her to play *vingt-et-un* one evening at Mrs. Merriman's. She was asked to go early, to dinner, and Mr. Merriman or Mr. Arobin would take her home. Edna accepted in a half-hearted way. She sometimes felt very tired of Mrs. Highcamp and Mrs. Merriman.

[33.16] Late in the afternoon she sought refuge with Mademoiselle Reisz, and stayed there alone, waiting for her, feeling a kind of repose invade her with the very atmosphere of the shabby, unpretentious little room.

[33.17] Edna sat at the window, which looked out over the house-tops and across the river. The window frame was

filled with pots of flowers, and she sat and picked the dry leaves from a rose geranium. The day was warm, and the breeze which blew from the river was very pleasant. She removed her hat and laid it on the piano. She went on picking the leaves and digging around the plants with her hat pin. Once she thought she heard Mademoiselle Reisz approaching. But it was a young black girl, who came in, bringing a small bundle of laundry, which she deposited in the adjoining room, and went away.

[33.18] Edna seated herself at the piano, and softly picked out with one hand the bars of a piece of music which lay open before her. A half-hour went by. There was the occasional sound of people going and coming in the lower hall. She was growing interested in her occupation of picking out the aria, when there was a second rap at the door. She vaguely wondered what these people did when they found Mademoiselle's door locked.

[33.19] "Come in," she called, turning her face toward the door. And this time it was Robert Lebrun who presented himself. She attempted to rise; she could not have done so without betraying the agitation which mastered her at sight of him, so she fell back upon the stool, only exclaiming, "Why, Robert!"

[33.20] He came and clasped her hand, seemingly without knowing what he was saying or doing.

[33.21] "Mrs. Pontellier! How do you happen--oh! how

well you look! Is Mademoiselle Reisz not here? I never expected to see you."

[33.22] "When did you come back?" asked Edna in an unsteady voice, wiping her face with her handkerchief. She seemed ill at ease on the piano stool, and he begged her to take the chair by the window. She did so, mechanically, while he seated himself on the stool.

[33.23] "I returned day before yesterday," he answered, while he leaned his arm on the keys, bringing forth a crash of discordant sound.

[33.24] "Day before yesterday!" she repeated, aloud; and went on thinking to herself, "day before yesterday," in a sort of an uncomprehending way. She had pictured him seeking her at the very first hour, and he had lived under the same sky since day before yesterday; while only by accident had he stumbled upon her. Mademoiselle must have lied when she said, "Poor fool, he loves you."

[33.25] "Day before yesterday," she repeated, breaking off a spray of Mademoiselle's geranium; "then if you had not met me here to-day you wouldn't--when--that is, didn't you mean to come and see me?"

[33.26] "Of course, I should have gone to see you. There have been so many things--" he turned the leaves of Mademoiselle's music nervously. "I started in at once yesterday with the old firm. After all there is as much chance for me here as there was there--that is, I might find

it profitable some day. The Mexicans were not very congenial."

[33.27] So he had come back because the Mexicans were not congenial; because business was as profitable here as there; because of any reason, and not because he cared to be near her. She remembered the day she sat on the floor, turning the pages of his letter, seeking the reason which was left untold.

[33.28] She had not noticed how he looked--only feeling his presence; but she turned deliberately and observed him. After all, he had been absent but a few months, and was not changed. His hair--the color of hers--waved back from his temples in the same way as before.

His skin was not more burned than it had been at Grand Isle. She found in his eyes, when he looked at her for one silent moment, the same tender caress, with an added warmth and entreaty which had not been there before the same glance which had penetrated to the sleeping places of her soul and awakened them.

[33.29] A hundred times Edna had pictured Robert's return, and imagined their first meeting. It was usually at her home, whither he had sought her out at once. She always fancied him expressing or betraying in some way his love for her. And here, the reality was that they sat ten feet apart, she at the window, crushing geranium leaves in her hand and smelling them, he twirling around on the piano

stool, saying:

[33.30] "I was very much surprised to hear of Mr. Pontellier's absence; it's a wonder Mademoiselle Reisz did not tell me; and your moving--mother told me yesterday. I should think you would have gone to New York with him, or to Iberville with the children, rather than be bothered here with housekeeping. And you are going abroad, too, I hear. We shan't have you at Grand Isle next summer; it won't seem--do you see much of Mademoiselle Reisz? She often spoke of you in the few letters she wrote."

[33.31] "Do you remember that you promised to write to me when you went away?" A flush overspread his whole face.

[33.32] "I couldn't believe that my letters would be of any interest to you."

[33.33] "That is an excuse; it isn't the truth." Edna reached for her hat on the piano. She adjusted it, sticking the hat pin through the heavy coil of hair with some deliberation.

[33.34] "Are you not going to wait for Mademoiselle Reisz?" asked Robert.

[33.35] "No; I have found when she is absent this long, she is liable not to come back till late." She drew on her gloves, and Robert picked up his hat.

[33.36] "Won't you wait for her?" asked Edna.

[33.37] "Not if you think she will not be back till

late," adding, as if suddenly aware of some discourtesy in his speech, "and I should miss the pleasure of walking home with you." Edna locked the door and put the key back in its hiding-place.

[33.38] They went together, picking their way across muddy streets and sidewalks encumbered with the cheap display of small tradesmen. Part of the distance they rode in the car, and after disembarking, passed the Pontellier mansion, which looked broken and half torn asunder. Robert had never known the house, and looked at it with interest.

[33.39] "I never knew you in your home," he remarked.

[33.40] "I am glad you did not."

[33.41] "why?" She did not answer. They went on around the corner, and it seemed as if her dreams were coming true after all, when he followed her into the little house.

[33.42] "You must stay and dine with me, Robert. You see I am all alone, and it is so long since I have seen you. There is so much I want to ask you."

[33.43] She took off her hat and gloves. He stood irresolute, making some excuse about his mother who expected him; he even muttered something about an engagement. She struck a match and lit the lamp on the table; it was growing dusk. When he saw her face in the lamp-light, looking pained, with all the soft lines gone out of it, he threw his hat aside and seated himself.

[33.44] "Oh! you know I want to stay if you will let me!" he exclaimed. All the softness came back. She laughed, and went and put her hand on his shoulder.

[33.45] "This is the first moment you have seemed like the old Robert. I'll go tell Celestine." She hurried away to tell Celestine to set an extra place. She even sent her off in search of some added delicacy which she had not thought of for herself. And she recommended great care in dripping the coffee and having the omelet done to a proper turn.

[33.46] When she reentered, Robert was turning over magazines, sketches, and things that lay upon the table in great disorder. He picked up a photograph, and exclaimed:

[33.47] "Alcée Arobin! what on earth is his picture doing here?"

[33.48] "I tried to make a sketch of his head one day," answered Edna, "and he thought the photograph might help me. It was at the other house. I thought it had been left there. I must have packed it up with my drawing materials."

[33.49] "I should think you would give it back to him if you have finished with it."

[33.50] "Oh! I have a great many such photographs. I never think of returning them. They don't amount to anything." Robert kept on looking at the picture.

[33.51] "It seems to me--do you think his head worth

drawing? Is he a friend of Mr. Pontellier's? You never said you knew him."

[33.52] "He isn't a friend of Mr. Pontellier's; he's a friend of mine. I always knew him--that is, it is only of late that I know him pretty well. But I'd rather talk about you, and know what you have been seeing and doing and feeling out there in Mexico." Robert threw aside the picture.

[33.53] "I've been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle; the quiet, grassy street of the *Chênière*; the old fort at Grande Terre. I've been working like a machine, and feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting."

[33.54] She leaned her head upon her hand to shade her eyes from the light.

[33.55] "And what have you been seeing and doing and feeling all these days?" he asked.

[33.56] "I've been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle; the quiet, grassy street of the *Chênière Caminada*; the old sunny fort at Grande Terre. I've been working with a little more comprehension than a machine, and still feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting."

[33.57] "Mrs. Pontellier, you are cruel," he said, with feeling, closing his eyes and resting his head back in his chair. They remained in silence till old Celestine

announced dinner.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 33:

[33.4] (Lippincott 2000): As their pregnancies progress, Adèle becomes increasingly sensitive to food, while Edna increasingly enjoys both food and drink (59).

[33.28] (Barrish 2000): That Robert's time in Mexico would transform his sexual persona reinforces a long-held belief that boys return from Mexico as men (69).

CHAPTER 34

[34.1] The dining-room was very small. Edna's round mahogany would have almost filled it. As it was there was but a step or two from the little table to the kitchen, to the mantel, the small buffet, and the side door that opened out on the narrow brick-paved yard.

[34.2] A certain degree of ceremony settled upon them with the announcement of dinner. There was no return to personalities. Robert related incidents of his sojourn in Mexico, and Edna talked of events likely to interest him,

which had occurred during his absence. The dinner was of ordinary quality, except for the few delicacies which she had sent out to purchase. Old Celestine, with a bandana *tignon* twisted about her head, hobbled in and out, taking a personal interest in everything; and she lingered occasionally to talk patois with Robert, whom she had known as a boy.

[34.3] He went out to a neighboring cigar stand to purchase cigarette papers, and when he came back he found that Celestine had served the black coffee in the parlor.

[34.4] "Perhaps I shouldn't have come back," he said. "When you are tired of me, tell me to go."

[34.5] "You never tire me. You must have forgotten the hours and hours at Grand Isle in which we grew accustomed to each other and used to being together."

[34.6] "I have forgotten nothing at Grand Isle," he said, not looking at her, but rolling a cigarette. His tobacco pouch, which he laid upon the table, was a fantastic embroidered silk affair, evidently the handiwork of a woman.

[34.7] "You used to carry your tobacco in a rubber pouch," said Edna, picking up the pouch and examining the needlework.

[34.8] "Yes; it was lost."

[34.9] "Where did you buy this one? In Mexico?"

[34.10] "It was given to me by a Vera Cruz girl; they are very generous," he replied, striking a match and

lighting his cigarette.

[34.11] "They are very handsome, I suppose, those Mexican women; very picturesque, with their black eyes and their lace scarfs."

[34.12] "Some are; others are hideous. just as you find women everywhere."

[34.13] "what was she like--the one who gave you the pouch? You must have known her very well."

[34.14] "She was very ordinary. She wasn't of the slightest importance. I knew her well enough."

[34.15] "Did you visit at her house? Was it interesting? I should like to know and hear about the people you met, and the impressions they made on you."

[34.16] "There are some people who leave impressions not so lasting as the imprint of an oar upon the water."

[34.17] "Was she such a one?"

[34.18] "It would be ungenerous for me to admit that she was of that order and kind." He thrust the pouch back in his pocket, as if to put away the subject with the trifle which had brought it up.

[34.19] Arobin dropped in with a message from Mrs. Merriman, to say that the card party was postponed on account of the illness of one of her children.

[34.20] "How do you do, Arobin?" said Robert, rising from the obscurity.

[34.21] "Oh! Lebrun. To be sure! I heard yesterday

you were back. How did they treat you down in Mexique?"

[34.22] "Fairly well."

[34.23] "But not well enough to keep you there. Stunning girls, though, in Mexico. I thought I should never get away from Vera Cruz when I was down there a couple of years ago."

[34.24] "Did they embroider slippers and tobacco pouches and hat-bands and things for you?" asked Edna.

[34.25] "Oh! my! no! I didn't get so deep in their regard. I fear they made more impression on me than I made on them."

[34.26] "You were less fortunate than Robert, then."

[34.27] "I am always less fortunate than Robert. Has he been imparting tender confidences?"

[34.28] "I've been imposing myself long enough," said Robert, rising, and shaking hands with Edna. "Please convey my regards to Mr. Pontellier when you write."

[34.29] He shook hands with Arobin and went away.

[34.30] "Fine fellow, that Lebrun," said Arobin when Robert had gone. "I never heard you speak of him."

[34.31] "I knew him last summer at Grand Isle," she replied. "Here is that photograph of yours. Don't you want it?"

[34.32] "What do I want with it? Throw it away." She threw it back on the table.

[34.33] "I'm not going to Mrs. Merriman's," she said.

"If you see her, tell her so. But perhaps I had better write. I think I shall write now, and say that I am sorry her child is sick, and tell her not to count on me."

[34.34] "It would be a good scheme," acquiesced Arobin. "I don't blame you; stupid lot!"

[34.35] Edna opened the blotter, and having procured paper and pen, began to write the note. Arobin lit a cigar and read the evening paper, which he had in his pocket.

[34.36] "What is the date?" she asked. He told her.

[34.37] "Will you mail this for me when you go out?"

[34.38] "Certainly." He read to her little bits out of the newspaper, while she straightened things on the table.

[34.39] "What do you want to do?" he asked, throwing aside the paper. "Do you want to go out for a walk or a drive or anything? It would be a fine night to drive."

[34.40] "No; I don't want to do anything but just be quiet. You go away and amuse yourself. Don't stay."

[34.41] "I'll go away if I must; but I shan't amuse myself. You know that I only live when I am near you."

[34.42] He stood up to bid her good night.

[34.43] "Is that one of the things you always say to women?"

[34.44] "I have said it before, but I don't think I ever came so near meaning it," he answered with a smile. There were no warm lights in her eyes; only a dreamy, absent

look.

[34.45] "Good night. I adore you. Sleep well," he said, and he kissed her hand and went away.

[34.46] She stayed alone in a kind of reverie--a sort of stupor. Step by step she lived over every instant of the time she had been with Robert after he had entered Mademoiselle Reisz's door. She recalled his words, his looks. How few and meager they had been for her hungry heart! A vision--a transcendently seductive vision of a Mexican girl arose before her. She writhed with a jealous pang. She wondered when he would come back. He had not said he would come back. She had been with him, had heard his voice and touched his hand. But some way he had seemed nearer to her off there in Mexico.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 34:

[34.1 – 34.2] (McGee 2000): A dinner with Robert, described in Chapter 34, is unimpressive, lacking both intimacy and real openness (50).

[34.23, 34.25] (Barrish 2000): Prior to Robert's trip to Mexico, he had expressed envy at Alcée Arobin's obvious effect on women. Returning to New Orleans, Robert becomes

the object of Alcée's envy: Alcée notes that a girl from Vera Cruz had given Robert a silk pouch, a blatant reference to Robert's sexual conquests while in Mexico (71).

[34.46] (Barrish 2000): While planning her seduction of Robert, Edna imagines a love triangle involving a Mexican girl Robert may have met while away from Louisiana, further raising his status as a knowledgeable and desirable sexual partner and Edna's determination to have him as her own (68-69).

CHAPTER 35

[35.1] The morning was full of sunlight and hope. Edna could see before her no denial--only the promise of excessive joy. She lay in bed awake, with bright eyes full of speculation. "He loves you, poor fool." If she could but get that conviction firmly fixed in her mind, what mattered about the rest? 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. She pictured him going to his business that morning. She even saw how he was dressed; how he walked down one street, and

turned the corner of another; saw him bending over his desk, talking to people who entered the office, going to his lunch, and perhaps watching for her on the street. He would come to her in the afternoon or evening, sit and roll his cigarette, talk a little, and go away as he had done the night before. 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.

[35.2] Edna ate her breakfast only half dressed. The maid brought her a delicious printed scrawl from Raoul, expressing his love, asking her to send him some bonbons, and telling her they had found that morning ten tiny white pigs all lying in a row beside Lidie's big white pig.

[35.3] A letter also came from her husband, saying he hoped to be back early in March, and then they would get ready for that journey abroad which he had promised her so long, which he felt now fully able to afford; he felt able to travel as people should, without any thought of small economies--thanks to his recent speculations in Wall Street.

[35.4] Much to her surprise she received a note from Arobin, written at midnight from the club. It was to say good morning to her, to hope she had slept well, to assure her of his devotion, which he trusted she in some faintest manner returned.

[35.5] All these letters were pleasing to her. She answered the children in a cheerful frame of mind, promising

them bonbons, and congratulating them upon their happy find of the little pigs.

