



**RISING AWARENESS AND SELFHOOD
IN KATE CHOPIN'S 'THE AWAKENING' AND
'THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK' BY DORIS LESSING**

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Abstract:

The postmodern idea of the self as fragmented and decentred in contrast with earlier traditions' idea of a rational, stable and autonomous self has great implications in the positionality of the woman in patriarchal discourse. This study applied a close reading of *The Awakening* and *The Golden Notebook* based on ideas from the new French feminist's theories of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray that indicate that the woman whose patriarchal discourses of Freud and Lacan placed outside the Symbolic, outside language has the resources to re-position and write herself as a subject. The paper used the '*signification process*' by Kristeva, supported by ideas from the discourses of Irigaray and Cixous, to trace the woman's progress through abjection into destabilising patriarchal representations of the female and rewriting herself. The female protagonists destabilised their entrenched representations, re-invented their own idea of femininity and affirmed *The Awakening* and *The Golden Notebook* as *L'écriture féminine* (feminine writing).

Keywords: selfhood/subjectivity; signification process; *L'écriture féminine*; *The Awakening*; *The Golden Notebook*

1. Introduction

Discussions about the self/subject in the contemporary society are more contested because of the idea that the individual is fragmented and decentred in opposition to the earlier idea of an autonomous, stable and rational self. The answers to the age-long raging questions about the identity and the constituent of an individual are always in process despite the stereotypical depictions of male and female entrenched in culture and established by history. Despite the efforts by earlier philosophic traditions to

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categorise and define an individual based on their socially assigned roles, the complexity of human nature eludes such categorisations. Correspondingly, the cultural representations of the female as an object are bound to change. This paper is concerned primarily with rising female selfhood as it relates to new French feminism within the contexts of *The Awakening* (Chopin, 1984) and *The Golden Notebook* (Lessing, 2014). It explores the process through which a woman can become a self, an individual who decides for herself rather than retaining the various definitions assigned to her in patriarchal discourse based on her duties and argues that the ability to become a self is inherent in the woman. Furthermore, this paper argues that the ability of the female characters to identify and retain a position for themselves to the extent of writing themselves into texts translates *The Awakening* and *The Golden Notebook* into the New French Feminism's *L'écriture féminine* (feminine writing). Postulations from the discourses of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray shall inform the close reading of the texts.

Earlier philosophical postulations on female subjectivity subsume women under the subjectivity of the male intimating that the concept 'human' has the male as its reference point. The female, in these suppositions, is essentially a domesticated and maternal being, described by her function without any individual identity except the one prescribed by the male. Correspondingly, Moi claims that the woman '*has been constructed as man's Other*' and has been '*denied the right to her own subjectivity and to responsibility for her own actions*' (1985: 92). However, since the Enlightenment, philosophy began to challenge the biological and caring nature ascribed to the female (Hall, 2004). Subsequent discussions on the imposed constraints on female selfhood followed similar trend until the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which saw the birth of feminist theory with its intent to restore selfhood to the female. While Fuller (1845) dwelt on restoring female selfhood through transformation of the mind-set, Taylor Mill (1851) and John Stuart Mill (1869) directed their propositions to institutions. The Mills associated female equality with the freedom to make decisions for oneself as the panacea to women's subordination and denied selfhood. Similarly, Beauvoir (1979) contends for an essential nature for the female in equality with the man. However, new French feminism argues that a male-ordered language created the woman currently in existence and that she can reposition herself to her specific nature based on her efforts. Subjectivity, according to French feminism, becomes an object wielded by the language that creates the individual. Paradoxically, the repositioning that French feminism advocates involves the areas of maternity and neurosis that marginalise the woman in patriarchal discourse. French feminist theorists contend that the woman is innately inclined to reinvent language, hence create a new subject position for herself. Based on their views, the subject position is not static, the self they contend for is a self that will continually interrupt meaning to enliven language, allowing the woman to disrupt and situate herself in the social realm as an individual, and not as a man's subordinate 'other' who reflects the glory of the man¹.

Using the stated ideas from New French feminism, this paper traces the progression of the female characters from their border positioning to the position of a

self/subjectⁱⁱ. It attempts to answer the question - how does a woman become herself? To achieve this, this paper begins with a brief discussion of Kristeva's signification process in her attempt to reclaim the position that Freudian and Lacanian developmental theories denied the female and supported by the ideas of Cixous and Irigaray on female subjectivity in tracing the progression of the characters to the positions of speaking subjects. Furthermore, this study discusses *The Awakening* and *The Golden Notebook* as feminine texts capable of destabilising patriarchal Symbolic order.

2. Signification Processⁱⁱⁱ

Unlike Beauvoir, the Mills and some other feminists who equate freedom for the female with equality with and the attainment of what the male has attained, new French feminism does not contest for the displacement of the privileges focused on the Phallus, the male as the self-sufficient, essential and stable signifier of authority. Rather, it argues against the notion of a stable signified and privileges language as the creator of the subject. Hence, the female can, with her positionality outside discourse transform the Symbolic^{iv} by claiming a subject position. The subject as a language construct has no fixed identity. It is always in the making like the linguistic signs, which constitute the subject. According to Kristeva, the linguistic systems that have been in use over time have always considered meaning in relation to a speaking subject whose 'transcendental ego' ultimately divorces meaning from its precursors (1986: 28). However, with the sign system as a '*signifying process*,' the tendency for the drives to attack and disrupt the stasis of the sign system will enliven meaning. Kristeva's signifying process involves a dialectic relationship between the semiotic^v and the symbolic aspects of language. The propensity to dismantle the hierarchical nature of the existing symbolic system is possible with both the semiotic and the symbolic operating on the subject.

Kristeva's system destabilises the association of the female with neurosis and irrationality, and rather, celebrates neurosis alongside Irigaray and Cixous as paradoxically empowering as well as threatening. A notable point in her theory for this paper is that the feminine and the semiotic are marginal to patriarchy and language, and from the marginal position, the feminine penetrates the Symbolic while still in contact with the chaotic '*chora*,' which she describes as a space capable of spontaneous and independent movements that precedes signification (Kristeva, 1986). The pre-symbolic semiotic is repressed and subjected to linguistic rules but, it often speaks out to disrupt the linguistic system as evidenced in poetic and psychotic utterances. Similarly, the woman serves the ambivalent duty of a life force to the society as well as a threat to its homogenising tendency. Additionally, the woman's alterity becomes a celebration rather than a limitation.

