

YAŞAR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME

MASTER THESIS

THE FLUID AND THE FEMININE IN *THE*
AWAKENING AND BODIES OF WATER

JASMINE JESSICA GREEN

THESIS ADVISOR: ASST. DR. TREVOR JOHN HOPE

İZMİR 2019

MASTER THESIS JURY APPROVAL FORM

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the Master degree.

Date 29.11.2019

Thesis Supervisor, Assist. Prof. Dr. Trevor Hope
Yaşar University



I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the Master degree.

Date 29.11.2019

Assoc. Prof. Dr.Nilsen Gökçen Uluk
Dokuz Eylül University



I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the Master degree.

Date 29.11.2019

Assist. Prof. Dr. Dr. Ahmet Süner
Yaşar University



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Çağrı BULUT

DIRECTOR OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ABSTRACT

THE FLUID AND THE FEMININE IN *THE AWAKENING* AND *BODIES OF WATER*

Jasmine Jessica, Green

Msc, English Language and Literature

Advisor: Asst. Dr. Trevor John Hope

2019

This thesis examines the symbolism of fluids in the novels *The Awakening* and *Bodies of Water* and their representations of a hierarchical binary view of gender, governed by the masculine-patriarchal imaginary. The association of fluidity and femininity reflects the patriarchal control of female sexuality and reveals the suppression/repression of the feminine, which is located in the watery depths and the unconscious. A psychoanalytic reading of the unconscious and femininity, represented as the fluid, leads to the notion of the uncanny, which enables the reader to understand both a profound ambivalence about female sexuality and the possibility of a transition, which can be found in both novels. This transition, or ‘awakening’ enables a reading which untangles the feminine from the hierarchical binary categorization, in the form of “écriture féminine”, which makes possible a liberation of female sexuality that is suppressed/repressed.

Key Words: fluid, feminine, repression, uncanny, unconscious, patriarchy, liberation, suicide, death, transformation, sexuality, text.

ÖZ

THE AWAKENING VE BODIES OF WATER; AKIŞKANLIK VE KADINSILIK

Jasmine Jessica, Green

Yüksek Lisans, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı

Danışman: Asst. Öğr. Üyesi Dr. Trevor John Hope

2019

Bu tez, *The Awakening* ve *Bodies of Water* romanlarındaki akışkanlık ve kadınsılık sembolizmini ve ataerkil hayali tarafından yönetilen cinsiyetin hiyerarşik bir ikili bakış açısını temsil ettiklerini inceler. Akıcılığın ve dişiliğin bağlamı, kadın cinselliğinin, ataerkil kontrolü altında oluşunu yansıtır ve sulu derinliklerde ve bilinçaltında bulunan feminenin bastırıldığını gösterir. Sıvı olarak temsil edilen bilinçdışı ve kadınlığın psikanalitik bir okuması, “uncanny” kavramını ortaya çıkararak hem kadın cinselliği konusundaki derin bir çelişkiyi, hem de her iki romanda da bulunabilecek bir geçiş/uyanış olasılığını anlamayı sağlar. “Uyanış” olarak da tanımlanan bu geçiş, “écriture féminine” olarak bilinen yazma biçimi ile iki romandada, dişiliği, baskılanmış/bastırılmış kadınların cinselliğini serbest bırakmayı mümkün kılarak, kadınlığı hiyerarşik ikili kategorizasyondan ayıran bir okumayı mümkün kılar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: akışkanlık, kadınsılık, bastırılmış, uncanny, bilinçdışı, ataerkil, serbest kalma, intihar, ölüm, değişim, cinsellik, metin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Trevor Hope for his guidance and patience during this study.

I would like to express my enduring love to my parents, who are always supportive, loving and caring to me in every possible way in my life.

Jasmine Jessica Green

İzmir, 2019

TEXT OF OATH

I declare and honestly confirm that my study, titled “The Fluid and The Feminine in *The Awakening* and *Bodies of Water*” and presented as a Master’s Thesis, has been written without applying to any assistance inconsistent with scientific ethics and traditions. I declare, to the best of my knowledge and belief, that all content and ideas drawn directly or indirectly from external sources are indicated in the text and listed in the list of references.

Jasmine Jessica Green

Signature

.....