[35.6] She answered her husband with friendly evasiveness,--not with any fixed design to mislead him, only because all sense of reality had gone out of her life; she had abandoned herself to Fate, and awaited the consequences with indifference.

[35.7] To Arobin's note she made no reply. She put it under Celestine's stove-lid.

[35.8] Edna worked several hours with much spirit. She saw no one but a picture dealer, who asked her if it were true that she was going abroad to study in Paris.

[35.9] She said possibly she might, and he negotiated with her for some Parisian studies to reach him in time for the holiday trade in December.

[35.10] Robert did not come that day. She was keenly disappointed. He did not come the following day, nor the next. Each morning she awoke with hope, and each night she was a prey to despondency. She was tempted to seek him out.

But far from yielding to the impulse, she avoided any occasion which might throw her in his way. She did not go to Mademoiselle Reisz's nor pass by Madame Lebrun's, as she might have done if he had still been in Mexico.

[35.11] When Arobin, one night, urged her to drive with him, she went--out to the lake, on the Shell Road. His horses were full of mettle, and even a little unmanageable.

She liked the rapid gait at which they spun along, and the quick, sharp sound of the horses' hoofs on the hard road. They did not stop anywhere to eat or to drink. Arobin was not needlessly imprudent. But they ate and they drank when they regained Edna's little dining-room--which was comparatively early in the evening.

[35.12] It was late when he left her. It was getting to be more than a passing whim with Arobin to see her and be with her. He had detected the latent sensuality, which unfolded under his delicate sense of her nature's requirements like a torpid, torrid, sensitive blossom.

[35.13] There was no despondency when she fell asleep that night; nor was there hope when she awoke in the morning.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 35:

[35.1] (Asbee 2001b): Edna realizes that love and sex are not codependent, yet one without the other leads to emotional alienation (257).

[35.9] (McGee 2000): Because of her increased practice Edna's paintings draw the interest of buyers and an art dealer who commissions her work when she tells him she

plans to go on an anticipated study trip to Paris (49).

[35.13] (McGee 2000): Edna's liaison with Arobin is growing less and less exciting, reflecting her general attitude toward her newly acquired independence (50-51).

CHAPTER 36

[36.1] There was a garden out in the suburbs; a small, leafy corner, with a few green tables under the orange trees. An old cat slept all day on the stone step in the sun, and an old *mulatresse* slept her idle hours away in her chair at the open window, till, some one happened to knock on one of the green tables. She had milk and cream cheese to sell, and bread and butter. There was no one who could make such excellent coffee or fry a chicken so golden brown as she.

[36.2] The place was too modest to attract the attention of people of fashion, and so quiet as to have escaped the notice of those in search of pleasure and dissipation. Edna had discovered it accidentally one day when the high-board gate stood ajar. She caught sight of a little green table, blotched with the checkered sunlight that filtered through the quivering leaves overhead. within

she had found the slumbering *mulatresse*, the drowsy cat, and a glass of milk which reminded her of the milk she had tasted in Iberville.

[36.3] She often stopped there during her perambulations; sometimes taking a book with her, and sitting an hour or two under the trees when she found the place deserted. Once or twice she took a quiet dinner there alone, having instructed Celestine beforehand to prepare no dinner at home. It was the last place in the city where she would have expected to meet any one she knew.

[36.4] Still she was not astonished when, as she was partaking of a modest dinner late in the afternoon, looking into an open book, stroking the cat, which had made friends with her--she was not greatly astonished to see Robert come in at the tall garden gate.

[36.5] "I am destined to see you only by accident," she said, shoving the cat off the chair beside her. He was surprised, ill at ease, almost embarrassed at meeting her thus so unexpectedly.

[36.6] "Do you come here often?" he asked.

[36.7] "I almost live here," she said.

[36.8] "I used to drop in very often for a cup of Catiche's good coffee. This is the first time since I came back."

[36.9] "She'll bring you a plate, and you will share my dinner. There's always enough for two--even three." Edna

had intended to be indifferent and as reserved as he when she met him; she had reached the determination by a laborious train of reasoning, incident to one of her despondent moods. But her resolve melted when she saw him before designing Providence had led him into her path.

[36.10] "Why have you kept away from me, Robert?" she asked, closing the book that lay open upon the table.

[36.11] "Why are you so personal, Mrs. Pontellier? Why do you force me to idiotic subterfuges?" he exclaimed with sudden warmth. "I suppose there's no use telling you I've been very busy, or that I've been sick, or that I've been to see you and not found you at home. Please let me off with any one of these excuses."

[36.12] "You are the embodiment of selfishness," she said. "You save yourself something--I don't know what--but there is some selfish motive, and in sparing yourself you never consider for a moment what I think, or how I feel your neglect and indifference. I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into a habit of expressing myself. It doesn't matter to me, and you may think me unwomanly if you like."

[36.13] "No; I only think you cruel, as I said the other day. Maybe not intentionally cruel; but you seem to be forcing me into disclosures which can result in nothing; as if you would have me bare a wound for the pleasure of looking at it, without the intention or power of healing

it."

[36.14] "I'm spoiling your dinner, Robert; never mind what I say. You haven't eaten a morsel."

[36.15] "I only came in for a cup of coffee." His sensitive face was all disfigured with excitement.

[36.16] "Isn't this a delightful place?" she remarked. "I am so glad it has never actually been discovered. It is so quiet, so sweet, here. Do you notice there is scarcely a sound to be heard? It's so out of the way; and a good walk from the car. However, I don't mind walking. 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.

[36.17] "Catiche's coffee is always hot. I don't know how she manages it, here in the open air. Celestine's coffee gets cold bringing it from the kitchen to the dining-room. Three lumps! How can you drink it so sweet? Take some of the cress with your chop; it's so biting and crisp. Then there's the advantage of being able to smoke with your coffee out here. Now, in the city--aren't you going to smoke?"

[36.18] "After a while," he said, laying a cigar on the table.

[36.19] "Who gave it to you?" she laughed.

[36.20] "I bought it. I suppose I'm getting reckless; I bought a whole box." She was determined not to

be personal again and make him uncomfortable.

[36.21] The cat made friends with him, and climbed into his lap when he smoked his cigar. He stroked her silky fur, and talked a little about her. He looked at Edna's book, which he had read; and he told her the end, to save her the trouble of wading through it, he said.

[36.22] Again he accompanied her back to her home; and it was after dusk when they reached the little "pigeon-house." She did not ask him to remain, which he was grateful for, as it permitted him to stay without the discomfort of blundering through an excuse which he had no intention of considering. He helped her to light the lamp; then she went into her room to take off her hat and to bathe her face and hands.

[36.23] when she came back Robert was not examining the pictures and magazines as before; he sat off in the shadow, leaning his head back on the chair as if in a reverie. Edna lingered a moment beside the table, arranging the books there. Then she went across the room to where he sat. She bent over the arm of his chair and called his name.

[36.24] "Robert," she said, "are you asleep?"

[36.25] "No," he answered, looking up at her.

[36.26] She leaned over and kissed him--a soft, cool, delicate kiss, whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being--then she moved away from him. He followed, and took

her in his arms, just holding her close to him. She put her hand up to his face and pressed his cheek against her own. The action was full of love and tenderness. He sought her lips again. Then he drew her down upon the sofa beside him and held her hand in both of his.

[36.27] "Now you know," he said, "now you know what I have been fighting against since last summer at Grand Isle; what drove me away and drove me back again."

[36.28] "Why have you been fighting against it?" she asked. Her face glowed with soft lights.

[36.29] "Why? Because you were not free; you were Léonce Pontellier's wife. I couldn't help loving you if you were ten times his wife; but so long as I went away from you and kept away I could help telling you so." She put her free hand up to his shoulder, and then against his cheek, rubbing it softly. He kissed her again. His face was warm and flushed.

[36.30] "There in Mexico I was thinking of you all the time, and longing for you."

[36.31] "But not writing to me," she interrupted.

[36.32] "Something put into my head that you cared for me; and I lost my senses. I forgot everything but a wild dream of your some way becoming my wife."

[36.33] "Your wife!"

[36.34] "Religion, loyalty, everything would give way if only you cared."

[36.35] "Then you must have forgotten that I was Léonce Pontellier's wife."

[36.36] "Oh! I was demented, dreaming of wild, impossible things, recalling men who had set their wives free, we have heard of such things."

[36.37] "Yes, we have heard of such things."

[36.38] "I came back full of vague, mad intentions. And when I got here--"

[36.39] "When you got here you never came near me!" She was still caressing his cheek.

[36.40] "I realized what a cur I was to dream of such a thing, even if you had been willing."

[36.41] She took his face between her hands and looked into it as if she would never withdraw her eyes more. She kissed him on the forehead, the eyes, the cheeks, and the lips.

[36.42] "You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both."

[36.43] His face grew a little white. "What do you mean?" he asked.

[36.44] There was a knock at the door. Old

Celestine came in to say that Madame Ratignolle's servant had come around the back way with a message that Madame had been taken sick and begged Mrs. Pontellier to go to her immediately.

[36.45] "Yes, yes," said Edna, rising; "I promised. Tell her yes--to wait for me. I'll go back with her."

[36.46] "Let me walk over with you," offered Robert.

[36.47] "No," she said; "I will go with the servant.

She went into her room to put on her hat, and when she came in again she sat once more upon the sofa beside him. He had not stirred. She put her arms about his neck.

[36.48] "Good-by, my sweet Robert. Tell me good-by." He kissed her with a degree of passion which had not before entered into his caress, and strained her to him.

[36.49] "I love you," she whispered, "only you; no one but you. It was you who awoke me last summer out of a life-long, stupid dream. Oh! you have made me so unhappy with your indifference. Oh! I have suffered, suffered! Now you are here we shall love each other, my Robert. We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of any consequence. I must go to my friend; but you will wait for me? No matter how late; you will wait for me, Robert?"

[36.50] "Don't go; don't go! Oh! Edna, stay with me," he pleaded. "why should you go? Stay with me, stay with me."

[36.51] "I shall come back as soon as I can; I shall find you here." She buried her face in his neck, and said good-by again. Her seductive voice, together with his great love for her, had enthralled his senses, had deprived him of every impulse but the longing to hold her and keep her.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 36:

[36.7] (McGee 2000): A coincidental encounter at a café on the outskirts of the city recalls Robert and Edna's time at the Cheniere Caminada. As they exchange kisses and secrets, Edna tries to retrieve the thrill she once felt at potentially mastering her own destiny. Unfortunately, Robert's ideas reflect a longing for a traditional relationship with Edna (50).

[36.10] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Edna asks Robert why his words and behavior are not consistent (193).

[36.16] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's enjoyment of long walks contradicts contemporary medical advice concerning a woman's activity during pregnancy (60).

[2.3, 36.20] (Barrish 2000): Before his trip to Mexico, the sexually ambiguous Robert

smoked cigarettes. Upon his return to New Orleans, the newly masculinized Robert purchases cigars by the box, reflecting his elevated sexual status (71).

[36.32] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert claims to have loved Edna since their shared time at Grand Isle (193).

[36.36] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert begins a casual relationship with Edna upon returning to the city, only because they meet unexpectedly (193).

[36.38] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Robert chooses to keep his return to the city secret from Edna, because he cannot respond to her amorous needs (193).

[36.39] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): 193.

[36.40] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): In making such grand proposals, Robert is hoping Edna's loyalty to convention will cause her to insist that he stop. To his surprise, however, Edna agrees that they must pursue their relationship (193).

[16.8, 36.42] (Barrish 2000): While Robert's Mexican quest increases his sexual appeal to Edna, it also places him among the ranks of Leonce Pontellier, to whom Edna is a

possession. This shift closes the door to the possibility of Robert sharing a long-term relationship with Edna, as he has now become a part of a system to which she will not adhere (70-71).

[36.42] (Bunch 2001-2): In conversations with Robert LeBrun and Adèle Ratignolle before her suicide, both attempt to recall Edna to the traditional economy of matrimony and maternity. Robert, like Edna's father and Léonce, wishes to possess her, but cannot "rescue" her due to a lack of money (58).

[36.42] (Bunch 2001-2): Robert too, like Edna's father and Léonce, tries to possess her. These three men resemble one another more than is at first apparent (58).

[36.42] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): 193.

[36.42 – 36.43] (Muirhead 2000): Edna boldly pronounces that she will no longer be treated as a commodity, thus catching Robert by surprise (45-46).

[36.42 – 36.43] (McGee 2000): Once back at her small home, the reality of her fateful relationship with Robert becomes clear to Edna (50).

[36.42 – 36.43, 36.51] (Pizer 2001): Though Robert's love for Edna is reinvigorated during a chance meeting, he cannot cross socially mandated boundaries in order to be with

her (10-11).

[36.43] (Barrish 2000): Robert does not understand Edna's refusal to be a marriage partner to himself or Léonce. He does not realize that he has now joined the ranks of bourgeois masculinity (71).

[36.43] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): The emotion evoked in Edna by Robert's anonymous return causes him to realize that he cannot both continue their friendship and keep his homosexual leanings secret (193).

[36.44] (Lippincott 2000): Adèle calls for Edna to be with her when she goes into labor – a call coinciding with the erotic apex of Edna and Robert's relationship. Adèle describes her condition euphemistically and indirectly, as was typical of the period (62-63).

[36.49] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Edna persistently refers to their shared love (193).

[36.49] (Pizer 2001): Though Edna boldly expresses her desire to be with Robert, maternal ties restrict her at the climax of her declaration. Called away to attend Adèle's labor, Edna is reminded of her responsibilities as a mother (9).

[37.10 – 37.12, 36.49, 38.8 – 38.9] (Pizer 2001): Although the scene describing Adèle's delivery is a bit over-done, it contributes to a number of important issues that are central

to the meaning of the novel (9).

CHAPTER 37

[37.1] Edna looked in at the drug store. Monsieur Ratignolle was putting up a mixture himself, very carefully, dropping a red liquid into a tiny glass. He was grateful to Edna for having come; her presence would be a comfort to his wife. Madame Ratignolle's sister, who had always been with her at such trying times, had not been able to come up from the plantation, and Adèle had been inconsolable until Mrs. Pontellier so kindly promised to come to her. The nurse had been with them at night for the past week, as she lived a great distance away. And Dr. Mandelet had been coming and going all the afternoon. They were then looking for him any moment.

[37.2] Edna hastened upstairs by a private stairway that led from the rear of the store to the apartments above. The children were all sleeping in a back room. Madame Ratignolle was in the salon, whither she had strayed in her suffering impatience. She sat on the sofa, clad in an ample white *peignoir*, holding a handkerchief tight in her hand with a nervous clutch. Her face was drawn and pinched, her sweet blue eyes haggard and unnatural. All her beautiful

hair had been drawn back and plaited. It lay in a long braid on the sofa pillow, coiled like a golden serpent. The nurse, a comfortable looking *Griffe* woman in white apron and cap, was urging her to return to her bedroom.

[37.3] "There is no use, there is no use," she said at once to Edna. "We must get rid of Mandelet; he is getting too old and careless. He said he would be here at half-past seven; now it must be eight. See what time it is, Josephine."

[37.4] The woman was possessed of a cheerful nature, and refused to take any situation too seriously, especially a situation with which she was so familiar. She urged Madame to have courage and patience. 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. The nurse gave her a fresh handkerchief, sprinkled with cologne water.

[37.5] "This is too much!" she cried. "Mandélet ought to be killed! where is Alphonse? Is it possible I am to be abandoned like this-neglected by every one?"

[37.6] "Neglected, indeed!" exclaimed the nurse. "Wasn't she there? And here was Mrs. Pontellier leaving, no doubt, a pleasant evening at home to devote to her? And wasn't Monsieur Ratignolle coming that very instant through

the hall? And Josephine was quite sure she had heard Doctor Mandelet's coupe. Yes, there it was, down at the door.