Also important for this paper is Kristeva's concept of abjection. Kristeva's notion of abjection denotes an operation of the psyche through which a subject constitutes itself, by excluding anything it sees as a threat. According to Kristeva (1980), a speaking

subject arises because language has shaped the conscious memories, the unconscious and the subject's aesthetic experiences. A splitting occurs each time a subject emerges because the process that awards a subject position to an individual appropriates the subject/individual as its object. The object becomes the reaction, the splitting that occurs as the emerging subject attempts to detach itself from what threatens its selfhood. This paper uses abjection to describe the feelings of horror manifested in the forms of depression, fear, anxiety, madness and death that a character feels when confronted with her corporeal reality or a breakdown in a character's distinction between what she has constituted as herself and the 'other', which she suppressed earlier to belong to her society.

3. Rising Selfhood: Edna and Anna

In *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier dissociates herself from the other women on vacation at Grand Isle, but not physically. *The Awakening* describes her as a sensitive and reserved young woman of twenty-eight who begins to lose her reservation through her association with Adele Ratignolle. Her marriage has conditioned her to hide her passionate nature and she does not expect Mr. Pontellier to respond to her sensitivity because his culture does not expect him to bother with such trivialities as a woman's emotions. From a very early age, Edna '*had apprehended instinctively the dual life - that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions*' (A, 57)^{vi}. Her father brought her up under rigid rules since her mother died when Edna was very young. This ambivalent nature seems to set Edna apart from the other women in Grand Isle. But she continues to maintain the status quo as a mother and a wife as the society expects of her until the night the husband wakes her up to care for a 'purportedly' sick child. Mr. Pontellier might have insisted on waking Edna to assert his authority, especially as she seems to prefer the cocoon of sleep than listen to his stories. However, on a deeper and unconscious level, the physical waking corresponds with resuscitating the feelings of dissatisfaction that Edna has repressed by concentrating on '*the abundance of her husband's kindness and a uniform devotion*' (A, 48). Mr. Pontellier has inadvertently roused Edna to start listening to the '*voice of the sea.*' Freud (1913) associates the sea with the maternal source of origin. The sea represents the 'chora', the maternal source of life, which now calls Edna to dialogue with it for her transformation. Sleep and wakefulness are part of the core metaphors that run through the text.

Mr. Pontellier's act of rousing Edna from her natural sleep simultaneously initiates a metaphorical act of waking Edna to the reality of her value in his household. Irigaray argues that the society preselects mothers as '*reproductive instruments marked with the name of the father, and enclosed in his house,*' thereby excluding them from exchange (1985: 185). Consequently, Edna rouses from the sleep that made her live six years of her married life as nothing more than a domestic drudge, an ambulatory womb and a sex object. She gives way to this arousal by weeping profusely, which psychoanalytically, indicates a reconnection with the maternal, the primal desire that is

unfathomable. *The Awakening*, through its intrusive free indirect discourse connects Edna's emotional outburst to '[a]n indescribable oppression which seemed to generate from some unfamiliar part of her unconsciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish', and finally concludes that '[s]he was having a good cry all to herself' (A, 49). As a baby in Kristeva's semiotic, Edna's feelings are chaotic and unfounded because such incidents are common in her marriage. Additionally, the text employs the midnight setting to attune to Edna's mood, and the quietness allows the penetration of 'the everlasting voice of the sea' (A, 49). Midnight also metaphorically compares to the enclosure of the womb, where Edna is retreating.

The text foregrounds the sea from the onset, making it part of the heteroglossia that clamour for accommodation within *The Awakening*. Gilbert (1983) reads the sea as the symbol of Edna's rebirth, a reconnection with the maternal. As such, 'the voice of the sea' becomes a voice within Edna's unconscious trying to unite her with her maternal nature prior to separation into the Symbolic. However, this paper reads the voice of the sea as Edna's desire to revolutionise the symbolic by changing the prescribed codes assigned to femininity. The sea also has a physical presence. According to the text, the sea '... broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night' (A, 49) that Mr. Pontellier woke Edna. Association of the sea to a 'lullaby' is another allusion to a mother-child relationship, as a lullaby is usually soothing, and a means of transferring cultural knowledge. Paradoxically, the lullaby it sends across to her is 'mournful.' Whereas the sea is multifaceted in its symbols, its 'mournful' tone portends the nature of Edna's strives to selfhood and the subsequent results. Antithetically, in the morning, Edna happily receives money from her husband, affirming her position as a kept woman.

While Edna has been living a life '- just driven along by habit' (A, 57), the summer on Grand Isle reminds her of her aimless, unguarded and unthinking walk through the meadow when she ran away as a child from her father's gloomy prayers. She compares her walk in the meadow to a swimming motion and the tall meadow grasses to the length of the ocean, making the ocean a symbol of freedom. The ocean seems to be an expression of Edna's deepest yearning, which is to be free from the restrictions imposed by the father figures. She goes swimming with Richard even when she earlier declined his offer. Two contradictory impulses impel Edna: '[a] certain light is now beginning to dawn dimly within her – the light which, showing the way, forbids it' (A, 54). She is torn between giving freedom to her repressed nature that has started clamouring for release and the habitual life of obedience, formerly as the Colonel's daughter, and presently, as a mother of two and a wife to Mr. Pontellier.