December 28, 2019

TABLE OF CONTENT

ABSTRACT.....	II
OZ.....	III
TEXT OF OATH.....	V
TABLE OF CONTENT.....	VI
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 : <i>The Awakening</i> ; the Fluid and the Feminine.....	31
CHAPTER 2 : Bodies of Water ; the Fluid and the Feminine.....	50
CHAPTER 3 Death, Liberation and Women’s Writing in; <i>The Awakening</i> and <i>Bodies of Water</i>	68
CONCLUSION.....	97
WORKS CITED.....	100

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will be providing a detailed reading of Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, and V.H Leslie's novel *Bodies of Water*. I have chosen to present the analysis of the two novels because they share common themes of the "fluid" and the "feminine". The female protagonists of the novels are oppressed by the norms and expectations of a patriarchal society. In both novels, water serves as an instrument which gives the characters the possibility to resist the patriarchal imaginary and even escape it. The protagonists also share a similar ending, in which they join the water's inviting embrace which leads them to their watery deaths.

In both novels, water imagery is strong and persistent and projected as a seductive and inviting element. However, the water does not seduce any male character, but specifically these women characters who resist the patriarchal control and overstep boundaries of the society they live in. I wanted to present my readers a novel from the past and a novel from the present to bring recognition to the links between the "fluid" and the "feminine". It seemed to me that it would be more convincing and more interesting to be reading two novels that have been written in two different centuries where I could do an analysis based on this theme, showing that there is a pattern that associates the female/feminine with the fluid. Based on this connection, I carry out a psychoanalytic reading that reveals the repressed female sexuality that surfaces from within the depths of the ocean, which symbolises the "unconscious".

It seems that *Bodies of Water* is a novel that is inspired by Kate Chopin, as we see that the name of the water therapy facility is named "Wakewater" which is a place that aims to "awaken" its female patients in order to help women "return" to society by "oppressing" female sexuality. However, within the facility, the protagonist goes through a metamorphosis which is a kind of awakening of repressed desires. This is comparable to *The Awakening*, as

the title directly refers to Edna's awakening identity and the awakening of her inner repressed desires.

Looking at old and contemporary references in art and literature such as the paintings of Ophelia and paintings of anonymous drowned women, art work and myths about aquatic feminine creatures (mermaids, sirens), so often have the connections between women and water been made that it is impossible to ignore, which makes one wonder the reasons for the origins of the formation of this liquefaction.

By looking at the novels *The Awakening* and *Bodies of Water*, this thesis analyses the connections of women and fluids through feminist discourses that revolve around ideas of the social construction of women and binary oppositions in language. Representations that stem from patriarchal ideologies have contributed to the association of women and fluidity. In order to comprehend this connection, it is important to know some historical facts which show a pattern of the female figure, being closely identified with fluidity. In the course of the historical analysis, it is possible to see that behind the representation of the fluid female, there lie a number of problems such as gender issues, othering of the female/feminine and patriarchal control over women's bodies and specifically of female sexuality.

Among historical images and myths about fluid, aquatic women, there will be readings of the symbolism of these representations which are connected to another crucial issue, which is "repression". Through the historical references in the third chapter, it can be seen that the oppressive patriarchal order has even had an influence on the way women commit suicide, which is a significant detail for the issue of death that is to be discussed, regarding the protagonists in the novels proposed.

After gaining an overall perspective of various representations of the fluid feminine figure, and the pressure of patriarchal control, it is important to understand another problem, one that is within language. Hierarchal differences between genders are discussed throughout

the analysis of both novels. The same hierarchal differences exist in language which is under the influence of patriarchy. The symbolism of fluids is directly linked with their representation of a certain sex. The binary “liquid vs. solid” represents a hierarchal power relationship which shows that “liquid” is oppressed by the “solid”. This example illuminates a problem that leads to the subordination of the feminine which appears deeply embedded in language itself.

However, the repressed femininity that is represented in both of these novels, through language and imagery returns in a way that reverses the underestimated power of femininity. Kate Chopin and V. H. Leslie, in their writing, have used the notion of femininity and fluids in a way that highlights the power of female sexuality by empowering the female image in the water and the concept of nature/woman. The concept of the feminine and the fluid is explored in order to reveal the ways in which femininity has been oppressed and helps to uncover the part of the feminine which has been repressed. The theory of the “return of the repressed” which is connected to all of the notions discussed above will be analysed in detail through the narrative of both novels.

From the beginning of this thesis, the fluid image of women and femininity is discussed in relation to patriarchal control. However, this thesis aims to conclude on a different note. In both novels, female characters go on a journey that awakens parts of themselves, which they are not aware existed. This concept of an unfamiliar self is analysed with reference to the psychoanalytic terms, of the “uncanny” and the “unconscious”. These terms provide a meaningful understanding of the water imagery used in both novels and also the character evolution of the protagonists. Within the close reading of the texts, the subject of “metamorphoses” and “re-birth” that is connected to the psychoanalytic terms will be touched upon, as it is one of the central themes explored in these novels. It is important to

see that by analysing the fluid and the feminine, the language and representations in the text change, and become liberated from patriarchy.