[37.7] Adèle consented to go back to her room. She sat on the edge of a little low couch next to her bed.

[37.8] Doctor Mandelet paid no attention to Madame Ratignolle's upbraidings. He was accustomed to them at such times, and was too well convinced of her loyalty to doubt it.

[37.9] He was glad to see Edna, and wanted her to go with him into the salon and entertain him. But Madame Ratignolle would not consent that Edna should leave her for an instant. Between agonizing moments, she chatted a little, and said it took her mind off her sufferings.

[37.10] 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.

[37.11] She began to wish she had not come; her presence was not necessary. She might have invented a pretext for staying away; she might even invent a pretext now for going. But Edna did not go. With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture.

[37.12] She was still stunned and speechless with emotion when later she leaned over her friend to kiss her and softly say good-by. Adèle, pressing her cheek, whispered in an exhausted voice: "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!"

NOTES ON CHAPTER 37:

[37.2] (Lippincott 2000): Edna is shocked by the changes in Adèle's demeanor which her labor has caused (63).

[37.9-37.11] (Asbee 2001b): Love is characterized by Chopin as a tool to lure women into having children and the trauma of childbirth. Madame Ratignolle's labor awakens Edna to this notion (264-265).

[37.10] (Bunch 2001-2): Chopin describes Adèle's childbirth scene as an occurrence of reversed eroticism, rending apart the mother-child bond. Yet in the anguish is the desire for an original autonomy at its most intense (58-59).

[37.10 – 37.12, 36.49, 38.8 – 38.9] (Pizer 2001): Although the scene describing Adèle's delivery is a bit over-done, it contributes to a number of important issues that are central

to the meaning of the novel (9).

[4.3, 37.11] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna visits Adèle during her labor, the last person she will see before her suicide (58).

[37.12] (Lippincott 2000): The brutality of Adèle's labor and delivery cause Edna to view motherhood with a clarity she previously had not (63).

[37.12] (Bunch 2001-2): In the midst of her anguish Adèle pleads with Edna to return to the economy of production that motherhood is for her (59).

[4.3, 37.12] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna chooses death over a life of servitude as a wife and mother (59).

CHAPTER 38

[38.1] Edna still felt dazed when she got outside in the open air. The Doctor's coupe had returned for him and stood before the *porte cochère*. She did not wish to enter the coupe, and told Doctor Mandelet she would walk; she was not afraid, and would go alone. He directed his carriage to meet him at Mrs. Pontellier's, and he started to walk home

with her.

[38.2] Up--away up, over the narrow street between the tall houses, the stars were blazing. The air was mild and caressing, but cool with the breath of spring and the night. They walked slowly, the Doctor with a heavy, measured tread and his hands behind him; Edna, in an absent-minded way, as she had walked one night at Grand Isle, as if her thoughts had gone ahead of her and she was striving to overtake them.

[38.3] "You shouldn't have been there, Mrs. Pontellier," he said. "That was no place for you. Adèle is full of whims at such times. There were a dozen women she might have had with her, unimpressionable women. I felt that it was cruel, cruel. You shouldn't have gone."

[38.4] "Oh, well!" she answered, indifferently. "I don't know that it matters after all. One has to think of the children some time or other; the sooner the better."

[38.5] "When is Léonce coming back?"

[38.6] "Quite soon. Some time in March."

[38.7] "And you are going abroad?"

[38.8] "Perhaps--no, I am not going. I'm not going to be forced into doing things. I don't want to go abroad. I want to be let alone. Nobody has any right--except children, perhaps--and even then, it seems to me--or it did seem--" she felt that her speech was voicing the incoherency of her thoughts, and stopped abruptly.

[38.9] "The trouble is," sighed the Doctor, 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."

[38.10] "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."

[38.11] "It seems to me, my dear child," said the Doctor at parting, holding her hand, "you seem to me to be in trouble. I am not going to ask for your confidence. I will only say that if ever you feel moved to give it to me, perhaps I might help you. I know I would understand, And I tell you there are not many who would--not many, my dear."

[38.12] "Some way I don't feel moved to speak of things that trouble me. Don't think I am ungrateful or that I don't appreciate your sympathy. There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don't want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others--but no matter--still, I shouldn't want to trample upon the little lives. Oh! I don't know what I'm saying, Doctor. Good night. Don't

blame me for anything."

[38.13] "Yes, I will blame you if you don't come and see me soon. We will talk of things you never have dreamt of talking about before. It will do us both good. I don't want you to blame yourself, whatever comes. Good night, my child."

[38.14] She let herself in at the gate, but instead of entering she sat upon the step of the porch. The night was quiet and soothing. All the tearing emotion of the last few hours seemed to fall away from her like a somber, uncomfortable garment, which she had but to loosen to be rid of. She went back to that hour before Adèle had sent for her; and her senses kindled afresh in thinking of Robert's words, the pressure of his arms, and the feeling of his lips upon her own. 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. It was so late; he would be asleep perhaps. She would awaken him with a kiss. She hoped he would be asleep that she might arouse him with her caresses.

[38.15] Still, she remembered Adèle's voice whispering, "Think of the children; think of them." She meant to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound--but not to-night. To-morrow

would be time to think of everything.

[38.16] Robert was not waiting for her in the little parlor. He was nowhere at hand. The house was empty. But he had scrawled on a piece of paper that lay in the lamplight:

[38.17] "I love you. Good-by--because I love you."

[38.18] Edna grew faint when she read the words. She went and sat on the sofa. Then she stretched herself out there, never uttering a sound. She did not sleep. She did not go to bed. The lamp sputtered and went out. She was still awake in the morning, when Celestine unlocked the kitchen door and came in to light the fire.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 38:

[30.19, 38.8] (Lippincott 2000): Edna mirrors Adèle's labor emotionally, experiencing fear, anxiety, and racing thoughts (63).

[37.10 – 37.12, 36.49, 38.8 – 38.9] (Pizer 2001): Although the scene describing Adèle's delivery is a bit over-done, it contributes to a number of important issues that are central to the meaning of the novel (9).

[38.8, 38.12] (Strozier 2002): Upon viewing Adèle give birth, Edna realizes, with renewed intensity, the contradiction between living an independent life and her commitments as a mother. At this point, Edna's internal struggle is no longer conveyed until the following day, at the beach on Grand Isle (28).

[38.9] (Muirhead 2000): Edna recognizes that the romanticized notions of marriage and maternity propagated by society serve only to ensnare women into unfulfilling lives. Unfortunately, she is unable to express this realization successfully, leading to her suicide (52).

[22.19, 38.10] (Rich 2003): Edna is disillusioned by the Victorian ideals of romantic love and matrimony (128).

[7.27-7.28, 7.31, 38.9-38.10] (Bunch 2001-2): Even though she is now one of Leonce's possessions, Edna's original intent in marrying her Catholic husband was to escape her father's Protestant household and a girl's romantic imaginings (50).

[38.11] (Muirhead 2000): Dr. Mandelet asks Edna to confide in him, but his words and manner suggest that he too only wishes to control her (50).

[38.12] (Muirhead 2000): Edna may here be resisting the domination of an authoritarian male (50).

[38.12] (Pizer 2001): (10).

[38.14] (Lippincott 2000): Chopin's description of Edna's euphoric anticipation at returning to Robert resembles the effect of anesthesia on a woman in labor (63).

[38.17] (McGee 2000): Once Edna is called away by Adèle Ratignolle, Robert too realizes that his relationship with Edna will never meet the needs of them both. He thus composes a brief message that he probably perceives as being masculine and socially proper (50).

[38.17] (Asbee 2001b): Robert's farewell does not deter Edna from returning to the place of her awakening (265).

[38.17] (Disheroon-Green 2002a): Realizing that he cannot fulfill Edna's sexual expectations, Robert exits the house with a cryptic farewell (193).

[38.17] (Pizer 2001): (11).

CHAPTER 39

[39.1] Victor, with hammer and nails and scraps of scantling, was patching a corner of one of the galleries. Mariequita sat near by, dangling her legs, watching him work, and handing him nails from the tool-box. The sun was beating down upon them. The girl had covered her head with her apron folded into a square pad. They had been talking for an hour or more. She was never tired of hearing Victor describe the dinner at Mrs. Pontellier's. He exaggerated every detail, making it appear a veritable Lucullan feast.

The flowers were in tubs, he said. The champagne was quaffed from huge golden goblets. Venus rising from the foam could have presented no more entrancing a spectacle than Mrs. Pontellier, blazing with beauty and diamonds at the head of the board, while the other women were all of them youthful houris, possessed of incomparable charms.

[39.2] She got it into her head that Victor was in love with Mrs. Pontellier, and he gave her evasive answers, framed so as to confirm her belief. She grew sullen and cried a little, threatening to go off and leave him to his fine ladies. There were a dozen men crazy about her at the *Chênrière*; and since it was the fashion to be in love with married people, why, she could run away any time she liked to New Orleans with Céline's husband.

[39.3] Céline's husband was a fool, a coward, and a pig, and to prove it to her, Victor intended to hammer his head into a jelly the next time he encountered him. This assurance was very consoling to Mariequita. She dried her eyes, and grew cheerful at the prospect.

[39.4] They were still talking of the dinner and the allurements of city life when Mrs. Pontellier herself slipped around the corner of the house. The two youngsters stayed dumb with amazement before what they considered to be an apparition. But it was really she in flesh and blood, looking tired and a little travel-stained.

[39.5] "I walked up from the wharf", she said, "and heard the hammering. I supposed it was you, mending the porch. It's a good thing. I was always tripping over those loose planks last summer. How dreary and deserted everything looks!"

[39.6] It took Victor some little time to comprehend that she had come in Beaufort's lugger, that she had come alone, and for no purpose but to rest.

[39.7] "There's nothing fixed up yet, you see. I'll give you my room; it's the only place."

[39.8] "Any corner will do," she assured him.

[39.9] "And if you can stand Philomel's cooking," he went on, "though I might try to get her mother while you are here. Do you think she would come?" turning to Mariequita.

[39.10] Mariequita thought that perhaps Philomel's

mother might come for a few days, and money enough.

[39.11] Beholding Mrs. Pontellier make her appearance, the girl had at once suspected a lovers' rendezvous. But Victor's astonishment was so genuine, and Mrs. Pontellier's indifference so apparent, that the disturbing notion did not lodge long in her brain. She contemplated with the greatest interest this woman who gave the most sumptuous dinners in America, and who had all the men in New Orleans at her feet.

[39.12] "What time will you have dinner?" asked Edna. "I'm very hungry; but don't get anything extra."

[39.13] "I'll have it ready in little or no time," he said, bustling and packing away his tools. "You may go to my room to brush up and rest yourself. Mariequita will show you."

[39.14] "Thank you", said Edna. "But, do you know, I have a notion to go down to the beach and take a good wash and even a little swim, before dinner?"

[39.15] "The water is too cold!" they both exclaimed. "Don't think of it."

[39.16] "Well, I might go down and try--dip my toes in. Why, it seems to me the sun is hot enough to have warmed the very depths of the ocean. Could you get me a couple of towels? I'd better go right away, so as to be back in time. It would be a little too chilly if I waited till this afternoon."

[39.17] Mariequita ran over to Victor's room, and returned with some towels, which she gave to Edna.

[39.18] "I hope you have fish for dinner," said Edna, as she started to walk away; "but don't do anything extra if you haven't."

[39.19] "Run and find Philomel's mother," Victor instructed the girl. "I'll go to the kitchen and see what I can do. By Gimminy! Women have no consideration! She might have sent me word."

[39.20] Edna walked on down to the beach rather mechanically, not noticing anything special except that the sun was hot. She was not dwelling upon any particular train of thought. She had done all the thinking which was necessary after Robert went away, when she lay awake upon the sofa till morning.

[39.21] She had said over and over to herself: "To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn't matter about Léonce Pontellier--but Raoul and Etienne!" She understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adèle Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children.

[39.22] Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired. 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. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach.

[39.23] 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.

[39.24] Edna had found her old bathing suit still hanging, faded, upon its accustomed peg.

[39.25] She put it on, leaving her clothing in the bath-house. 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.

[39.26] 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.

[39.27] The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. 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.

[39.28] 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.

[39.29] Her arms and legs were growing tired.

[39.30] She thought of Léonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul. How Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed, perhaps sneered, if she knew! "And you call yourself an artist! what pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies."

[39.31] Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her.

[39.32] "Good-by--because I love you." He did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand. Perhaps Doctor Mandelet would have understood if she had

seen him--but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone.

[39.33] She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 39:

[39.2] (Barrish 2000): (67).

[39.9] (Muirhead 2000): Chopin uses the myth of Philomel to draw attention to Edna's muteness in relation to her social and spiritual dilemma. As in the myth, the image of birds represents freedom, which Philomel finds but which eludes Edna (52).

[39.11] (McGee 2000): Prior to this scene, Edna's entire life and the structure of the novel had revolved around meals (50-51).

[39.12, 39.18] (McGee 2000): Though she claims to be hungry, requests fish, and

questions many of the details involved in her last meal, ultimately Edna asks that no special arrangements be made. Her interest in eating fish may ironically foreshadow her impending doom (50).

[39.21-39.22] (Barrish 2000): The exchange between Robert and Alcée about the girls of Vera Cruz causes Edna to realize that, despite her intense desire for Robert, her only choices are those of wife or mistress (71).

[4.3, 39.22] (Bunch 2001-2): (59).

[39.22] (Strozier 2002): Chopin reveals, through interior monologue, Edna's realization that her children obligate her socially as no other force in her life (28).

[39.22] (Pizer 2001): Unable to reconcile her desire for freedom and the responsibilities of motherhood, Edna chooses to escape the situation altogether by committing suicide (10).

[39.22] (Strozier 2002): Edna's private nature and longing for solitude come from a realization that the men in her life have served to distract her from knowing herself and that each will inevitably be forgotten (27).

[39.23] (Rich 2003): Edna submits to the call of the ocean when she realizes that her

relationship with Robert cannot transcend the boundaries of social acceptability (129).

[39.23] (Muirhead 2000): The serpentine nature of the sea represents the silenced voice of women, much as the severed tongue of the mythic Philomel does (53).

[39.26] (Lippincott 2000): The novel's last chapter describes Edna's birth experience. Naked upon the beach, Edna is finally unencumbered by social constraints and expectations (63). Her conduct resembles the behavior advocated by some twentieth-century specialists for women about to give birth (63-64).

[39.26] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's suicide, or birthing scene, is full of (and is foreshadowed by) terminology associated with pregnancy (55).

[39.27] (Muirhead 2000): The serpentine character of the sea alludes to the Edenic myth. In her awakened state Edna can no longer live in Edenic ignorance, but must face life as it is (53).

[39.27] (Lippincott 2000): Edna's physical exhaustion and awareness of the nearness of both life and death further reinforce Chopin's labor imagery (64).

[39.30] (Pizer 2001): Death alone (Edna thinks) can free her from the social and physical requirements of matrimony and motherhood (11).

[39.33] (Rich 2003): Episodes such as this one foreshadow the modernist movement in literature (126).

[39.33] (Bunch 2001-2): Edna's suicide is a sensual act of surrender, surpassing physical and emotional limitations (59).

[39.33] (Bunch 2001-2): In the end, sensual stimuli drown out the voices representing institutional bonds from her life. Edna's sensual awakening is complete (60).

[39.33] (Treu 2000): While resolving a story with the main character's suicide is a technique common to modern storytellers, during Chopin's era this would have defied convention and been considered highly irregular (22).

CHARACTERS:

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): Chopin and other American authors created a vast range of fictitious characterizations: examples include Léonce Pontellier as a typical man of commerce; Robert LeBrun as a weak example of masculinity; Adèle Ratignolle as a doting matriarch; Edna Pontellier as a self-seeking mother exploring new avenues of amorous endeavor; and Mademoiselle Reisz as a socially-inept maiden lady of questionable sexual orientation (183).