Similarly, Anna in *The Golden Notebook* is living in her own quagmire. Though she started to use the label 'insecure and uprooted' in an unapologetic way, 'as flags or banners for an attitude that amounted to a different philosophy,' which she associates with living life on the brink (GN, 31), Anna's life seems suspended, in stasis. For instance, reiterating her experience through Ella, her alter ego, the reader is informed that:

<...> it was over a year ago since Paul had left her and that everything she did, said, or felt, still referred to him. Her life was shaped around a man who would not return to her. She must liberate herself. This was an intellectual decision, unbacked by moral energy.
(GN, 276)

Like every other woman in the text, Ella accepts the prescription that she cannot move forward without a man, even when she understands mentally that her life is not restricted to a man, she still feels lethargic. She must decide whether to retain the societal prescription of life for the female or to listen to an inner voice. Ella/Anna finds out through her broken relationships that the panacea administered to the woman for her 'lack' by the culture is '*all a fraud and that she 'must liberate herself'*' (GN, 282). Anna operates on the patriarchal mentality of her day. Her society claims that the man and the woman are of equal status but fails to dislodge the age-long tradition that operates socially and psychically on the individual and mythic levels. Language defers meaning but does not completely wipe it off; hence, Anna cannot readily detach herself from the accrued definitions of a woman. Intellectual decision to free herself does not make the decision a reality. The text plays with Anna's rigid hold on reason as a means of keeping up with the logics of logocentric culture. However, the more she tries, the harder it becomes.

Anna is unable to publish again after her first novel, *The Frontiers of War*, a best seller that captures core societal and personal issues of war, class and male-female relationship. Her discussion with Mrs. Marks, her psychiatrist, exposes that her inability to write stems partly from her relationship with a man who hates her creative ability and her role as a mother to Janet. Anna explains that she resents Michael when he '*makes some crack about the fact I have written a book – he resents it, makes fun of my being an authoress*' and '*when he is ironical about Janet, that I put being a mother before loving him*' (GN, 216). Her relationship with a man cripples her from her true nature. Implicit here, also is the issue of a mother's relationship with the daughter. According to Kristeva, motherhood, starting from pregnancy, proceeds from the recognition of the existence of the 'other'. The recognition of the 'other' referring to the baby in the womb makes the mother to develop a love she rarely would have shared with any other, '*not for herself, nor for an identical being, and still less for another person with whom 'I' fuse (love for sexual passion)*' (1986: 206). Michael detests the sacrificial love Anna has for her child, which he may have found threatening. Five years after he leaves her, Anna still battles with the psychological trauma. As part of liberating herself, she contemplates being like a man: '*I ought to be like a man, caring more for my work than for people; I ought to put my work first, and take men as they come, or find an ordinary comfortable man for bread and butter reasons – but I won't do it. I can't be like that*' (GN, 283).

She knows she is not a man and the social order would not recognise her as such. She desires to find a man who loves her and is ready to stay with her, however, the men she relates with and the experiences she garnered from her association with other people prove that such a man does not exist. Rather than remain in a loveless marriage,

she decides to live under the banner of 'free woman' without the fringe benefits attached to it. Her broken relationship with Michael opens her eyes to the plight of women in her society. According to Anna, because a woman sees '*everything in a sort of continuous creative stream*' (GN, 243), she cannot dissociate her emotions from other aspects of her life and this makes her a prey to men and incapacitates her writing. The text relays Anna's experiences to every other female character. She claims that every married woman is 'cracking' up inside her home. In a way, all these characters are her alter egos to indicate that the idea of an absolute subject is in the land of fantasy. *The Golden Notebook* fills itself with women who hold tightly to the psychological myth of Freud that the woman saves herself from neurosis by giving precedence to the man, an act, which seems to draw attention to the futility of such a belief. Antithetically, the same women are running mad within the security of their marriage. *The Golden Notebook* has no single golden or happy relationship. Every relationship is dismal, and the title 'Golden Notebook' seems parodic. How then does Anna re-position herself?

On the wider social level, Anna, as a writer, sensitive to the social maladies of her day, feels that her writing is infinitesimal compared to the political uprisings and general instability existing in her society and the whole world. Her membership of the Communist Party opened her eyes to the reality that the Party was just attempting to live up to a myth of communism. Similarly, the characters in the text try to uphold patriarchal ideology by demeaning the women they depend on. Anna eventually summons the strength to leave the Party when she reconnects with the maternal through her menstruation. Her menstruation seems to empower her into taking actions she would have ordinarily deferred despite her complains that it gets her '*irritated, because it makes me feel helpless and out of control*' (GN, 319). The tendency to make her irritable and out of control enables her to confront Jack, her direct supervisor in the Party. According to Kristeva, the subject experiences the abject when the subject becomes '*weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being...*' (1982: 5). Anna acknowledges that her year of 'welfare work' for the Party has made little difference in the lives of the people she wanted to impact positively and that the attitude of Rose, another Party staff to the plights of people is undesirable. Her bodily-induced irritability heightens her sensitivity and helps her stand her ground that men should not vent their frustration on her for the success of her novel. She also comes to understand that the happiness she associates with serving Michael is transitory. Anna's rumination as she prepares meal for Michael the day she quits the Party exposes part of her travail through selfhood, which unlike Edna's physically obvious actions is more mentally oriented. According to Anna, the happiness she feels with her '*kitchen*' '*full of good kitchen smells*' turns into '*a cold feeling*' when she calculates that the previous four years of relationship with Paul has taught her that '*being happy is a lie.*' (GN, 323 - 324).

Anna attempts to deal with the age-long projection of patriarchal expectations on the woman, the masculinist culture that grooms the female to accept that her life's fulfilment is in preparing and serving gourmet dishes to the male and always being

available for the children. Any life outside this prescription where the woman engages in something she desires as an individual arouses a feeling of guilt as if she were engaged in a prohibited activity. Anna dispels these constructed ideas about the woman, her feminine intuition intimating her that Michael has no role in her present life and that her ability to work outside the home has no adverse effect on her daughter's development. She comes to terms with the success of her book, as well. Nevertheless, the text infers that Anna's reprieve is only temporary if she continues questioning and reacting against patriarchal prescriptions. She has become acquainted with the 'guilt' and the 'tiredness' that follow every attempt to stand for her belief.