“Women’s writing” is the focal point regarding the discussion of the liberation of the text. This thesis explores this concept through the theories of various French feminists who have developed the concept of “*écriture féminine*”. Chopin and Leslie’s Novels contain elements of the *écriture féminine*, which aims to reverse the outcome of oppression and turns it in to a source of power, in order to escape the patriarchal imaginary.

By deconstructing the binary oppositions in the text, the fluid is set free from the passive and weak representation. Instead, it represents power and an uncontrollable element which threatens the order of patriarchy. At the ending of both novels, it can be said that women become united in the water, having reclaimed their freedom from patriarchy, in the boundless, ever flowing streams, oceans and rivers.

Men have long referred to women as watery creatures because of women’s bodily functions, and characteristics such as giving birth, menstruation, vaginal fluids etc. that the female body produces naturally. A major problem that explains this, is the hierarchy within the meanings given to symbols. The “masculine” sits at a higher position when it comes to symbolic meanings. The images of “solid” and “liquid” elements in the novels are discussed in relation to this hierarchic point of view. In the readings of both novels, things that are solid, which have a stable structure, symbolise patriarchal control and power. However, liquids which don’t have a sense of stability and that lacks control, fitting in any shape or mould they sit in, symbolise femininity. This opposition between the liquid and the solid enables a reading that highlights the power struggle between the sexes and the oppression of the feminine by the masculine, particularly the repression of female sexuality.

The central issue that is addressed regarding the representation of femininity as fluid, begins with language, as expressed above. We can see that this issue extends outwards and affects the image of women and their visual representations in other categories such as mythology and art. We come across this in both of the novels, where there are references to water-dwelling creatures. These aquatic creatures are represented in connection with the feminine imaginary, as they represent the repressed femininity of the unconscious. As it is a central theme in this thesis, it is meaningful to provide the reader with sufficient information about feminine aquatic creatures. In the analysis of the protagonists of the novels, the awakening of the repressed desires are projected through mermaids and serpent like creatures which represent the uncanny, (unfamiliar but at the same time familiar). These creatures symbolically represent a resistance against the patriarchal imaginary. These female figures represent feminine danger to the masculine power, with their excessive sexuality.

The two novels under discussion contain aquatic mythological references which are linked to the fluidity of woman. Thus, to begin understanding the intertwining notion of women and liquids, we must explore classical mythology, where we come across traces of the water-dwelling feminine creatures. Historically, we can see here that there are depictions that link the fluid to the feminine. Tales and legends of half -fish half- human figures have been alluring and inspiring for many people, for centuries, and can still have the same effect today. The creatures we know as mermaids are an example of aquatic creatures. There are many types of female creatures that are a part of the watery realm. They all come from waters all around the world, and they have a strong connection with the symbolisms water. As Alexander Skye argues, “The sea has long been connected with emotions, intuition and the unconscious, deep, dark and mysterious” which will be discussed in further detail (Chapter 1). The oceans display a duality in character, being able to produce life but at the

same time destroy it. This characteristic is seen similar to that of mermaids, for they were not always known as the pretty, innocent creatures as we know today.

The history of mermaids dates all the way back to mythologies from 1000 B.C.E. As Skye tells us, according to Assyrian legend, Atargatis, a Goddess who throws herself in to the lake is destined to be a mermaid for the rest of her life because “the water could not hide her other worldly beauty, so she became a mermaid and remained divine” (Chapter 1). Mermaids are closely linked to fertility Goddesses of the waters, and that is why they had seductive traits which “evolved from the early fertility and creator goddesses” (Alexander chapter 2). Some other depictions of these creatures in oral tales and written texts show a darker side. In the thirteenth century, a Norwegian text known as “*The King’s Mirror*” “described mermaids as beasts with fishtails and scales on their lower bodies, large webbed hands, terrifying faces, wide mouths, and wrinkled cheeks” (Alexander Chapter 2). Indeed the image is very different from the popular contemporary mermaid figure we are familiar with.