ALCÉE AROBIN:

(Bunch 2001-2): Alcée provides Edna the opportunity to go beyond flirtation, as with Robert LeBrun, and experience what is taboo (56).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): Chopin's masculine characters engage women within marriages (such as Léonce Pontellier) or liaisons (such as Alcée Arobin). Robert's relationships with women are the only example beyond these two roles (188).

MRS. HIGHCAMP:

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): The characters of Miss Highcamp and Miss Mayblunt, although only minor players in *The Awakening*, represent the kind of women most suspect by both Léonce and Dr. Mandelet – feminists and suffragettes (278). Miss Highcamp would rather engage in intellectual pursuits, such as a literary meeting, than social ones (278). At each of her appearances in *The Awakening*, Miss Highcamp offers

explanation for missing one social gathering or another (278). Chopin utilizes the characters of Miss Highcamp and Miss Mayburn to counter the notion that a woman's fulfillment could only be achieved on the domestic front (278).

ROBERT LeBRUN:

(Asbee 2001b): Many critics find Robert LeBrun inadequate for a woman such as Edna (262).

(Barrish 2000): One of the characteristics that initially makes Robert a desirable recipient of Edna's sexual attention is his difference from Léonce, who represents conservative masculinity, yet this same characteristic of Robert causes one to question his sexual orientation (67). Robert's intentions concerning Edna are never questioned, allowing them hours of solitary time together without arousing suspicion. He is a safe young man, until the suggestion of a sexual relationship with Mariequita implies otherwise. This suggestion alters Robert's status in Edna's eyes, making him seem a reasonable object for her awakening sexual desire (68).

(Bunch 2001-2): In Robert, Edna imagines the potential of becoming someone totally unlike the woman she is (52).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): Where Léonce represents the typical American male of the 1800s, Robert represents his opposite – a man who thrives in the company of women

(and whom Chopin thereby depicts as potentially gay). Neither Léonce nor Robert provides what the emotionally awakened Edna needs in a male companion. Robert is ultimately overwhelmed by Edna's newly aroused sexuality, leading the reader to suspect him of being a latent homosexual (184). Chopin hints at Robert's homosexuality without crossing the lines of social acceptability (185). Chopin never refers to Robert as Mr. LeBrun in the text (187). During a scene in which Léonce invites Robert to play billiards at his club, he is addressed as "LeBrun." Refusing Léonce's invitation, he is again addressed as "Robert," reflecting his place of inferiority to Léonce. This scene serves to further disassociate Robert from manly personification, and it shows how skillfully Chopin uses names to indicate status (187). Despite the public nature of Robert and Edna's relationship, Léonce does not view Robert as a rival (187). The qualities that Mr. Pontellier finds effeminate in Robert serve to draw women, including Edna, toward him. He engages in intimate talk with women as they go about their daily tasks: sewing, cutting patterns, and having tea (188). Chopin's masculine characters engage women within marriages (such as Léonce Pontellier) or liaisons (such as Alcée Arobin). Robert's relationships with women are the only example beyond these two roles (188). Before departing for Mexico, Robert routinely strives to appear manly, as a ploy to disguise his true gender neutrality (189). Robert protests too much concerning his status as a non-threatening male companion, reinforcing the notion that he is just as he is accused (190). Robert does not overreact when accused of using women by Madame Ratignolle, but focuses attention on Alcée Arobin and others. While this technique diverts attention from his motives, it serves to reinforce readers' belief that Robert is homosexual (190).

Innocently, Robert continues to grow in Edna's esteem (191). Robert causes Edna to believe her absence would be felt greatly (191). Edna wants Robert to sit alongside her as she swings in the hammock. Where Léonce's presence repels her, Robert's is welcomed (191). Robert's attentiveness is a pleasant change for Edna (191). By going to Mexico Robert hopes Edna's growing feelings for him will subside. Feeling the pressure of Edna's amorous longings, Robert takes his leave of the situation suddenly, further emphasizing his discomfort with male-female sexuality (191). Robert hopes Edna's affection for him will die during his absence (191). Paradoxically, the emasculated Robert provokes Edna's amorous enlightenment (192). The man who had found such comfort in the company of women now seeks to hide in the emotionally noncommittal world of men (194).

(Disheroon-Green 2002b): Robert walks between the lovers, a possible foreshadowing of his role in the breakup of Edna and Léonce's marriage and his own ultimate separation from Edna, or an implication about his wanting to be recognized as a potential lover. Still a further potential implication is that Robert breaks up the lovers as he will later break off his own potential relationship with Edna (88).

(Pizer 2001): Robert's decision to go to Mexico rather than go to the next level in his relationship with Edna shows that he cannot cross the boundaries of Creole social mandate (8). Robert's love and its expression are mandated by social requirement. He cannot allow their love to cause them to cross boundaries of acceptability. Ironically,

Edna's sexual awakening drives Robert to progress from potentially adulterous lover to protector of her honor (11).

VICTOR LeBRUN:

(Asbee 2001a): According to various scholars, Edna, the new woman, and Victor, the androgynous decadent, represent two of the greatest threats to Victorian decorum and convention (283).

EDNA PONTELLIER:

(Asbee 2001a): According to various scholars, Edna, the new woman, and Victor, the androgynous decadent, represent two of the greatest threats to Victorian decorum and convention (283).

(Asbee 2001b): Some critics argue that Edna more closely represents an evolved female-animal who emerges from the sea into a godless universe than Botticelli's Venus. This interpretation falls in line with the ideas of Darwin, T.H. Huxley, and Herbert Spencer, whose writings influenced Chopin's ideology (259-260).

(Bunch 2001-2): Unlike the women depicted in the fiction of Georges Bataille, Edna Pontellier is a woman who cannot be diminished, labeled, or absorbed into a larger entity (46). As modern critics reevaluate *The Awakening* in feminist, Marxist, and regionalistic terms they all fail to account for the fundamentally elusive character of Edna Pontellier

(46). Edna strives to move from being functional to being autonomous (46). By emphasizing Bataille's notions of a being's split into two opposing selves we can better understand Edna's journey toward self-realization – a journey that ultimately leads to her demise (46). The drive to move beyond the institutional systems that restrict her motivates Edna to experience taboos that ultimately lead to realms of untapped self-expression (48). Edna's behavior after her enlightenment at Grand Isle reveals her as a Bataillean protagonist who will not be restrictively categorized according to usefulness alone (48-49). In extraordinarily precise terms, Chopin characterizes the stifling social institutions that encompass Edna (49). Edna's privileged childhood was spent on a Kentucky plantation, built strong by the institution of slavery (49). Edna is unsure how to regulate her feelings for her sons, but she realizes that those feelings are not conducive to the economic relationship of her marriage (51). At the moment when she feels the greatest sense of pending danger, Edna realizes that life must be experienced in all its uncertainty in order to be lived truly (54). Chopin's heroine reflects the Bataillean belief that in life, as in sex, truth is obtained only through complete surrender, in Edna's case surrendering to death (60). Edna allows the reader to experience an uncompromising life without forcing answers to the questions of how to live an authentic life (61).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): Edna will continue as Leonce's wife, but will not allow this fact to dim her emotional renaissance (192).

(Disheroon-Green 2002b): The symbolic link between the lady in black and Edna's sensual awakening has not been addressed in previous scholarship (83). Though Robert's departure stalls their potentially illicit relationship, Edna can no longer return to life as she once knew. She has tasted liberty and longs for more. As the Creole moral code no longer holds sway over Edna, the lady and the lovers disappear from the novel (91-92).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Edna Pontellier and Mademoiselle Reisz, socially marginal characters, allow the author to explore alternate expressions of femininity than those common to the nineteenth century (273). Edna displays none of the characteristics of exemplary Creole women, described in etiquette books as caring, loyal, above suspicion, good homemakers, nonintellectual, and tender mothers of many children (275).

Exemplifying ideas explored by Michel Foucault, Edna, by refusing to be defined solely as wife and mother, subverts the only acceptable institutions in which women's power was expressed (276-77). Due to the personal nature of the relationship Edna shares with Mademoiselle Reisz, she cannot hide her growing affection for Robert LeBrun from her friend (277). As Edna proceeds to create an independent life of her own, her friendship with Mademoiselle Reisz is the only one which she holds dear (277). Edna's motivation for change is entirely personal, neither political nor ideological (278). Toward achieving her aim of self-realization, Edna makes three distinct changes in her life: she begins to paint again, she sends her sons to stay with their grandmother for an extended visit, and she moves from the family home into a small house she can afford to run with her own finances (278).

(Strozier 2002): When Edna Pontellier marries into a Creole family she becomes subject to its mores of conduct and gender roles. Edna's internal search for identity is juxtaposed against this rigid social system (27). Chopin effectively communicates Edna's internal struggle within a framework that does not itself moralize. It is nonbiased without adopting the perspective of the larger culture (27). Edna's journey toward self-realization takes her through a series of feelings and longings never before realized to varying degrees of fulfillment (27). Chopin relates Edna's interior exploration as she struggles to know herself (27). While on vacation, Edna spends a Sunday afternoon at Madame Antoine's relaxing, enjoying the very feeling of her own body. This awakening produces self-knowledge (27). The complex emotions Edna experiences after attending the birth of Adele's child, though confusing, are her own, to which she refuses to give voice, if even to Dr. Mandelet, since so doing would surrender her feelings to another's judgment (27-28).

(Varney and Erdman 2003): As her metaphysical enlightenment is occurring, Edna realizes the disharmony between her longings and her social responsibilities (273).

LÉONCE PONTELLIER:

(Bunch 2001-2): Léonce's success, as a husband and businessman, relies on appearing to be profitable, whether falsely or not (49). As a commodities broker, Léonce's business success depends upon displaying the outward trappings of good fortune (49). Every dollar Léonce spends is well planned so as to best sustain his image of success (49-50).

Lacking real authority over his life, Léonce determines his value by his occupational success and the worth of his possessions, to include his wife Edna (50). Léonce's gambling winnings are used to invest in objects that reflect his prestige, rather than enjoyed frivolously. He is dominated by a perpetual drive to prove his success (50).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): Where Léonce represents the typical American male of the 1800s, Robert represents his opposite – a man who thrives in the company of women (and whom Chopin thereby depicts as potentially gay). Neither Léonce nor Robert provides what the emotionally awakened Edna needs in a male companion. Robert is ultimately overwhelmed by Edna's newly aroused sexuality, leading the reader to suspect him of being a latent homosexual (184). Léonce Pontellier is the image-obsessed, self-satisfying, egotistical husband whose wife should serve as a tasteful accessory (185). The reader's initial introduction to Leonce has him complaining about the birds' noise disrupting his newspaper reading (185). Because Léonce is a male head-of-household, in the opening chapter he takes for granted his right to have his own way (186). Robert's relationships with women are not what Leonce considers manly. Léonce expects men to pursue the traditional distractions of work and social clubs in the city, away from wives and families. Respectable men marry as a business venture, then return to their own pursuits (187). Despite the public nature of Robert and Edna's relationship, Léonce does not view Robert as a rival (187). While in private scenes between husband and wife Chopin uses Léonce's first name, she refers to him as Mr. Pontellier when he interacts with Robert or addresses Edna in a scolding manner (187). Chopin's masculine

characters engage women within marriages (such as Léonce Pontellier) or liaisons (such as Alcée Arobin). Robert's relationships with women are the only example beyond these two roles (188). While berating Edna's abilities as a parent, Léonce smokes a cigar (189). As Edna's affection for Robert grows, Léonce's sway over her is lessened (190). No longer able to control Edna as he once did, Léonce must assert much more phallic power – represented in part by the quantity of cigars he must smoke -- to achieve the desired result. Edna is moving outside his realm of influence gradually (191).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Chopin uses the character of Léonce to represent middle-class patriarchy, especially in Léonce's treatment of Edna as a possession (277).

(Muirhead 2000): By remaining silent, Edna challenges Léonce's reasons for her to come indoors. Responding to this, Léonce becomes polite, speaking more softly. Again failing to sway Edna, Léonce becomes increasingly more authoritative in his statements (44).

(Rich 2003): Chopin's depiction of Léonce resembles George Egerton's depiction of an unappealing husband in one of Egerton's stories (127).

(Weinstock 2002): Léonce, like the husband in Chopin's story "Her Letters", arouses a modicum of sympathy, as both the story and the novel suggest that men who think they own their wives run the risk of feeling frustrated (51).

ADELE RATIGNOLLE:

(Lippincott 2000): Chopin informs the reader of nineteenth century social norms concerning pregnancy through her descriptions of Adèle Ratignolle (55).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Adèle Ratignolle embraces the nineteenth-century notion of womanhood, exemplified by her utter dedication to her family (276). Adèle defines herself through her roles as wife and mother with no criticism from Edna (276).

Exemplifying ideas explored by Michel Foucault, Adèle voluntarily submits to the social expectations facing a woman of her era (276).

(Rich 2003): Chopin does not advocate any single option for women of her day, but rather offers characterizations of vastly different women who find their self-selected options fulfilling. While Mademoiselle Reisz and Adèle Ratignolle portray diametrically opposite choices for women, both are content with their chosen way of life (131-132).

MADemoiselle REISZ:

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Edna Pontellier and Mademoiselle Reisz, socially marginal characters, allow the author to explore alternate expressions of femininity than those common to the nineteenth century (273). Mademoiselle Reisz is *The Awakening's* most interesting character (277). Mademoiselle Reisz serves as an example to Edna of how a woman can lead an independent life, devoted to artistic pursuits (277). Chopin's personal feelings toward Mademoiselle Reisz are difficult to determine. Possibly she attempts

simply to present an example of a completely independent, self-determined woman (277). While Mademoiselle Reisz's unorthodox behavior generates loathing in most, Edna is drawn to the unusual character, initially due to their shared love of music, but ultimately because Reisz comprehends Edna's personal struggle (277).

(Muirhead 2000): The fact that Mademoiselle Reisz sometimes speaks in metaphors may suggest her effort to find a way of communicating that side-steps standard conventions (50). Mademoiselle Reisz's piano playing is as responsible as Robert is for Edna's transformation (51).

(Rich 2003): Chopin does not advocate any single option for women of her day, but rather offers characterizations of vastly different women who find their self-selected options fulfilling. While Mademoiselle Reisz and Adèle Ratignolle portray diametrically opposite choices for women, both are content with their chosen way of life (131-132).

LADY IN BLACK:

(Asbee 2001b): The woman in black stands for religion, tradition, and the loss of romantic love, as well as possibly destiny and/or mortality (254-255).

(Disheroon-Green 2002b): The lady in black is frequently following the young lovers, who seem to desire nothing more than to be alone with one another, separate from social gatherings (83). The lady in black appears alone only one time (83). In view of Chopin's

highly purposeful life and writing style, the lovers and the lady in black must symbolize key elements in Edna's sexual and personal awakening (85). The lady in black is obviously connected with Catholicism, a key aspect in the Creole culture in which Edna, a Kentucky Presbyterian, has married. The lady is characterized by the color of her clothing and her faithful religious practices: praying the rosary, reading a book of prayer, attending mass, and trying to understand religious mysteries. Recurring associations with the rosary lead one to presume a link to Mary, noted for her chaste and pure nature, as a good Creole wife was assumed to be (85). The lady in black represents the rigid morality of Creole society (85). The lady's black clothing, rosary, and prayer book recall a nun's habit and authority. Rather than dressing the lady in white, synonymous with virginity and purity, the lady's black garments associate her with virtue, a loftier trait. She serves as an example of acceptable behavior (85-86). The lady in black signifies milestones in Edna's renunciation of traditional feminine roles: her relationship with Robert, and his decision to go to Mexico (86). The lady's first appearance occurs at the beginning of the novel, when Edna had not yet decided to pursue independence. However, when Edna makes a decision to forego her role as Creole wife and mother, the lady appears again (86). The image of the praying woman early in the novel emphasizes each character's compliance with Creole moral expectations (86). Once Robert and Edna's relationship begins to take bloom, the lovers and the lady in black appear together, to emphasize the inappropriate nature of their association. The lovers and the lady appear together in four scenes, in three of which she follows the lovers. As the scene unfolds, the lady's proximity to the lovers grows closer emphasizing that one cannot ignore society's moral

code (87). In constantly saying the rosary or reading her prayer book, the lady in black symbolizes the Catholic sacraments of confession and penance (87). Because Robert physically separates the lovers, the presence of the lady in black is unnecessary here. So too is she unnecessary when Adèle's labor, Robert's leaving, and Edna's suicide later separate Robert and Edna (88). This term implies that the lady in black is not unfamiliar with the potential immorality with which the lovers may deal (89). As Robert and Edna's infatuation with one another grows, they, like the lovers, choose to separate themselves from the rest of the group; as if in response, the lady in black becomes increasingly immersed in her prayer book, presumably interceding for the wayward couples (90). Though Robert's departure stalls their potentially illicit relationship, Edna can no longer return to life as she once knew. She has tasted liberty and longs for more. As the Creole moral code no longer holds sway over Edna, the lady and the lovers disappear from the novel (91-92).