Inferentially, Anna's rising selfhood is comparable to shifting sands. For instance, in *Free Women 3*, the third person narration informs the reader that every achievement by Molly and Anna to live 'freely' is put on hold by Tommy's blindness when he attempted suicide. Tommy, like his father, Richard and most other male characters in the text becomes '*the centre of the house, dominating it, conscious of everything that went on in it, a blind but all-conscious presence*' (GN, 334) while Anna and Molly creep about in their guilt. Molly probably blames herself for enjoying her one-year stay abroad while Anna feels her notebooks, which Tommy read once caused the accident. Yet, they are quite aware that the twenty-years-old Tommy is wielding the same patriarchal power they have been trying to circumvent. Discordant notes fill Anna's life. She becomes a nervous wreck from the external pressure to give in to the societal values and allow the likes of Tommy and Richard to dictate her life, and the critical 'Anna' who urges her to retain her uniqueness. The conflicting emotions surging through Anna make her to question her identity and contemplate what it means to '*crack up*' GN, 344). She tries to uphold the stable identity of Anna, the mother of Janet that her society apportions to her: '*I am Anna ..., I can't be ill ... because of Janet. ... What then am I, Anna?*' (GN, 344).

Anna rejects her duty as a prop, 'something' that Janet needs is restrictive, beneath her potential and does not leave much legacy for the daughter to inherit. As a visionary, she sees her writing, despite its tortuous and unfinished state marked by cancellations and variety of writing as a possible means of defining Anna. Symbolically, Tommy's perusal of Anna's notebooks alludes to the censorship and patriarchal limitations that oppose Anna's means of defining herself. Tommy compares metaphorically to the 'guilt' that Anna associates with the success of her artistry. Her patriarchal culture is antagonistic to her ability to discard its assigned role of '*something that is necessary to Janet*' (GN, 344), and become a person who writes herself into existence. Until Anna can curb the guilt associated with her creative ability and express 'freely' her experiences in writing, contradictory emotions remain her stock-in-trade.

She records every memory of lived and captured experiences in four notebooks to hide her thoughts and beliefs from her society and out of fear of chaos. Tommy attributes Anna's inability to publish to the fear of desertion and loneliness once her thoughts are displayed. She is afraid to take a step into a subject position because the society she lives in does not appropriate such a position to the woman. Anna tries to

hold to the symbolic privileging of reason and intellect but finds herself increasingly falling apart under the pressure to restrain the chaos clamouring for release. Allowing the depression to reign will separate her from people, as Tommy predicts. Her notebooks capture Anna's emotion in its rawness as well as the intellectual criticisms she subjects herself.

While Anna is trying to hold to reason, Edna tentatively steps out from her routine. The text compares Edna's progression to the tottering steps of a child learning to walk. Edna becomes prone to *'dreams, to thoughtfulness'* as well as to *'despair'* (A, 57). She finds herself torn between the awareness of the world *'within'* and *'about'* her; she experiences the abject where threatened dissolution of meaning exists between her life as a woman and life as an individual. In other words, Edna begins the process of trying to make the husband see her beyond his household possessions, and the society to recognise her as Edna, and not someone's property. However, this action is tantamount to rejection of *'realities'* which made her grow *'fond of her husband'* and *'... of her children'* (A, 63). Her chosen steps will result in discarding her roles as a mother and a wife because her society has no leeway. Ms. Reisz chooses her music, Adele chooses motherhood and Edna desires to choose herself, Edna.

The sea, birds, music and life processes such as sleeping and waking are recurrent metaphorical images that the text uses to capture Edna's awakening. Once again, the images of the sea and the birds resurface at the carnival organised to welcome the husbands from the city. Metaphorically, the text stations the women and the children on the island like the entrapped birds in their cages. During the party, the parrot defies the merry audience and screeches a warning of damnation, whether to Edna or the Farival twins, the text remains open to interpretation. However, the warning presages doom. The woman exists within a system that refuses selfhood to the female, and the system stands to resist attempts by the woman to take a subject position, especially by the woman herself. This is because she has internalized the normative codes of the society; reacting against such codes would make her feel treacherous.

Edna once renamed a music piece played by Adele *'Solitude'*, probably an expression of her innermost desire - to regain control over the tumultuous emotion that assailed her-, but in renaming the piece she became a visionary in similar way that Anna in *The Golden Notebook* was able to perceive the pathway to claiming an identity for herself. *'Solitude'* opened her imagination to a man watching a bird fly from his reach. That image partly contributes to Edna's desire to soar above the conventions of her society. However, Ms. Reisz's play on the piano arouses inexplicable emotion in her. According to the text, *'[p]erhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth'* (A, 71). The extradiegetic voice is merely suggestive and refuses to reveal the *'abiding truth'*. Inferentially, Edna now understands that she must wade through the multitudinous constraints around her to become herself. She needs to initiate her own actions since her society will not permit her desires. She was unable to relate fully with the primordial element that was

unleashed in the first night of her awakening, but Ms. Reisz's music seems to call up her revolutionary spirit. Ms. Reisz is an acclaimed artist whose outward appearance and behaviour as a woman appals the society, yet her music can awaken the dream of achieving solitude, an individual space for Edna. Edna succeeds that night to overcome her fear of the sea and swims out on her own.

Metaphorically, the emotions from music are compared to a physical lashing by waves as indicated in: '*[b]ut the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body*' (A, 72). This allusive connection between music, Edna and the sea create a thread, a hyperlink connecting previous and subsequent events. The language of the text captures the very rhythm of a new life eager to be born and connects it with the established lives as well as foreshadows its future. Edna's success in a physical swimming act metaphorically compares to her success in deciding to choose her own path, different from the one assigned to her, and recalls Weedon's definition of subjectivity as a reference to '*...the conscious and unconscious thought and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world*' (1987: 32). The definition by Weedon implies that Edna is ready to initiate a discursive field that links her repressed nature to her socio-cultural signification system. The shift that Edna is about to make in the discursive field which had her positioned as man's object is bound to transgress patriarchal law. She exults at her achievement and feels she can handle any situation.

At this moment, Edna is unaware that subjectivity is as precarious as her time in the sea where she could have drowned. According to Kristeva, '*process*' in '*subject in process*' includes the meaning associated with '*... a legal procedure where the subject is committed to trial ... our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over ruled*' (1986b: 19). Edna is about to dislodge an identity as Mr. Pontellier's possession, but it will be similar with the confrontation she had with death in the sea. Her ability to transform her system is dependent on how she manages the abjection, the repulsion that will assail her once she steps outside her society's prescribed norms for women.