THE LOVERS:

(Disheroon-Green 2002b): The lady in black is frequently following the young lovers, who seem to desire nothing more than to be alone with one another, separate from social gatherings (83). The young lovers serve as essentially a single character as they are never separate from one another, nor developed as individual characters. Their role is primarily symbolic (83). The young lovers appear without the lady in black on only two occasions (83). In view of Chopin's highly purposeful life and writing style, the lovers and the lady in black must symbolize key elements in Edna's sexual and personal

awakening (85). The lovers, who are not present in the earliest part of the novel, represent the relationship developing between Robert and Edna that will ultimately violate the Creole moral code (86-87). Once Robert and Edna's relationship begins to take bloom, the lovers and the lady in black appear together, to emphasize the inappropriate nature of their association. The lovers and the lady appear together in four scenes, in three of which she follows the lovers. As the scene unfolds, the lady's proximity to the lovers grows closer emphasizing that one cannot ignore society's moral code (87). The only scene in which the lovers are visible without the lady in black follows Mademoiselle Reisz's concert, at which Edna's sensual stirrings begin (88). Though Robert's departure stalls their potentially illicit relationship, Edna can no longer return to life as she once knew. She has tasted liberty and longs for more. As the Creole moral code no longer holds sway over Edna, the lady and the lovers disappear from the novel (91-92).

COMPOSITION OF *THE AWAKENING*:

(Asbee 2001b): *The Awakening* follows a rhythm of leaving and coming back, as the first sixteen and final chapter are set at Grand Isle and the remaining twelve chapters are set in New Orleans (244). Chopin deliberately chose to write in a direct manner, avoiding unnecessary plot points or characters. In fact, she openly criticized other writers who included unnecessary material (244). Chopin regularly uses juxtaposition of different tones of phrasing to avoid romanticization in the novel (245). Chapter 6 is both the briefest and most intimate chapter in the novel, employing an unusually rare and blatant

monologue by the narrator to the novel's readers (245-246). The novel uses pronouns in such a way that readers are encouraged to sympathize with Edna. Of course, if this strategy had been entirely successful, the novel would not have been condemned by so many of its initial readers (247).

(Stozier 2002): The narrative dilemma of *The Awakening* lies in representing an interior journey without compromising the journey in the telling (28).

(Treu 2000): Chopin claimed that her idea for *The Awakening* was altered by Edna messing up her original plan (23).

PLOT OF *THE AWAKENING*:

(Bunch 2001-2): Rather than provide answers, *The Awakening* shares Edna's revelation of questions about life (61).

PUBLICATION OF *THE AWAKENING*:

(Asbee 2001b): Negative reviews of *The Awakening* and its publisher's change of management caused only a first edition to be published until it was again printed in English again in 1969 (243). A volume dealing with modern criticism of Chopin's work was produced in 1992 (243).

(Disheroon-Green 2001): In 1969, the publication of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* resurrected *The Awakening* and *At Fault* for critical audiences (xxviii).

RECEPTION OF *THE AWAKENING*:

(Asbee 2001a): Author Willa Cather reviewed *The Awakening* for the *Pittsburgh Leader* in 1899, noting that an author of Chopin's exceptional style should not have felt moved to write a second *Madame Bovary*. Cather characterized Emma as a quick outline of a woman fallen under the influence of overly-romanticized love (274-75). In the introduction to Cyrille Arnavon's 1953 translation of the novel, he likens Edna to Emma Bovary, pointing out that any woman neglected by her husband and bored with her children would likewise fantasize of straying from the confines of her life. However, Arnavon criticized Chopin's use of suicide to resolve the novel, claiming Chopin does not make a credible case for Edna's act of mental weakness (275). Although Chopin's book is less well known in Britain than are some other late-nineteenth century novels, it is becoming increasingly more widely read. It has inspired film adaptations and has also inspired a recent novel by Robert Stone (284-85).

(Asbee 2001b): By telling Edna's story without moralizing about her social transgressions, Chopin scandalized most readers of *The Awakening* (242). Following *The Awakening*'s initial publication, Chopin was ostracized by friends and denied membership to a local Fine Arts Club. Popular legend claimed that the St. Louis library

system banned the novel, but recent scholarship has shown no evidence to support such a claim (243).

(Bunch 2001-2): Utilizing Bataillean philosophy to navigate *The Awakening* we are better able to understand why it was initially received as a hazardously rebellious work (61).

(Ewell 2002): Following the publication of Chopin's *Complete Works* in 1969, *The Awakening* became a popular text in women's study curricula, as well as a concrete example of prejudice in literary history (215).

(Rich 2003): In the June 1899 Los Angeles Sunday Times, *The Awakening* was declared unwholesome and sickeningly self-centered; the writer also compared the novel to an Audrey Beardsley illustration (121).

(Weinstock 2002): For five decades after its publication, *The Awakening* and its author were viewed as scandalous, limiting the book's reading audience and its effect on the reading public (45). Edna Pontellier was for decades characterized by reviewers as sick and self-centered, while *The Awakening* was perceived by many as wholly dirty and cliché (45).

PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THE NOVEL:

(Asbee 2001a): *The Awakening* is the first work in which Chopin openly conveys her opinions concerning women's lives during the late 1800s (269). The contrasts between Chopin's two novels are striking (270). *The Awakening* is Chopin's search of the feminine understanding (271).

(Asbee 2001b): After publishing *The Awakening*, Chopin wrote very little and died within five years time when a blood vessel burst in her brain (243).

(Bunch 2001-2): Widowed and living among St. Louis' intelligentsia, Chopin was introduced to German philosophy, specifically Hegelianism, by Dr. Frederick Kolbenheyer, Chopin's gynecologist and possible lover (44-45). Chopin found intolerable many of the intellectuals Kolbenheyer considered friends and would often mock the Hegelian philosophy in print (45). Chopin's rejection of Hegelian philosophy helps the reader understand why the theme of *The Awakening* focuses primarily on the nature and purpose of being as none of her other works do to the same degree (45).

(Bunch 2001-2): Chopin's most purposeful work, *The Awakening*, disputes many of the established ideas of her time, thus foreshadowing intellectually anarchical movements to come, especially modernism and post-structuralism (45). Chopin's perceptions foreshadow the ideas of Georges Bataille, a French philosopher and writer whose works

influenced key figures of the post-structuralist movement – Michael Foucault and Julia Kristeva (45). Chopin's radical theories, evident in *The Awakening*, can be understood in light of Bataille's notions concerning the division of the self (45). *The Awakening* shows Chopin's doubt that life can be comprehended by means of logic (45). Chopin's fiction, like that of Bataille, expresses dissatisfaction with intellectualized approaches to experience, yet their writing styles differ dramatically (46).

(Disheroon-Green 2001): Prior to writing *The Awakening*, Chopin sharpened her writing skill by writing short stories (xxviii).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Biographer Emily Toth maintains that Chopin's written work and behavior exhibited unorthodox characteristics for a nineteenth century woman. Chopin's works do not follow the pattern popular during her era: especially the idealization of motherhood and of the mother-child relationship (274). Widowed and in debt, Chopin began writing to support herself and her family. *The Awakening* was perceived to violate acceptable standards of behavior and taste to the point that Chopin quit writing for publication. The stigma of *The Awakening's* critical reception prevailed for fifty years after its initial release (274-75). Chopin's personal feelings toward Mademoiselle Reisz are difficult to determine. Possibly she attempts simply to present an example of a completely independent, self-determined woman (277). Kate Chopin

exemplifies female writers who reacted against the sentimentality of women authors during the pre-Civil War era (279).

(Pizer 2001): Chopin was influenced by the works of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and the French naturalists, and created a work that explored the biological and social limitations upon human purpose in bourgeois Creole society (5). While Chopin dismisses Darwin's philosophy of feminine passiveness, she does incorporate his notion of a feminine instinct to protect one's children. Thus, by actively seeking to free herself socially, Edna experiences emotional strife in relation to her role as a mother. She may be able to oppose social pressures concerning proper motherhood, but she seems unable to oppose her own innate feelings of duty toward her sons (6-7).

(Rich 2003): Paradoxically, Chopin's own comments on British "New Woman" fiction foreshadowed the kind of censure *The Awakening* itself would later elicit (122).

CRITICAL RESPONSE:

(Asbee 2001b): Published first in the United States in 1899, *The Awakening* met with highly critical reviews, and was not republished until 1969 in the English language. In 1953, the novel was translated into French, but was not readily available to the public until the late 1960s (242). Reviewers of 1899 spoke in hostile terms about *The Awakening*, referring to the novel as lethal, noxious, self-centered, unhealthy, and trashy

(243). In the 1970s, on the eve of the feminist movement, Chopin's novel was praised where it had once been vilified (243).

(Bunch 2001-2): Overlooking the serious issues raised by Edna's suicide, many modern critics prefer to concentrate on Chopin's interpretation of New Orleans Creole society (44).

(Disheroon-Green 2001): Many analysts argue that *The Awakening* overshadows Chopin's first novel *At Fault*, but the comparison is not accurate since the latter novel was professionally printed while the earlier one was not (xxviii). Most recent critical analysis of *At Fault* compares it with *The Awakening* (xxix-xxxii).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): Chopin develops characters who run the gamut of racial, socio-economic, and sexual classifications, yet critics have not yet analyzed her treatment of gay men in *The Awakening* (183). To include characters of undoubtedly homosexual bent would have caused an intensely negative response to *The Awakening* (194).

(Ewell 2002): The majority of literary criticism concerning Chopin's work has focused on *The Awakening* (214). Critics of Chopin's day criticized the author's permissive treatment of Edna's wanton behavior. The concluding chapter of the novel, in particular, lacks any evidence of authorial condemnation, lending a three-dimensionality to the heroine's dilemma (215). Shocked by the negative critical response *The Awakening*

received, Chopin issued a formal apology, though it lacked any evidence of the author feeling any true regret (215).

(Lippincott 2000): The contemporary readers who were most critical of Chopin, overlooking their own inconsistency, criticized Edna's adulterous behavior while ignoring Chopin's detailed description of Adèle's pregnancy (57). As society's attitudes toward pregnancy and childbirth have evolved, so has its ability to receive objectively Chopin's novel of a woman's erotic awakening (64-65).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Recent criticism of *The Awakening* reveals the close relationship between nineteenth century social norms of female eroticism and of women's lives within and without the home (273). With few exceptions, nineteenth-century critiques of *The Awakening* reveal how far Edna Pontellier is from representing acceptable standards for women (275). Most eighteenth century critiques characterized the novel as gruesome sex writing, obscene and tawdry (275).

(Pizer 2001): In the last four decades, *The Awakening* has undergone intensive analysis, theoretically and culturally, to become one of the most investigated American novels (5).

(Pizer 2001): Any examination of *The Awakening* should not neglect its obvious significance as a reflection of the rise of naturalism in American fiction in the last decade of the nineteenth century (5).

(Treu 2000): *The Awakening* has sparked contention in its readers since its publication in 1899, first due to Edna Pontellier's adulterous affairs and suicide. More recently, feminist critics have criticized Edna's over-romanticism or praised her decision to die rather than live an unfulfilling life (21-22).

(Weinstock 2002): During the latter half of the twentieth century, feminist critics discovered *The Awakening* to be a text rich with description of women's experiences during the nineteenth century (45). Critics in the late twentieth century argued that Chopin surpassed previous works in honestly characterizing nineteenth century women's desire for freedom, both sexually and individually (45).

FEMINISM:

(Asbee 2001a): *The Awakening* is Chopin's search of the feminine understanding (271). Scholars have often categorized Edna as a "new woman" (277).

(Barrish 2000): Though modern feminist critics would hail Edna as a universally representative feminist character, the novel's treatment of the Mexicanist presence proves it applicable to modern bourgeois white women alone (72). Madame Ratignolle's exaggeratedly white Creole femininity and the novel's Africanist and Mexicanist presence serve to normalize and universalize Edna's American Protestantism. Even modern scholars tend to look at the novel's women through a binary lens, with Edna on one side and all those of color on the other (74).

(Lippincott 2000): Chopin confronts nineteenth century constraints on women by subtly including scenarios of pregnancy and childbirth in *The Awakening* (55).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Edna's sensual awakening and rejection of social norms challenged current notions of womanhood as presented in books of etiquette and conduct (275). Edna's pursuit of self-realization could only be characterized as a challenge to nineteenth-century notions of feminine fulfillment, regardless of its complete lack of political motivation (278). The characters of Miss Highcamp and Miss Mayblunt, although only minor players in *The Awakening*, represent the kind of women most suspect by both Léonce and Dr. Mandelet – feminists and suffragettes (278). The extent to which the three main female characters accept social mandates determines their approval: Madame Ratignolle defines herself by her marriage and children, Mademoiselle Reisz overtly defies feminine convention, and Edna Pontellier vacillates between the two in an attempt to realize herself on her own terms (279).

(McGee 2000): Most significantly, the meals in *The Awakening* serve to draw attention to the state of women during the radically changing social environment of the turn of the century (47). Pursuing fulfillment on her own terms, Edna paints when she would have fulfilled domestic responsibilities in the past (49). (McGee 2000): Mademoiselle Reisz, as a woman who has sacrificed no end of material comforts for art, and Madame Ratignolle, who has surrendered to the prescribed roles of wife and mother, represent the

extremes of women's options during the late nineteenth century. Desiring neither life, Edna struggles to carve out a place somewhere between the two, a nearly impossible task (49).

(Pizer 2001): In New Orleans, Edna acts in a manner congruent with the New Woman of the 1890s: leaving her husband, developing her own medium of expression, and beginning an extramarital sexual relationship (8).

(Rich 2003): Edna Pontellier challenges the mandates of Victorian True Womanhood (124). Chopin does not advocate any single option for women of her day, but rather offers characterizations of vastly different women who find their self-selected options fulfilling. While Mademoiselle Reisz and Adèle Ratignolle portray diametrically opposite choices for women, both are content with their chosen way of life (131-132).

(Varney and Erdman 2003): Guided by convention, Edna becomes party to a life she does not want (271). Much like the expectations placed upon Edna in the nineteenth century, during the 1980s a strong tendency was to surrender oneself in a world under male control (272-73). Edna serves as a tragic hero for modern women, making them realize the multiple options available to them that were not available to her (273).

FREEDOM:

(Asbee 2001a): Edna experiences increasing levels of relief as first her father, then Leonce, and finally her sons leave New Orleans. Without them present, she is free of the restraints of being a daughter, wife, or mother (279).

GRAND ISLE:

(Asbee 2001a): Ironically, the date at which *The Awakening* is set roughly coincides with the year when a hurricane destroyed much of Grand Isle. As the soft gulf breeze can turn deadly, so too does Edna's awakening (285).

IMAGERY:

(Asbee 2001b): Chopin uses fairytale images similar to those from Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Rip Van Winkle to communicate the awakening to new possibilities Edna experiences (255).

INDIVIDUALITY:

(Asbee 2001b): Edna renounces her roles as a wife and mother, and finally as artist, realizing that simple opposition to the norm will not solve her internal struggle (245).

(Bunch 2001-2): *The Awakening* is the tale of one woman's choosing all things wonderful, especially an unsettled, irresponsible life, over matrimony and maternity (47). Edna's life of independence is supported by money she wins at the races and money

inherited from her mother – money Edna has not worked to earn (58). Edna's breaking of the vase, throwing an elaborate birthday celebration, and deciding to pursue a life of sensual intensity all point to a shift in the way she determines to define herself and the economy in which she operates. Edna is no longer a possession to be acquired, but is now the sole determiner of value in a pirate economy of her own making (58).

(Lippincott 2000): Edna's realization of her significance in the greater scheme of life is the first spark in her ultimate self-realization (58).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): While Adele revels in the roles of wife and mother, Edna rebels against social expectation in the only way she knows: to separate herself physically and emotionally from her children and husband (276). Throwing off her identity as wife and mother, Edna strives to realize herself independently of others (276).

(Muirhead 2000): Because Edna is not a white male, and thus not one of the socially-mandated possessors of power, she is denied the liberty to choose her mode of productivity (painting) and the power that comes from making such a decision for one's self (43). Edna turns away Alcee's efforts to see her daily, as these efforts threaten her new-found independence (46). In later conflicts with Arobin, Edna recognizes her need and ability to take command of her situation, especially in relation to men (47-48).

(Strozier 2002): When Edna Pontellier marries into a Creole family she becomes subject to its mores of conduct and gender roles. Edna's internal search for identity is juxtaposed against this rigid social system (27).

INFLUENCES OR PARALLELS:

(Asbee 2001a): *The Awakening* was influenced by the writings of a variety of nineteenth-century authors (270). *The Awakening* contrasts strikingly with earlier novels, particularly with Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, although the stylistic effects of the two books are often similar (271). When we compare Edna to Jane Eyre, another female character of the nineteenth century who confronts illicit love, we see that each feels a comparable degree of passionate yearning, yet Edna is not as restricted by morality or religion. Staking her hopes on love, Jane remains steadfast, where Edna heeds the seductive call of the sea and drowns herself (271). The work of Guy de Maupassant had a major impact on Chopin's writing (272-74). Parallels have often been drawn between *The Awakening* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (274). In the introduction to Cyrille Arnavon's 1953 translation of the novel, he likens Edna to Emma Bovary, pointing out that any woman neglected by her husband and bored with her children would likewise fantasize of straying from the confines of her life. However, Arnavon criticized Chopin's use of suicide to resolve the novel, claiming Chopin does not make a credible case for Edna's act of mental weakness (275). In 1956, Kenneth Eble called *The Awakening* an American *Madame Bovary*, noting that Edna displays a degree of self-reliance not found

in Emma Bovary and that Chopin concentrates on Edna with a kind of penetration not found in Flaubert's depiction of Emma (275-76). Eble argues that unlike Emma Bovary, Edna is neither overly romantic nor riddled with guilt about her sensuality. She represents transformations in women's attitudes that occurred between the time *Madame Bovary* (1856) and *The Awakening* (1899) were published (276).

(Asbee 2001b): Some critics argue that Edna more closely represents an evolved female-animal who emerges from the sea into a godless universe than Botticelli's Venus. This interpretation falls in line with the ideas of Darwin, T.H. Huxley, and Herbert Spencer, whose writings influenced Chopin's ideology (259-260). One analysis contends that Chopin utilized Darwinian sexual selection theories in *The Awakening*, abandoning traditional Christian ideas of morality and regional notions the Southern white women did not feel sexual yearnings (261). One critic argues that, contrary to the theories of Charles Darwin, Chopin's female characters play a vigorous role in choosing their sexual partners (261).

(Bunch 2001-2): Once Edna crosses the boundaries of sensual expression as a married woman, she begins to spend money lavishly. All her actions revolve around satisfying her sensual longings alone: pursuing relationships with men other than her husband, sending her children to their grandmother's, or lavishly entertaining friends. In all these ways, Edna exemplifies the kind of autonomous power celebrated by Georges Bataille (49).

(Rich 2003): Chopin's work shares themes and stylistic elements with that of George Egerton, the pseudonym of Mary Chavelita Dunne, whose novel entitled *Keynotes* was widely read because of its "advanced" views (121). (Rich 2003): Chopin's narrative style and the themes of her works were influenced by late nineteenth century French authors like Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant, by feminist authors George Sand and Madeame de Stael, and by playwright Henrik Ibsen (124). (Rich 2003): Chopin's depiction of Leonce resembles George Egerton's depiction of an unappealing husband in one of Egerton's stories (127). (Rich 2003): In its themes and social impact, Chopin's novel resembles a work by the feminist writer George Egerton (131).

(Strozier 2002): In its themes and in its focus on individual experiences, Chopin's novel resembles Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, even though the novels differ in technique (26).

(Weinstock 2002): Several of Chopin's short stories – particularly "Her Letters" - deal with the same controversial issues as *The Awakening*, despite its negative reception. In fact, "Her Letters" may be an even more explicitly feminist work than the novel itself (45). The final outcome of *The Awakening* is almost the reverse of the outcome depicted in Chopin's short story "Her Letters" (51). Leonce, like the husband in Chopin's story "Her Letters", arouses a modicum of sympathy, as both the story and the novel suggest that men who think they own their wives run the risk of feeling frustrated (51).

Chopin's story "Her Letters" may be a more subversive work than *The Awakening* since the story shows its heroine achieving a certain amount of autonomy (60).

LOVE:

(Asbee 2001a): Although a quick synopsis of *The Awakening's* plot would lead one to believe that it is void of love, a closer analysis will show that this is not the case (271).

MARRIAGE:

(Asbee 2001a): Although *The Awakening* fits the *fin de siècle* style of fiction, Edna and Léonce's marriage resembles one of the Victorian era, the respectability of which is preserved by silent collusion (280).

MATRIARCHY:

(Bunch 2001-2): Edna's preferred style of motherhood consists of infrequent, but lavish, symbols of affection with no expectations attached (59).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): The juxtaposition of Adèle and Edna centers upon each woman's adaptation to or rejection of maternal social expectations (276). Adèle Ratignolle embraces the nineteenth-century notion of womanhood, exemplified by her utter dedication to her family (276).

NATURE:

(Asbee 2001a): Nature is the most seductive force in Edna's life (271).

(Bunch 2001-2): As Edna is overcome by the Gulf waters she hears the voices of her father and her sisters calling her back to their world, followed by the barks of a dog wanting to escape his chains, and spurs from the cavalry officer she longed for as a young woman. His spurs symbolize the ways humans control nature to make it productive (60).

EDNA'S FAREWELL PARTY:

(Asbee 2001a): While the highly sensuous nature of Edna's dinner party might have shocked the typical British or American reader, Chopin was writing about Creoles, known for their unconventionally open sensuality. However, it is essential to remember that the party's hostess is not herself of this Creole set, but a Kentucky Presbyterian (283). It's significant to note that Madame Ratignolle is absent from Edna's dinner party, and her husband leaves before the decadent mood takes hold (283).

(Bunch 2001-2): Four episodes characterize Edna's decision to abandon her former way of life for one of growing expense: Edna intentionally breaks a vase in her bedroom, she throws herself an elaborate birthday party, she moves to a small house of her own, and she commits suicide (54). Edna chooses to use the finest material representations of her marriage to Leonce, the pinnacle of which is a diamond tiara she wears, a symbol of his attempt to name her as his ultimate possession. Instead the wearing of the tiara represents

a door closing on Edna's role as wife and opening on a life of self-determination and independence (56).

(McGee 2000): The party Edna throws to mark her break from Léonce is the first complete meal described in the novel; all the previously-described meals are simply preparatory to this one, which is meant to emphasize Edna's new independence (49).

Edna chooses to take the place of the guest of honor rather than that of overseer, as a wife was expected to, marking the shift of focus in her life (49). While Edna's party marks the beginning of her independent life, the men in her life are present in physical ways: the cocktail her father created is used to begin the evening's festivities, and Edna wears a diamond tiara sent her by Léonce, whose money Edna seems to have used to finance the lavish affair (50). Edna's great concern over the details of her final dinner upon returning to Grand Isle further emphasize meals' importance in *The Awakening* (50).

PATRIARCHY:

(Bunch 2001-2): Although Edna's father and husband differ greatly on the surface, they both are driven by the same motivations – accumulation, tradition, and obligation – forces Edna longs to escape. Her present with Léonce strongly resembles her past with her father (51).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): In *The Awakening*, Chopin depicts diametrically opposing male lead characters (Léonce Pontellier as a generous, yet emotionally-negligent husband, and Robert LeBrun as an effeminate young man, awkward in the presence of other men), using frequent representations of the phallus to further this idea (183-84).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): *The Awakening's* male characters serve to represent social norms of Chopin's era: they tend to be ignorant of or uncaring about feminine sentiments (277).

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Chopin uses the character of Léonce to represent middle-class patriarchy, especially in Léonce's treatment of Edna as a possession (277). *The Awakening* serves as both an example and a criticism of nineteenth-century patriarchy's notions concerning women's means of personal identification (279). Chopin effectively writes a novel that explores the impact of eighteenth century patriarchal notions of feminine identity on women's sense of fulfillment and realization, while offering alternative means for women to realize their authentic selves (279).

(McGee 2000): Dinner is associated with patriarchy at a meal attended by Léonce, Edna's father, and Dr. Mandélet, who all seem concerned with Edna's neglect of her domestic responsibilities (48).

(Pizer 2001): *The Awakening* draws attention to the patriarchal endorsement of conventional notions of motherhood to the end of insuring male authority when Léonce criticizes Edna's mothering skill in relation to their sick son and when Dr. Mandelet proposes that Edna is suffering an episode of feminine hysteria. Yet this tendency for patriarchy to exploit motherhood does not obviate the fact that women are the ones who give birth and that in Chopin's era women were presumed to have deep maternal instincts (7-8).

PERCEPTION OF MINORITIES:

(Barrish 2000): The presence of Mexican-American characters in the novel is as significant as the presence of African-American characters. The Mexican-American characters help define, in particular, the ways white men and women are presented in the book (67). Whereas the black women characters of *The Awakening* are easily categorized in the highly structured social hierarchy familiar to nineteenth century New Orleans, the Mexican women are portrayed as lustful, wild, exotic, and unattached. The fact that Mexico is a place and society unfamiliar to Edna only heightens her imaginings about its women. Ironically, the body of water that separated exotic Mexico from New Orleans is the same seductive Gulf that spurs Edna's sexual awakening (69). Mexico and Mexicans serve to demarcate Robert's sexual identity and Edna's feminine awakening (71-72). Though modern feminist critics would hail Edna as a universally representative feminist character, the novel's treatment of the Mexicanist presence proves it applicable to

modern bourgeois white women alone (72). Madame Ratignolle's exaggeratedly white Creole femininity and the novel's Africanist and Mexicanist presence serve to normalize and universalize Edna's American Protestantism. Even modern scholars tend to look at the novel's women through a binary lens, with Edna on one side and all those of color on the other (74).

SENSUALITY AND/OR SEXUAL DESIRE:

(Barrish 2000): Recent scholarship on *The Awakening* argues that the sensual awakening Edna Pontellier experiences is afforded by the labor of anonymous black women (65-66). Recent critics contend that the sexual liberation Edna experiences is made possible and its framework is provided by colored women around her, whom she takes for granted (66). Some recent analysts assert that the mulatto and quadroon women in *The Awakening* connote images of eroticism and unsanctioned sex, thereby emphasizing Edna's own awakening sexuality (66).

(Bunch 2001-2): Once Edna crosses the boundaries of sensual expression as a married woman, she begins to spend money lavishly. All her actions revolve around satisfying her sensual longings alone: pursuing relationships with men other than her husband, sending her children to their grandmother's, or lavishly entertaining friends. In all these ways, Edna exemplifies the kind of autonomous power celebrated by Georges Bataille

(49). Edna feels social restrictions shrink as she works toward building an intimate relationship with Robert, only to experience grief (53). Edna's desire for Robert moves her beyond the boundaries of marriage which have confined her, and at the same time defined her, for so long. The ensuing feelings of loss and anxiety are the first step toward experiencing sensual fulfillment (53-54). Edna's self-arousal only highlights the temporary nature of her newly discovered sensuality. Once the elation abates, she realizes her disconnectedness all the more (55).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): Edna's ease with Robert's touch grows (191). If Robert shared Edna's emotional longings, such an abrupt goodbye would be troublesome. However, Robert leaves Edna without so much as a look back. She is alone in the state of newly awakened emotional need (192). Edna's sexual longing causes Robert to flee to the cover of social acceptability. Edna's sexuality produces fear in the homosexual Robert (192-93). Edna's heightened sexuality terrifies Robert, who foresees that her persistence will ultimately reveal his homosexuality (193). Though Robert fears a situation in which his sexual orientation will be revealed, he pleads with Edna to remain with him when she is called to attend Adèle during childbirth. Possibly he is hoping, along with Edna, that he can respond to her amorous need (193). Robert chooses to abandon Edna once again rather than reveal his sexual impotence with a woman and damage Edna's self-esteem by showing he finds her erotically unstimulating (194).

(McGee 2000): Edna's independence is manifest in her acts of sexuality as well as her renewing pursuit of artistic expression, both of which arouse great feelings in her (49). Musical performances by Mademoiselle Reisz are coupled with growing romantic feelings for Robert LeBrun, first on Grand Isle and later at Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment (49). Unlike the men's reminiscences, Edna's story merges truth and fiction to evoke strong and authentic feelings (49).

SETTING:

(Asbee 2001b): *The Awakening* follows a rhythm of leaving and coming back, as the first sixteen and final chapter are set at Grand Isle and the remaining twelve chapters are set in New Orleans (244). Readers who are not Americans or residents of Louisiana may at first be puzzled by Chopin's references to aspects of Louisiana culture (247).

(Bunch 2001-2): Although *The Awakening* is set in Southern Louisiana and New Orleans, Chopin composed the book while living in St. Louis (44). Underscoring the increased sensuality Edna experiences living in the pigeon house, it becomes the setting for her extramarital liaison with Alcee (57-58).

(Duet 2002): Stories by Chopin not set in New Orleans often address the issue of women's work (57).

(Ewell 2002): Though *The Awakening* could be considered a work of regional fiction, Chopin's most popular and successful genre, its setting serves only to strengthen the author's intended broader focus in her work, in which she refuses to praise or condemn her characters (214).

(Muirhead 2000): In the setting of *The Awakening*'s social structure upper and middle class women were expected to function as wives, mothers, and social representatives for their husbands. To work outside the home, as Edna desires, would reflect negatively on Leonce (43).

(Varney and Erdman 2003): Edna's environment serves as a greater determiner in her life than her emotions, causing her feelings of turmoil (273).

SEX:

(Martin-Gonzalez 2001): Edna claims the authority to refuse her husband sexually, one step of many that will bring her toward ownership of her self (275).

STRUCTURE:

(Asbee 2001b): In structure, *The Awakening* resembles a piece of music rather than a realistic novel (266).

(Bunch 2001-2): Chopin uses economic phrasing to describe Edna's longing for Robert (53). Four episodes characterize Edna's decision to abandon her former way of life for one of growing expense: Edna intentionally breaks a vase in her bedroom, she throws herself an elaborate birthday party, she moves to a small house of her own, and she commits suicide (54).

(Lippincott 2000): *The Awakening* consists of 39 chapters, approximately the same number of weeks necessary for a normal pregnancy. The structure of the novel mirrors the progress of a typical pregnancy (57).