The recurrent motif of the sea during Edna's first swim partly symbolises the voice of the Edna yet to be born, displaced but constantly present like Kristeva's '*semiotic*'. The semiotic, according to Kristeva, predates the symbolic and submits to the ordering of the maternal instincts from which its ability to revolutionise the signifying system emerges. She further explains that the semiotic chora is on the '*path of destruction, aggressivity and death*' (1986: 95). With the '*chora*' on the pathway to devastation, the sea is not limited to Edna's defiance against her socio-cultural roles but serves as a prelude to her death. However, Kristeva's description of negativity is of a wider implication. The drives, subconscious emotions that assail Edna prompt the desire for selfhood, but without subjecting these emotions under the existing language system, they will remain the babbles of a baby in similar way that Anna's notebooks remain a secret until she acknowledges their potential to deconstruct patriarchy. If a

glimpse into Anna's notebooks could make Tommy to attempt suicide, its ability to threaten the symbolic is plausible.

Textually, Edna's ability to harness these drives to access the symbolic can result in an artistic creation, which revitalises language, creating a new way of seeing things, new meanings. In this paper, artistic creation is not limited to artistic work but also implies a new form of femininity apart from the existent forms. *The Awakening* therefore, uses the character of Edna to shake the system that describes a woman as mute, a lack and a man's object of reflection based on her subsequent actions, not just to award Edna her denied selfhood, but also to replenish the symbolic. She replenishes the system when she introduces a previously non-existent position to her society. For the first time after six years of marriage, Edna hears the imperative tone that the husband uses on her, and against her norm, chooses to disobey as well as gain the voice to warn the husband against speaking to her imperiously. However, the chaos of abjection rampages her soul because of her action. The few hours of sleep, according to the extradiegetic narrator impresses on her the unattainability of her awakened desires. Selfhood may eventually be an illusion, but she does not want to flutter down to earth as a weakling. She decides to develop strong wings in order '*to soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice*' (A, 138), and commands the presence of Robert Lebrun, which she never did before.

Her earlier inarticulateness gives way to volubility. Edna gets into the habit of expressing herself and begins to speak '*as one having authority*' during the race horses at New Orleans, '*[s]he did not perceive that she was talking like her father...*' (A, 128), which the text later categorises as '*unwomanly*' (A, 161). This raises several questions. Why must she speak like her father, and unknowingly, at that? Does it mark her resubmission to the desire for the father? Irigaray's idea of mimesis involves resubmitting a woman to her stereotypical representations in culture with the aim of calling such representations into question. Edna rather mimics the father. This could be because Edna ventures out from her cultural positioning to the realm of entertainment reserved for men, and automatically uses the language of reason. The language that represents her as irrational is the same that she uses authoritatively. *The Awakening* seems to question the mental acuity of the theorists of patriarchal binary logic.

Edna reconstructs affairs in her home to accommodate her moods. She moves outside the restriction of her home to perambulate around the city, '*to look with her own eyes...*' The Edna that was once restricted to the Grand Isle and was expected to sit home and entertain guests at New Orleans '*[n]o longer was... content to 'feed upon opinion'*' (A, 151). She decides to experience life itself rather than live her life based on the formulation of others. This is an underlying message of French feminism. Patriarchal culture positioned the woman in an area outside ontological and epistemological reasoning to a position of bodily sensations, totally disregarding her capability. Edna wants to know why Mr. Pontellier thinks he has the right to make a fellow human being his possession. She resolves never again to belong to another than herself. According to the text, '*[e]very step which she took towards relieving herself from obligations added to her*

strength and expansions as an individual' (A, 151). In as much as French feminism does not accept an autonomous self, it affirms the right of selfhood to any sex at the point where the subject employs language and allows language to signify their presence. Language expresses culture. Edna's penetration into language indicates her revolution of culture, hence, the birth of 'new women' like Anna and Molly in *The Golden Notebook*. Edna takes to painting and becomes self-reliant through the money she raises from her painting.

Ironically, Mr. Pontellier seems to be the only one who '*... 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'* (A, 108). He does not intend to see Edna beyond her economic value. Paradoxically, Edna detests everything relating to socially instituted authority. She refuses to attend her sister's wedding, swoons during a church service and tramples on her wedding ring. She disposes of her servants as she moves residence and climbs a ladder to hang her pictures – a duty that the bourgeois relegates to their servants down on the social ladder. Edna's aversion to constituted patriarchal authority, which she exhibits through emotional displays, symbolises a confrontation between the cultural norms that she defies and her repressed instinctual drives that seek to assert themselves. The path she has chosen seems a very lonely one. Adele, who has become a very close friend, informs her that she would no longer visit her in her pigeon house because of what the public would make of her visits, and Edna does not seem to mind.

Furthermore, her progression to selfhood involves reclaiming her body from the repression that Freudian psychology placed on female sexuality as an anomaly, a taboo. Cixous' metaphor of the Medusa expresses a call for the woman to discard the passivity associated with her nature and move fluidly like the snakes on the Medusa's head. She sees the woman's body as a multiple pleasure point through which the phallogocentric economy is destabilised. This view explains the observable changes in Edna. She was described at the early stage of her progression as being '*...unusually pale and quiet'* probably because every familiar thing around her became '*part and parcel of the alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic'* (A, 87). She cannot establish her desire without oppositions from what Cixous calls '*... deadly brainwashing'* (1976: 877). Edna is fighting the tradition that indoctrinated her. Her journey to selfhood is a fight against herself, against everything she believed to be true. Yet, it is a fight whose paradox envisages life in death as explained in Kristeva's '*[n]one of us has pleasure without confronting an obstacle, prohibition, authority, or law that allows us to realize ourselves as autonomous and free'* (2000: 7). Freedom and battle belong together.