(McGee 2000): *The Awakening* is organized as a sequence of meals. These meals are symbolically significant in a variety of ways (47). Dinners provide the framework of the novel, giving structure to Edna's transformation and reflecting the social atmosphere in which she finds herself (47).

(Pizer 2001): The two major sections of *The Awakening* deal with Edna's time in Grand Isle, where her initial awakening occurs, and her time in New Orleans, where she attempts to implement her enlightenment into her daily existence (5-6).

(Strozier 2002): Chopin effectively communicates Edna's internal struggle within a framework that does not itself moralize. It is nonbiased without adopting the perspective of the larger culture (27).

(Treu 2000): The voices of the different characters weave together to build tension, similar to a symphony. Edna incorporates these voices within herself without allowing any one voice dominance. Léonce flatters, impacting his wife little to not at all. Madame Ratignolle voices the narrowly prescriptive perspective of the mother-woman, the late nineteenth century feminine ideal. Robert LeBrun is the voice of desire and attention to Edna.

CHOPIN'S STYLE:

(Asbee 2001b): Unlike most nineteenth century novels, *The Awakening* is not too long to be completed in a single reading (243-244). The brief length of *The Awakening* exemplifies a shift away from the three volume novel, popular throughout the 1800s. Chopin's abbreviated narrative style leaves room for the reader to use his or her powers of inference rather than merely be a passive observer by appealing so directly to the reader's responses, the novel functions much as music does (244). By reducing the number of characters, settings, and plot points Chopin was better able than previous writers to develop three-dimensional main characters. Images and symbols are even more significant in Chopin's novel than they had been in previous fiction (244). As repetition in music might, repetition of imagery provides a cohesive rhythm to Chopin's work. Chopin's chapters are of varied lengths, often involve contrasts from one to the next, but frequently are held together by various kinds of repetition, with each new appearance of an image or idea being more powerful or more resonant than the previous one (244).

(Bunch 2001-2): Though Edna's journey toward sovereignty ultimately leads to her destruction, as Icarus' did, Chopin is able to tell her tale in ways that contribute to the reader's enjoyment and enlightenment (61).

(Disheroon-Green 2001): One analyst contends that *The Awakening* and *At Fault* merge components of regional fiction, domestic fiction, and the fiction of the "New Woman" (xxxii).

(Disheroon-Green 2002b): Chopin's deliberate storytelling techniques lead readers to nontraditional inferences that her peers may have found distasteful (83). Chopin's writing style is purposeful and organized, lacking extraneous detail (84).

(Ewell 2002): In addition to *The Awakening*, Chopin wrote two novels and many short stories (212). The ethical dilemmas posed in *The Awakening* were first introduced by Chopin in *At Fault* (212). In her novel and short stories, Chopin utilizes an impressionistic style that depends on the effective use of setting, plot and dialogue (214-215). *The Awakening* is an impressive fictional work (215).

(Lippincott 2000): Using the first person perspective in this final turbulent scene mirrors the intense drawing inward many laboring women experience (64).

(Rich 2003): The style of Chopin's novel foreshadowed the later expressionistic style used by various modern authors (125).

(Strozier 2002): Chopin's unbiased narrative style serves to communicate Edna's journey of self-exploration while allowing the journey to remain private and specific to Edna (27). Chopin's narrative style gives Edna room to know herself without outside interference (28). The conflict between objective knowledge and inner knowledge is communicated by Edna's challenging boundaries, and ultimately failing to bridge the gap between the two forms of cognition (28-29). Chopin's novel serves as a statement against applying logical, scientific reasoning to human experience (29).

EDNA'S SUICIDE:

(Asbee 2001a): While Chopin chooses to address Adèle's labor and childbirth directly, detailing the traumatic ordeal, Edna's suicide is nearly romanticized, as Chopin offers no description of struggle and ultimately never concludes the scene. The novel ends with Edna losing consciousness, but alive (275).

(Asbee 2001b): Modern critics are torn about how to interpret Edna's suicide: an act of utter defeat or a surrender in hope of a mythic transformation (258).

(Bunch 2001-2): More than thirty years' worth of analysis of *The Awakening* supports the competing views that Edna's suicide represents either the ultimate expression of

freedom or an act of fearful surrender to social pressures (43-44). Overlooking the serious issues raised by Edna's suicide, many modern critics prefer to concentrate on Chopin's interpretation of New Orleans Creole society (44). Edna's suicide represents an act of positive surrender following an intuitive epiphany (44). Four episodes characterize Edna's decision to abandon her former way of life for one of growing expense: Edna intentionally breaks a vase in her bedroom, she throws herself an elaborate birthday party, she moves to a small house of her own, and she commits suicide (54). Edna's suicide reflects her focused intent on self-knowledge, despite its cost (58). As Edna is overcome by the Gulf waters she hears the voices of her father and her sisters calling her back to their world, followed by the barks of a dog wanting to escape his chains, and spurs from the cavalry officer she longed for as a young woman. His spurs symbolize the ways humans control nature to make it productive (60). Edna's surrender to death is necessary for her to understand her life (60). Chopin's heroine reflects the Batallean belief that in life, as in sex, truth is obtained only through complete surrender, in Edna's case surrendering to death (60). While most readers empathize with Edna's feelings of dissatisfaction, they question whether suicide is really the only resolution available. However, Edna's decision to end her life proves that she will not consider living if it requires bondage to any system she cannot endorse (60-61).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): Edna's suicide represents her final break from Léonce's control (194). Edna's suicide extinguishes the phallic power of Léonce's cigar, while protecting the truth behind Robert's cigarettes (194).

(Disheroon-Green 2002b): The event most explored by critics is Edna's suicide, which has been characterized as either a representative victory or an utter failure. Regardless of one's perspective the incident provokes questions which may not have clear cut answers (84). Edna's suicide has been characterized by critics as an unimaginative escapist failure, a self-defining decision, or a swim in the Gulf that simply has no end (84).

(Lippincott 2000): Countering the notion that Edna's suicide is an escape from life, Chopin uses pleasing imagery to describe her final moments, provoking the reader to reexamine the fundamental motives behind Edna's actions: escape or metamorphosis (64).

(McGee 2000): Edna and the novel ultimately cannot escape the framework of tradition, leaving its insurgent heroine no other option but death (47). Breaking free of the structure of meals, Edna will not eat this final dinner, but instead will swim to her death (51). The dinner left uneaten reflects the inconclusive ending of Chopin's novel. Edna freedom is never truly attained, as she cannot escape the patriarchal social framework that permeates every aspect of life (51).

(Muirhead 2000): Edna's inability to express herself, via language or art, contributes to her death (42).

(Pizer 2001): Despite Edna's pursuit of a new life, social and physical limitations cause her ultimate demise (12).

(Strozier 2002): Edna's suicide, like Chopin's narration of the incident, is designed to protect her inner self from concession to outside forces. She merely swims out of the conflict and out of the story (28).

(Treu 2000): The only point about which critics agree is that Edna kills herself (22). Given what the reader knows of Edna, suicide is not the only, nor most reasonable inference to draw from the novel's final scene (23). Chopin may have intentionally ended *The Awakening* vaguely to allow her readers an opportunity to consider several possible endings (23).

(Varney and Erdman 2003): Edna places her hope in Robert to provide an escape from her unsatisfactory life. When this option is closed to her, Edna escapes via suicide (273). Too near to clearly see the contradictions she faces, Edna can only kill them as she destroys her own body (273).

(Weinstock 2002): Edna's suicide is the direct result of her realizing that her awakening will never be complete, but is barren. Rather than accept such a fate, Edna (perhaps boldly) embraces death. Her death both resembles, and significantly differs from, the suicide described in Chopin's story "Her Letters" (60).

SYMBOLISM:

(Bunch 2001-2): At the moment when the vase's power to restrain is destroyed Edna realizes its lost value as well. Its broken pieces symbolize wastefulness and uselessness (55). As Edna is overcome by the Gulf waters she hears the voices of her father and her sisters calling her back to their world, followed by the barks of a dog wanting to escape his chains, and spurs from the cavalry officer she longed for as a young woman. His spurs symbolize the ways humans control nature to make it productive (60).

(Disheroon-Green 2002a): In *The Awakening*, Chopin depicts diametrically opposing male lead characters (Léonce Pontellier as a generous, yet emotionally-negligent husband, and Robert LeBrun as an effeminate young man, awkward in the presence of other men), using frequent representations of the phallus to further this idea (183-84). When Léonce Pontellier asserts male authority over Edna, he is often smoking a cigar simultaneously, thus symbolically reinforcing his mentality of male-supremacy toward women and men of questionable masculinity, such as Robert LeBrun, who is the only man in the book who does not anticipate that he will be held in high esteem just because he is a male (184). Once his tirade is complete, Léonce symbolically asserts his superiority over those who would disrupt him by lighting a cigar (186). Edna has left her wedding rings, symbols of her status as something owned by Léonce, while she swims with Robert, the source of her newly aroused sexuality and hunger for independence. Upon returning to the house, Edna asks Léonce to return her rings, unwillingly reinstating herself as his wife, while longing for the opportunity freedom from him would offer

(186). Léonce seems unconscious of any symbolism behind Edna's leaving her wedding rings behind. He simply keeps them until she returns, assured of her imminent desire to claim status as his wife, all the while smoking a cigar (186-87). Robert's cigarettes are a veiled reference to his gender affinity. Léonce – father, husband, and successful business man – boldly smokes cigars while Robert – the non-sexual companion of women – smokes delicate cigarettes (188). Once Robert departs, Léonce's phallic power no longer bears any weight on Edna (192).

(Disheroon-Green 2002b): *The Awakening* is a highly symbolic work (83). The symbolic link between the lady in black and Edna's sensual awakening has not been addressed in previous scholarship (83). The symbolic elements of nature, clothing, food, and femininity in Chopin's fiction have received much attention from critics, but the lovers and the lady in black have gone virtually unnoticed (84). Some critics have analyzed Chopin's use of symbolism to build a feminist Aphrodite myth or to criticize the social "trade" in feminine sexuality (84). In view of Chopin's highly purposeful life and writing style, the lovers and the lady in black must symbolize key elements in Edna's sexual and personal awakening (85).

(Lippincott 2000): Edna herself is symbolically pregnant, with the fully individuated woman she hopes to become (55). Edna's and Adèle's friendship mirrors the interconnectedness of an expectant mother with her unborn child (55-56). Edna's sexual and personal awakening are juxtaposed with Adèle's actual pregnancy and childbirth

experience (56). Although some critics have noted the confluent progression of Edna's awakening and Adèle's actual pregnancy, few characterize Edna's discovery of self as a symbolic pregnancy (56). While Adèle's pregnancy is openly characterized in the novel, Edna's spiritual pregnancy is described in the most elusive fashion (57). Edna's new self is conceived during her time at Grand Isle, where she is learning to swim in the ocean. The ocean serves as a maternal figure as well as a sexual stimulus, and is the main impetus in Edna's awakening (57). As a pregnant woman might, Edna becomes increasingly aware of her environment (58). Chopin juxtaposes Edna's symbolic pregnancy with the real pregnancy of Adèle (58). Edna sleeps frequently to overcome the fatigue of her state, just as a pregnant woman would (59). Edna's episode of faintness during a church service further reinforces the pregnancy motif (59). Edna's senses are heightened by her metaphorical pregnancy (59). While Adèle passed up the opportunity to dance, due to her pregnancy, Edna takes full advantage of the occasion (60). Edna experiences the first movement of her metaphoric pregnancy, or the quickening, during Chapter 18, comparable to the eighteenth week of a literal pregnancy, when the unborn child becomes most real to an expectant mother. At this time in the story, Edna is thinking about Adèle's life as a mother and wife (61). Her labor at its apex, Edna spends the night awake, plagued by ceaseless wonderings (63). Walking naked into the ocean, symbolizing her mother, Edna begins the final stage of her rebirth (63-64). In Edna's final recollections are images of fertility: bees and flowers (64). By using the imagery of pregnancy and childbirth, Chopin creates a work in which women's most universal rite of passage is explored (65).

(McGee 2000): *The Awakening* is organized as a sequence of meals. These meals are symbolically significant in a variety of ways (47). Edna's striving for autonomy from the domesticity of her life is suggested in part by means of descriptions of dinners (47). Food is also dualistically portrayed – at once representative of the institutions Edna wishes to be free of (marriage and motherhood) and also as yet tempting and gratifying (47). Both liberation and restriction are represented in the meals of *The Awakening*, especially for Edna (47). While enjoying the act of eating, Edna does not fulfill the traditionally feminine jobs related to meals (47). Several characteristics in Edna's life are described by scenes revolving around food: Léonce takes his meals at his men's club when Edna angers him, and he sends her packages of sweets when he is away, treating her much like one would a child (47-48). Edna's tardiness to meals while at Grand Isle reflects her resistance to conforming to expected social norms (48). While dinners grow less appealing for Edna, food itself becomes increasingly enjoyable (48). Edna's newly found autonomy, lack of domestic responsibilities, and heightened sensuality increase the pleasure she takes in food (48). The café where Edna meets Robert in Chapter 36 seems to symbolize the kind of security and lack of ostentation associated with gardens; it seems a special place, distinct from the ordinary world. It seems a place associated with women, with ancientness, and with relaxation (50).

(Muirhead 2000): As the caged parrot at the book's opening speaks without comprehension, so too Edna does not understand her situation until Mademoiselle Reisz

persuades her to voice her inner struggle (45). Chopin uses the Philomelic myth to address the silencing of women in her culture without estranging her readers (53).

(Rich 2003): Edna keeps on her desk a framed portrait of a famed tragic actor whom she loved as a young girl, implying her regret over bygone romantic possibilities (127). Edna's wedding rings represent her place as a bit of Léonce's property (128).

(Strozier 2002): In *The Awakening*, standard comprehension is identical to comprehension of community standards, although the latter are constricted, especially in terms of gender (27). Paradoxically, Edna's newly discovered inner self is represented by open elements of nature—the Gulf, the meadow, and unrestricted space. Chopin's narrative gives Edna the freedom to lose herself in these externals without compromising the intimacy of such a private surrender (28).

THEME(S):

(Asbee 2001b): The novel's main theme (a woman's discovery and nurturing of her sensuality) may well be the reason it was not taken seriously until the dawn of the women's movement during the late 1960s (242). *The Awakening's* main character, Edna Pontellier, leaves her family and home to establish a life of her own, including sexual liaisons with a man for whom she cares little, and eventually commits suicide. Although such topics were not completely innovative, few writers had dealt as directly with

childbearing as Chopin does in this novel (242). Chopin defied the common notion that white Southern women were above sensual transgression (243).

(Bunch 2001-2): Chopin's rejection of Hegelian philosophy helps the reader understand why the theme of *The Awakening* focuses primarily on the nature and purpose of being as none of her other works do to the same degree (45). While Chopin associates motherhood with responsibility; pregnancy is associated with sexual misconduct (52).

(Disheroon-Green 2001): The reconfiguration of sexual, racial, and socio-economic identities – the major theme of *The Awakening* – was first introduced by Chopin in *At Fault* (xix).

(Duet 2002): Creole and Acadian women exploring their sexuality is a common theme in many of Chopin's stories (57).

(Ewell 2002): Chopin's short stories foreshadow the issues around which *The Awakening* develops: a woman's sexual expression clashing with her roles as wife and mother, the stress between social mores and intuition, the lack of independent women upon whom to model one's life, and nuanced depictions of indecisive feelings (214). *The Awakening* alludes to several classic southern ideas: the tendency to put women on pedestals, remembrances of the Civil War, and the conflicts between a Southern (or Creole) lifestyle and modern business (215). The main conflict of the novel focuses on Edna Pontellier's

struggle to nurture her emerging sensuality while defying traditional social mores – a struggle that ultimately leads to Edna's suicide (215).

(McGee 2000): At its root, *The Awakening* highlights the changing organization of the family at the start of the early twentieth century (47). *The Awakening* is dualistic in its theme and imagery: the sea is both mothering and deadly, and Edna's awakening is both liberating and lethal (47).

(Muirhead 2000): The use of language to position Edna Pontellier socially and emotionally, and to alter her status, is essential in *The Awakening* (42). Edna and Léonce lack the ability to discuss her dissatisfaction as a wife and mother. Within the Creole social structure such tools are not available, a situation that is further enforced by the fact that both Edna and Léonce express their concerns to other characters who likewise cannot assist them (43-44).

(Pizer 2001): Although *The Awakening* is not a work of naturalistic fiction in which Edna operates motivated by biology and society alone, but crosses several genres, the book does show the influence of naturalistic ideas. The influence of these ideas does not diminish the tragic significance of the book (11).

(Rich 2003): *The Awakening* must be analyzed in relation to the British New Woman context as well as that of the American (121). *The Awakening's* theme – a woman's

realization of the social limitations placed upon her – is characteristic of the New Woman genre (127).

(Strozier 2002): The conflict between objective knowledge and inner knowledge is communicated by Edna's challenging boundaries, and ultimately failing to bridge the gap between the two forms of cognition (28-29).

(Weinstock 2002): In her story "Her Letters" as well as in this novel, Chopin presents a tension between a woman's desire for autonomy and the social expectation that she will submit completely to her husband (49). *The Awakening*, like Chopin's story called "Her Letters", proposed that women had amorous wants as much as men and condemned opposing nineteenth century views (50). Edna's arguably narcissistic pursuit of passion may actually work to strengthen nineteenth century notions of women as emotionally flighty and undependable (50). In contrast, the woman in Chopin's story "Her Letters" behaves with extreme reason and compassion (50-51). Léonce, like the husband in Chopin's story "Her Letters", arouses a modicum of sympathy, as both the story and the novel suggest that men who think they own their wives run the risk of feeling frustrated (51).

TITLE:

(Asbee 2001a): *The Awakening's* first title was 'A Solitary Soul' (274).

CONCLUSION

In 2001, Dianne Russell produced a thesis surveying criticism of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* from the late 1980's through the early 1990's. That project was a direct inspiration for the present project, which covers articles dating from 2000 to the present. As a worthwhile ending to this project, comparisons and contrasts of some of my own findings with those presented by Russell are now presented. While some topics covered in Russell's work continue to interest critics today, a number of new emphases and concerns appear in the more recent work. As a result critical arguments dating from 2000 to the present cover a wide range of modern analytical perspectives formerly unrecognized or at least underemphasized in previous criticism. These topics include, for instance, minority characters' influences on main characters and the plot's progression; homosexual overtones in the text; and the novel's pregnancy motif. These new emphases suggest the ways Chopin criticism has continued to evolve, even in the relatively few years since Russell completed her work.

Feminism and women's issues were key topics in many of the articles surveyed by Russell. Typical titles dealing with this topic included the following: "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: Sex-role Liberation or Sexual Liberation?"; "From Conflict to Suicide – A Feminist Approach to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*"; "*The Awakening* and the Woman Question"; "*The Awakening* in a Course on Women in Literature"; "*The Awakening* in the Context of the Experience, Culture, and Values of Southern Women"; "Women's Language in *The Awakening*"; "Fate and Feminism in Kate Chopin's *The*

Awakening”; and “Puppets Must Perform or Perish: A Feminist Archetypal Analysis of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*.”

By contrast, feminism seems to be a much less prominent topic in recent Chopin criticism: whereas the words “feminism” or “feminist” are used in four of the nine articles just cited, this kind of term occurs only once in an article about Chopin published in the years since 2000 (“Working for Judith Shakespeare: A Study in Feminism”). Only four studies published during this period mention women’s issues explicitly in their titles, and even in those cases feminism seems usually not to be the main focus of concern (“Do You Not Know That Women Can Make Money?: Women and Labor in Louisiana Literature”; “Reconsidering *The Awakening*: The Literary Sisterhood of Kate Chopin and George Egerton”; and a chapter on Chopin in *The History of Southern Women’s Literature*). Of course, by the very nature of things, women’s issues will always remain prominent in any discussion of *The Awakening*, but it does seem striking that feminist concerns do not seem nearly as prominent in criticism published in or after 2000 than they had been before that date. Perhaps critics have come to the conclusion that the topic of feminism does not allow for as much original interpretation as it once did.

Critics have, obviously, long recognized Chopin’s inclusion of characters representing marginal groups, such as the working poor, widows, and the elderly. Two articles included in Russell’s project deal with the issue of race in *The Awakening*: “Doubly Dispossessed: Kate Chopin’s Women of Color” and “The Wretched Freeman”. However, the Mexicanist influence on all the novel’s characters has previously been overlooked. Recently, though, critic Phillip Barrish, in “*The Awakening*’s Signifying

'Mexicanist' Presence" has analyzed the novel's main characters in the context of their relationships with minority characters who surround them. For example, Barrish claims while Edna's sexual intentions are never questioned by her husband or close companions, the mulatto, quadroon, and Hispanic women who surround her are used by Chopin to draw a parallel between Edna's desire to experience illicit sexual relationships and the similarly illicit relationships that begat these women of mixed race. A surface reading of the novel would not result in such insight, as nineteenth century Louisiana would have been heavily populated by women of mixed race in service to white women. However, if such common knowledge were set aside, the strategic presence of ethnically diverse characters alongside the novel's main characters would strike one as much more significant than was previously assumed. By employing this explicitly ethnic lens, Barrish argues that Robert and Edna's illicit relationship and Edna's sensual awakening are achieved at the expense of the female minority characters who orbit this privileged white couple.

Initially, Barrish argues, Robert is considered a harmless young man. Rather than pursue a career of his own, he assists his aging mother in the running of the family's hotel during the summer. He is most often found in the company of women, yet these women are noticeably unattainable – aged widows, adolescent girls, and married women. Robert is not perceived as a sexual aggressor, nor is his attention construed as threatening to the marriages of the women he accompanies, either by the women or by their husbands. However, perceptions of Robert change once he is linked relationally to Mariequita, a sexually unfettered Mexican girl whose reputation is widely known. Chopin describes

her as a sly girl, having a pretty yet provocative face, and bare, dirty feet, of which she is unashamed. Edna is astounded by the girl's dirty feet and openly stares at them to the point that the girl asks Robert why Edna stares at her so much. According to Barrish Mariequita is at once appealing and repellant to Edna, much like the illicit relationship Edna longs to pursue with Robert.

Mariequita has been linked romantically with both Robert and Victor LeBrun. This linking Barrish claims changes the reader's perception of Robert's legitimacy as a lover. Before his association with the Mexican girl is revealed he is without a sexual dimension. Linking the two characters adds an erotic depth to Robert that could not be communicated in any other way. Chopin implies that Robert too has succumbed to the primal longings that would drive him to pursue a sexual relationship with a character such as Mariequita. His involvement with the Hispanic girl allows him to the ranks of the typical bourgeois Creole males, as his prior interactions with women have not.

According to Barrish, Robert's time in Vera Cruz also influences the intensity of Edna's longing for him. Upon his return Barrish asserts, Edna imagines a love triangle between herself, Robert, and an imagined Mexican woman with whom Robert has had a relationship while in Mexico. This imagined liaison provokes Edna to pursue a relationship with Robert in an increasingly intensified way. Barrish points out that Robert chooses to smoke cigars after returning from Vera Cruz. In his sexually ambiguous state at the beginning of the novel he had smoked cigarettes. What he chooses to smoke reflects his sexual status. (This interpretation is also emphasized in

Suzanne Disheroon-Green's "Mr. Pontellier's Cigar, Robert's Cigarettes: Opening the Closet of Homosexuality and Phallic Power in *The Awakening*.")

Barrish observes that whereas the characters' attitudes toward African-Americans are never spoken, in one particularly poignant scene Adele Ratignolle does reveal markedly stereotypical attitudes toward Mexicans. In Chapter fifteen, Adele cautions Robert to be careful in dealing with Mexicans, as she believes them to be "treacherous people, unscrupulous and revengeful." Adele admits to having known only one Mexican herself, a man who made excellent tamales, but who also killed his wife. Her story portrays the man as at once endearing and unpredictably volatile. This brief anecdote Barrish asserts spotlights bourgeois attitudes toward minorities, as Adele represents the ideal woman of the period. Where Creole attitudes toward African-Americans need not be addressed for Chopin's audience, attitudes toward Mexicans reveal a culture steeped in rigid notions of ethnic place and personality.

Barrish argues that the presence of ethnic women serves to normalize Edna's status in a world of hyper social stratification, with Adele Ratignolle as its ideal. Unlike Mariequita, the quadroon nursemaid, and Adele (who is repeatedly characterized as a fair blond), Edna is not characterized as sensual by any one physical aspect. She is a complex character, driven by a longing to be free of the social and moral strictures that define the novel's other female characters, both negatively and positively.

Just as the ethnic (and especially Mexicanist) emphasis is typical of the most recent criticism of Chopin's novel, so is an attention to the possibility of a "gay" or "queer" dimension. In Russell's project, an article entitled "Art is an Unnatural Act:

Homoeroticism, Art, and Mademoiselle Reisz in *The Awakening*” confronts the possible lesbianism of Mademoiselle Reisz. But in Suzanne Disheroon-Green’s “Mr. Pontellier’s Cigar, Robert’s Cigarettes: Opening the Closet of Homosexuality and Phallic Power in *The Awakening*,” Chopin’s use of phallic symbols is analyzed as it pertains to Robert LeBrun. In what is probably the most unique perspective of the articles included in this project, Disheroon-Green argues that Robert’s inability or unwillingness to respond to Edna’s growing sexual appetite results not from a lack of experience or an unwillingness to cross social norms, but rather from a concerted effort to disguise his homosexuality. Disheroon-Green believes that Phallic symbols, in the form of Robert’s and Léonce’s choices of smoking implements, cue the reader to each man’s role in Edna’s sexual awakening.

Léonce smokes a cigar in nearly all scenes in which he interacts with Edna, especially where he is asserting his authority over her as his wife. His assumption that his perspective and wishes should be heeded because they are his is as presumptive and offensive to Edna as is his cigar. While at Grand Isle, Léonce repeatedly points out Edna’s and Robert’s shortcomings, emphasizing that he represents the dominant social perspective of white bourgeois males. Robert does not fit this mold. He does not have a profession or a wife; he does not attend a social club, choosing instead to spend his time in the company of unattainable women; and, most notably, he smokes cigarettes, which are feminine versions of the cigar. Where Robert appeals to Edna’s emotional needs, Léonce provides for her physical and financial needs as Robert cannot. In Léonce’s eyes, Robert is no threat to his marriage.

In the dinner scene that precedes Robert's departure for Mexico, he smokes the one cigar he owns. Given its overtly public nature, this act serves, according to Disheroon-Green, to reinforce the suspicion that Robert is hiding his homosexual leanings. Disheroon-Green even argues that Robert's sudden decision to go to Mexico is in response to rising discomfort with Edna's sexuality. Knowing that he cannot fulfill her erotic longings, Robert flees suddenly in hopes that her feelings for him will fade during his absence. This idea is further reinforced by the fact that Robert does not write Edna while he is away, nor does he inform her of his return to New Orleans. Their chance encounter alone is responsible for the continuance of their illicit relationship.

According to Disheroon-Green, Chopin's choice of the specific Mexican city to which to send Robert is telling. At the time of *The Awakening's* writing, Vera Cruz was, she claims, noted for its large population of bisexual men. Disheroon-Green asserts that Chopin would have known this. Also, Chopin includes a rather ambiguous relationship between Robert and a man in Vera Cruz – a relationship that is never clarified. The reader assumes that the relationship is based on business, but with further insight come (at least according to Disheroon-Green) further questions about Robert's sexual bent. No previous critic in the history of commentary on Chopin's novel seems to have made a sustained or explicit argument that Robert is a homosexual; therefore, Disheroon-Green's article signals a marked departure from previous thinking about the novel.

Pregnancy is another topic that received relatively little explicit attention in previous discussions of the novel. Russell did examine an article entitled "Childbirth and Motherhood in *The Awakening* and in *Athenaise*", but Gail Lippincot's "Thirty-Nine

Weeks: Pregnancy and Birth Imagery in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" is apparently the first article to focus on the structure of the novel as it reflects the length and progress of a human pregnancy. Lippincot notes that structurally the novel consists of 39 chapters, the same number of weeks necessary for a full-term pregnancy. As Adele Ratignolle's pregnancy progresses, so too does Edna's symbolic pregnancy. Given her own familiarity with the side-effects of pregnancy, Chopin peppers the text with references to symptoms of Edna's physical and emotional condition; the result, Lippincot claims, is to encourage an increased awareness of the ways her evolution mimicks the changes typically experienced by a pregnant woman. Lippincot emphasizes, for instance, such matters as Edna's faintness, her fatigue, and her greater appreciation of food as she undergoes the gradual process of "awakening."

But unlike Adele's baby, who is born in one of the most graphic literary descriptions of childbirth of Chopin's time, Edna's "baby" is never completely viable. According to Lippincot, Edna is pregnant with the fully individuated self she hopes to become. Juxtaposed with Adele Ratignolle's actual pregnancy, Edna's symbolic pregnancy gives the reader a deeper understanding of the novel's subtle nuances and imagery. Lippincot's article, like Disheroon-Green's, marks a new development in the evolution of commentary on *The Awakening*.

Another new development in such commentary reflects the influence of philosophers whose work has only recently begun to affect the ways we think about literature. Revealing the influence of the evolution of philosophy on literary studies, this work includes such articles as Martin-Gonzalez's "Sexual Politics and Mother-Women in

The Awakening: A Foucauldian Analysis” and Stozier’s “Interiority, Identity, Knowledge: Unraveling the Cartesian Cogito.” Martin-Gonzalez argues that Chopin created character foils as Edna and Adèle to draw attention to the power structures to which women must belong or reject. Adèle chooses to surrender herself to the acceptable power structures of her day: wife and mother. Edna, on the other hand, rejects the restrictions of these same structures, thus subverting their power over her. By surrendering the social power such positions carry, Edna’s life becomes a social revolution with autonomy its prize. Stozier argues that the juxtaposition of *The Awakening* is within Edna. Stozier identifies Edna’s longing for independence as a foil to her roles as wife and mother especially. The rigid social order of the Creole culture, into which Edna marries, conflicts with her desire to define herself on her own terms. Stozier points out that Chopin’s style serves to express Edna’s internal struggle without compromising it in the telling. The articles Russell surveyed did not include such post-modern philosophic perspectives but instead analyzed Chopin’s work through more traditional critical philosophies of the sort implied by the titles such as “The Existential Dilemma of Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*,” “Edna Pontellier’s Art and Will: The Aesthetics of Schopenhauer in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*,” and “Revolt Against Nature: The Problematic Modernism of *The Awakening*.”

These comparisons and contrasts reveal that Chopin’s text is alive with meaning for many generations of readers. In the span of twenty years critical thought has shifted dramatically toward analyzing *The Awakening* as a statement of multi-layered individualistic fiction. Rather than focusing primarily on the main characters, modern

critics extract meaning and social statement from the most marginal characters (Mariequitta, the quadroon nurse) and the most minute details (Robert's cigarettes, Chopin's use of pregnancy imagery). Vastly differing analytical perspectives serve not only to open the literary student's mind to an array of notions concerning the text, but also prove the dynamic nature of Chopin's most noteworthy, and vilified, novel. Ironically, the novel that prompted the end of Chopin's literary career is a most poignant statement concerning the quashing of women's talents and potential by the mechanism of societal disapproval. As Edna's burgeoning talent is cut short of reaching its full expression, so too was Chopin's literary career. Yet both women leave a legacy of questioning what is acceptable and reaching beyond to what is yet unknown.