However, Edna's progress so far earns her the adjective, '*[r]avishing. ... Some way she doesn't seem like the same woman'* (A, 90). Doctor Mandelet's assessment of Edna's medical state confirms that she looks more alive than he had ever seen her. The formerly enervated Edna becomes energetic and open in her communication with people. Again, *The Awakening* employs language in its service, using few words to evoke multiple images and interpretations in the description of Edna as a '*beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun'* without a '*repression in her glance or gesture'* (A, 105). The

sexual imagery evident in this description links it with the time Edna wakes up in Chenerie Island to the recognition of her bodily appetite. Prior to her sleep, '*she looked at her round arms '... as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm texture of the quality of her flesh'* (A, 84), and on waking up, '*she was very hungry*' and noticed that the island seemed changed.

Although the text talks literally about her desire for food, the stylistic assemblage of bodily codes and the choice of words such as '*smouldering*', '*sizzle afresh*' and '*appetite*' point to their metaphoric underlining of sensuousness especially when these provisions to satisfy her hunger were provided by Robert, her love. In six years of marriage and birth of two children, including a repressed up-bringing by a Protestant father, Edna's sensuous nature seemed to have been in limbo. However, her rising selfhood frees her from the prohibition that inhibits her sexual passion and she entangles herself sexually with Arobin. Edna lived ahead of her time having set in motion a cast that Anna of the twentieth century fills decades after her death. Although, new French feminism calls women to reclaim their passion, their body from its prohibited location, it is not a call for licentiousness. Rather, the woman is made to understand that her body's sexual desire is normal, and she should not just '*[l]ie still and think of the Empire*' (Degler, 1974: 1467). Hence, when Robert finally returns from his trip to Mexico, Edna initiates their first kiss.

Edna's painting progresses with her individual awareness. From dabbling in art as a means of expressing her chaotic mood, the text declares that:

"She had reached a stage when she seemed to be no longer feeling her way, working, when in the humour with sureness and ease. And being devoid of ambition, and striving not towards accomplishment, she drew satisfaction from the work in itself." (A, 107),

This excerpt captures the entire journey of Edna to selfhood, and registers *The Awakening* as a *bildungsroman*, a novel of formation or education. The text exposes the psychological and physical development of Edna from the initial child-like steps of painting and tearing her efforts through the period she subdued everybody in her house under her paintbrush, desiring Adele's reassurance of the worth of her paintings to this final stage that she paints just for the pleasure. At the earlier stage, she suffered constant depression. Presumably, she was trying to balance her household demands with the surging inspiration that laid hidden all these years. Her ability to devote time to her art enabled the hidden Edna to emerge. On the moral level, she has come to terms with her choice to establish her specific desires against the expected norms of a woman as a housekeeper. She heeds to new French feminism to write herself in her art, and by so doing, creates a pattern for Anna to relate with, a pattern that affirms that beauty results from excruciating pain suffered at the point of leaving the old form.

While Edna progressively moves from sleep to full awakening, Anna continues in her attempt to hold to her sanity. Her four notebooks seem to be helpful at the initial stages of her depression. Each notebook begins *in media res* indicating that the contents

are written traces of a process. It raises the question of narrative linearity and authenticity. When did Anna's madness start? Which event precedes the other? Inferentially, the dates are means of clinging to the reality that is speeding away from her. Anna's split personality exposes itself from the first Free Women section, but the reader is led to see the 'thinking' Anna that she reveals.

Evident also in Anna's hatred for her first novel is the parent-child relationship that abounds in the text. Anna's novel has a life of its own and splits from the mother. However, in Anna's relationship with her text is a revolution that topples the 'mirror' image in the sense that Anna's novel refuses to sever from her but turns to be the one nourishing her selfhood. The text seems to affirm biological motherhood as her prerogative while her position as a textual mother is threatening. The social structure finds her style of writing threatening as indicated by the offers she receives from publishers and movie agents to rewrite her novel.

Quite expectedly, the notebooks provide evidence of change. For instance, Anna comments on one of her entries in the yellow notebook (GN, 197), which is a manuscript for a novel, entitled *Shadow of the Third* that the present Anna is more calculative and understanding about relationships than the previously naïve Anna. The text captures part of Anna's process towards freeing her psyche from absolving a man's failure. Anna learns not to blame herself for freezing up and hiding inside her dreams. Throughout the text, every man complains about and blames the woman for his incompetence. Inferentially, the men usually behave like children when they need something from the female as indicated when Saul Green writes a childish curse in Anna's new notebook because he wants to take it from her. He lives Freud's idea of the desire for the mother. Desire for the notebook signifies desire to curb her writing, which she is finally able to overcome by refusing to surrender the notebook. *The Golden Notebook's* men live the life that culture apportions to them with no exception. Anna's refusal to give up her writing is a rejection of her earlier statement that man creates the woman. She now creates herself and decides the terms of a relationship. Anna, like Edna, has taken over her body.

Anna seems to create her own signification practice quite distinct from the Symbolic order. She creates a world in her notebooks where the rules are entirely hers. She peeps into her notebooks like a voyeur or her psychoanalyst who tries to use her dreams and factual events to reconnect her with her mythic past and the social order. The text depicts psychoanalysis, social relationships, communism and it seems, the entire logocentric culture that Anna captures in her notebooks, as becoming meaningless. They insist on commanding attention but are blind like Tommy. Anna no longer identifies with the meaning that prompted her notes. According to Anna:

"It occurs to me that what is happening is a breakdown of me, Anna, and this is how I am becoming aware of it. For words are form, and if I am at a pitch where shape, form, expression are nothing, for it has become clear to me, reading the notebooks, that I remain

Anna because of a certain kind of intelligence. This intelligence is dissolving and I am very frightened. (GN, 419)

The dissolution of meaning alludes to the dissolution of Anna because language created the Anna in existence. Her logocentric society made her believe that reason supersedes instinctual acts; however, if she reads no meaning from her notebooks that capture every event relating to her life and society, then there is no existence. Her notebooks are ambivalently liberating as well as threatening. Anna's tangible hold on reality slips gradually away from her until she yields completely to formlessness, to the arena of irrationality that culture assigns to women. The logic of the masculine that her society privileges over the spontaneity and heterogeneity of the feminine disintegrates, leaving Anna at the mercy of abjection. She finally realises that belonging to the mythic community is as futile as waiting for Michael to return to her. She decides to leave '*the safety of myth and walk forward alone*' (GN, 414). Anna finally decides to confront her fears as an individual, not based on collective consciousness but by reuniting with the maternal pre-oedipal semiotic.

4. Closing Deliberations: Celebrating Femininity - *L'écriture Feminine*

Freud associates hysteria with femininity, which agrees with the representation of the female as uncontrollable. In Freudian perspective, Edna's trampling of her wedding ring, discarding her domestic duties and inexplicable mood swings are attributed to the 'womb', the maternal, the irrational. Such irrationality makes a woman deviate from accepted social behaviour; hence, Mr. Pontellier calls in Dr Mandelet who, after assessing Edna, attributes the tremendous changes in her to an immoral association with the likes of Arobin. Uncharacteristically, New French feminism affirms irrationality as feminine. French feminism understands the figure of the mad woman as subversive and redemptive. For instance, Cixous calls for a language of non-reason, which endorses feminine power to disrupt the patriarchal language and rationality.

Edna, progressively, exhibits a new form of femininity outside the norm. If her behaviour is outside the norm, then how did she learn of it? Edna listens to the voice of the sea, the voice that links her with her forebears who defied tradition. According to the text, during Edna's first swim, '*as she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself*' (A, 45). In the water, she reaches out to embrace the maternal 'chora' that compels her to walk away from the group. Furthermore, Edna allows the libidinal drives to override reason, defying the caution expected of a wife in sexual matters. However, it is a pleasure in death. Reproaches from the society for violating the marital code of fidelity especially when her husband provides her with her physical and material needs and feeling of betrayal assail Edna. She manages the semiotic flow and is finally about to emerge into the new form of womanhood who does not allow patriarchal representations to define her but defines herself. However,

there is need for a marked penetration into the symbolic for her to claim her selfhood and emerge as the subject of discourse.

Adele's travail of childbirth reminds Edna that no birth is complete without a split. This realization resuscitates the abject, '*...a feeling of unease, vague dread*' (A, 170) captures her. According to Kristeva, maternal abjection is '*the height of bloodshed and life*' (1982: 155). By inference, Edna cannot attain selfhood without undergoing death, a split from patriarchal tradition as well as from the semiotic. It is rather paradoxical that for the new form of art to arise there is a deliberate departure from the old forms of representation. *The Awakening* explores these deviations, questioning at every point the logic that states that the woman cannot express herself except as the signified; it questions the tradition that states that a woman exists for the man and the children but not for herself and that the work of art must be linear with a denouement after a climax. It questions what constitutes a moral tone in art.

The Awakening breaks through the boundary of language restricted to poetry, and by so doing, questions the new French feminists who argue that the language of *L'écriture féminine* is evident only in poetry. According to Cixous, only poetry reaches to the unconscious (1976: 879). However, *The Awakening* defies this restriction, extending its boundary to the mystic voice of the sea and the abundance of imagery that refuses to be restricted to a meaning. The text fills itself with images that make language palpitate with life as it attempts to create new meanings. For instance, '*the voice of the sea*' (A, 57), which becomes more of a lyric with its repetition in parts of the text takes a material form, a living form in the last scene of the text. It changes from a 'voice' to become '*[t]he touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace*' as Edna wades naked into the sea, creating an ambiguous picture of sexual pleasure and death. The ending of the text seems as baffling as the drives that prompted Edna to reach out for freedom. *The Awakening* ends as it started - with many voices -. According to Irigaray, '*[w]oman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, in-finite, form is never complete in her. She is not infinite but neither is she a unity...*' (1985: 229). Similarly, Edna who rejects the wealth of Mr. Pontellier defies description in similar way that *The Awakening* defies pigeonholing as a psychological novel, a fairy tale, a romance, a ballad, a realist novel or a modernist text in its presentation of a divided psyche in an age of centred self. *The Awakening* creates a new life in its ending, the life of the new woman.

Anna, and by extension, *The Golden Notebook* takes form from the life Edna created and strives to redefine herself based on her cultural milieu. She finally succumbs to the '*place where meaning collapses*' (Kristeva, 1982 p.2), to formlessness that she refused earlier. However, *The Golden Notebook* creates a new trademark in Anna's madness. She starts from the pre-oedipal semiotic as bisexual by running the course of her madness with Saul Green/Milt to express the fluidity of formlessness. According to Kristeva, at the semiotic, there is no sexual differentiation but chaotic motion. Anna's *The Golden Notebook* captures events of her madness and begins with a description of the '*cocoon*' of her room, which Saul Green likens to '*a world*' (GN, 531) where her madness runs its course. Anna melts into this new world for the 'other' to emerge. She complains

of physical spasms, which reflect the physical symptoms of Freudian neurosis and the pain of Kristeva's abjection. She is in her birth pangs to release the repressed and re-lives her dream of 'spite-in-joy' as Saul Green joins in her madness.

Like everything else in *The Golden Notebook*, one questions the identity of Saul Green. Does he exist or is he a figment of Anna's diseased imagination? The use of alter egos implies that various other characters are in fact, Anna. Her *Golden Notebook* brings to form the tiger she met in one of her dreams, which threatened and identified with her simultaneously. The text problematises the idea of identity as an autonomous whole as implicated in the 'I' of Saul's tirade (GN, 545). It questions the validity of representation. Diverging from Rudaityte's a novel's character incorporates 'the concept of personality' and raises the question of 'representation of reality in fiction' (2000:7), *The Golden Notebook* diffuses a single character in different forms throughout the text. It questions the identity ascribed to the woman by blurring the distance created in patriarchy between the feminine and the masculine. The characters, like Anna's dream about the projectionist, 'went very fast ... the film was now beyond my experience, beyond Ella's, beyond the notebooks, because there was a fusion...' (GN: 551). Anna's madness results in a fusion, a celebration of a new life, her 'Golden Notebook' where she writes all of herself. The reader cannot differentiate between Anna and Saul Green or Molly and Julia at the semiotic stage, rather, a fusion takes place to result in *The Golden Notebook*.

The Golden Notebook celebrates madness as the breaking of forms, which is evident in its structure. Anna's madness reflects the madness of the text's structure, a madness that allows defiance of established tradition of narrative logic and presence of authorial voice, a madness that blurs the female-male identity using metafictional narratives in the form of pastiche, diary, notebooks, novels framed in other novels, newspaper cuttings and personal comments. The text foregrounds its constructedness to examine the process of writing and restrictions placed by narrative conventions. It also questions the logic that ascribes madness or irrationality to the female. Additionally, Anna and Saul Green's madness are structured. It is madness with full awareness. The text seems to question the reader's understanding of irrationality. These characters shout and behave abnormally, but they reveal their innermost mind and rise above their abjection. *The Golden Notebook* reveals the constructed nature of the fictional world alongside the constructed nature of woman and man. Anna and Saul Green provide each other with the first sentences in their new novels and part ways in mutual understanding of the specificity of the other as captured in: 'I felt towards him as if he were my brother, ... we would always be flesh of one flesh, and think each other's thought' (GN, 556). Anna and Saul Green are from the same origin. They retain the maternal link. Finally, Anna controls the semiotic, the repressed which is personified in Saul Green, and writes a new book. If they are from the same origin, then none is hierarchically better than the other.

The Golden Notebook as well as Anna emerges from the chaos of fragmentation to challenge fundamental assumptions about the 'Self' as a singular unit who is wholly separate from the 'Other'. Irigaray claims that 'to conceive the subject as one, as singular, as

one and many, as one and as an ensemble of ones, is tantamount to misunderstanding as essential property of human existence and essence' (1996: 33). Inferentially, nature has a position for both the male and female, displacing none. As such, according to Irigaray, '[t]his coming to a stop before the other is recognition, but it is also a desire and appeal to overcome the interval which separates us' (ibid. 36-37). *The Golden Notebook* captures this view in its structure. Each of the diaries and the sections have a right to live, especially as the brief explanations before each 'Free Women' section categorise them as diaries, somewhat. The metadiegetic narrative perspective shifts from the third person narrative voice of 'Free Women' to the first in the notebooks, resulting in a heteroglossia as if to depict the fluidity of the feminine voice, and the fragmented nature of the subject. In 'The Golden Notebook' is the all of Anna that logocentric culture cannot limit to a border. At the height of abjection, she produces another novel, crafted from the '*crude, unfinished, raw, tentative*' aspects of her life (GN, 217). Her madness rejuvenates her.

Edna and Anna contested their positioning in a male-dominated society and were able to inscribe themselves as subjects in the dominant symbolic systems of their societies. They heeded Cixous' call to write themselves because '*writing is precisely the very possibility of change*' (1976: 879). Through the defiance of these characters to the prescribed norms of their societies *The Awakening* and *The Golden Notebook* assert themselves as texts that revolutionise the symbolic. They introduced new identity for women and avant-garde literary forms. According to Kristeva, literature is '*[abjection's] privileged signifier, ... represents the ultimate coding of our crisis, of our most intimate and most intimate and most serious apocalypse*' (1982: 208). These texts captured the experiences of women and were able to establish a feminine presence through their forms and the actions of their characters to affirm that the feminine cannot be subverted for long. However, more and detailed studies within the contexts of these two texts need to be conducted in hysteria/madness as being rejuvenating due to the grey area associated with madness.

ⁱ According to Lacan, the woman is the 'not whole' (1982:72), she has no essence but functions in the phallic system as an instrument, a 'thing' that helps the man who is the whole essence to construct himself. Lacan conceives the woman as a screen on which the man projects his lack as well as 'something he believes in' to assure him of his identity and being (ibid. 168). The woman becomes a spectacle, the 'other' on which the gaze of the Other/the man is fixed but remains unnoticed.

ⁱⁱ Self and subject are used synonymously in this paper despite Cavallaro's distinction of the 'self' as a representation of a stable and autonomous being from the 'subject', which he describes as an ambiguous combination of activity with passivity (2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ Kristeva developed a signification process deviating from Saussure's language system and Lacan's Symbolic. Although, her language theory does not seem to single out the woman, it applies to the position of the woman as marginalised from the Symbolic. She asserts that 'all identities are unstable: the identity of linguistic signs, the identity of meaning and, as a result, the identity of the speaker' (Kristeva, 1986: 19). Kristeva destabilises the idea of stable identity that patriarchy uses to hold absolute power.

^{iv} The Symbolic, according to Lacan's classification of the human psyche, refers to the entry into language, where the individual abides by the conventions of the society usually prescribed by the male/father and represented by the phallus. In addition to Freud's postulations of the unconscious as the site of the repressed Lacan posits it as a place for generating meaningful representations. According to him, the structure of the unconscious is like language. Lacan offers a linguistic model of sexual development for a better understanding of the human subject's entrance into the social realm. Lacan's idea of the human psyche has an underlying split between the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic (2002), and this idea paves way for French feminism's idea of split subjectivity. Entrance into the Symbolic is based on the 'Name-of-the-Father', which is closely bound with Freud's the superego/the Phallus/Oedipus Complex, hence a realm of law, order and signification

^v Kristeva's 'semiotic' refers to the pre-symbolic associated with the mother's body, the drive not represented in Freud's oedipal stage and Lacan's mirror stage. Her semiotic stage gives way to the 'thetic', a stage like Lacan's symbolic stage. It 'involves socially signifying language operating under the banner of reason, communication and the idea of singularity and unity' while the semiotic is the 'language of drives, erotic impulses, bodily rhythms and movements' (Allen, 2000: 48-49). The split into the semiotic and the symbolic is a consistent action. There is then no avenue for patriarchal psychology to limit neurosis to the problem of female repression. Although the symbolic or thetic stage marginalises the semiotic, it cannot function capably without the semiotic, and vice versa. The semiotic provides the drive, the force while the thetic/symbolic adds reason and social acceptability.

^{vi} *GN* and *A* are used consecutively to refer to citations from 2014 edition of *The Golden Notebook* and *The Awakening*, 1984 edition.

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