Skye points out that historically, mermaid myths depict these creatures with “a dual nature, they can be benevolent or malevolent, depending on what mood they’re in”. And we shall see that this element of ambiguity is echoed strongly in the 2 novels. Mythical ancient Greek Sirens are famous for their enchanting songs that lure seamen to their deaths. There are other female figures who are believed to dwell close to the water. Specifically, one kind is mentioned in *Bodies of Water*, the ‘Rusalki’, which are Slavic water spirits known for their long wet hair. Legend has it that “when women die in or close to the water, especially those who have committed suicide or those who have been intentionally drowned by others, they often return to haunt that particular body of water” (Leslie chapter 17). It is stated that women who are pregnant at the time of their death are extremely potent, and their ghostly presence lurks under the water, ready to lure mortals into the water with their song. The

Rusalki have similar attributes to Sirens, except that Rusalki are of Slavic origins and are referred to as Slavic mermaids, though without any scaled tails. They have legs just like humans. Although they have a reputation of haunting and drowning men, Rusalki were known just as water spirits, enriching their surroundings with means of fertility. The novel *Bodies of Water* deals with themes such as drowned pregnant women, and women from the water who haunt the river.

In *Bodies of Water* there are references to Melusine, a character from another animal folk tale. Her legend originates from France, and is about a young woman who imprisons her father to take back revenge for deceiving her mother. Her mother, feeling heartbroken, punishes Melusine for doing this to her father, and curses her. Thereby, every Saturday, Melusine turns into a fish-tailed, serpent-like creature. One day she meets a man and marries him on the condition that he would agree to never disturb her on a Saturday, for the rest of their lives. But once again, a man breaks his promise and witnesses her metamorphosis, suspecting that she might be being unfaithful to him. Following this, he calls her a serpent, and understanding that he has broken his promise, she turns into a dragon and flies away, never to return. Similarly, *Bodies of Water* presents female characters who seek revenge against disloyal, treacherous men. Not only do men betray women but women also betray women, as we see in both the novel and the tale. There is an inequality of power between men and women, which results with the woman being seen as the “other”, and being punished, forced to distance herself, even forced to reveal herself. The man thinks that he is entitled to invade his wife’s privacy. The serpent female figure represents female power and sexuality, which the husband fears might lead to cheating, an injury to his honour. The feminine is then distanced from the eyes of society and alienated until it is locked away in the depths of the unconscious, lurking, seeking revenge. Indeed we might say here that, the

very watery element which defines these creatures here stands as a symbol of the repressed femininity, which seeks to return to the surface.

Looking at their physical features, it is fair to say that mermaids and sirens are closely related to serpents. The serpent's symbolic meanings may vary. The serpent may be connected to the original sin of Eve, which represents the danger of sexuality and female knowledge and power. However, it is also strongly associated with healing. Dating back to the fourth century BC, Greek mythology recognized the serpent as a symbol for fertility, renewal, healing and rebirth; "its ability to perpetually rejuvenate by shedding its skin made it an underworld symbol of renewal of the vital powers of life" (Antoniou, Learney, I. Antoniou, F.A. Granderath.2011 p.218). The symbolic meaning of the serpent is significant for the reading of re-birth which is dealt with in both of the novels discussed.

Besides fish-tailed feminine creatures, there are other mythical women figures who have a close relationship with water, such as, (Botticelli's depiction of) *Venus*, the roman Goddess of beauty, also known as *Aphrodite* the Greek Goddess. The painting is about the birth of *Venus*. According to Ancient Greek mythology, Aphrodite arose from the foam in the sea. The imagery of the water is very powerful, symbolizing birth and renewal. Aphrodite is characterized as sensuous and sexually free. As depicted in Botticelli's famous painting, Aphrodite is represented as an aquatic woman, a Goddess born out of the water. It can be said that. Her birth bears great significance. According to the Greek poet Hesiod, Aphrodite was born out of the sperm of Uranos (God of the sky) after his son Cronus cut off his father's genitals and threw them in the sea. Uranos was giving pain to Gaia, constantly holding Gaia captive by remaining in a constant state of intercourse. In order to free Gaia, Cronus castrates his father. According to this creation, Aphrodite doesn't have a mother. Therefore it is interesting that when Uranos' genitals fall into the water, Aphrodite emerges as a full-grown woman. I offer a reading of this phenomena which suggests that the sea is

symbolically seen as a female entity which mingles with the sperm of Uranos, thereby creating another being. The fact that Gaia was oppressed by Uranus is significant, because after Gaia is set free, Aphrodite emerges. This might suggest that Gaia's freedom is projected on to Aphrodite, who interestingly symbolises a liberated feminine sexuality. Additionally the female image in the sea emerges from not only of a 'God' which represents a masculine power, but it is also created by a man, Hesiod. This indicates that the depictions of the "fluid feminine" are created by male authority, specifically, masculine writing. The freedom of female sexuality is linked to the fluid of the water. Thus, the aesthetic image of the feminine figure and the expression of female sexuality become intertwined. The subject of writing and authority will be discussed in the later chapters in relation with the patriarchal language opposing a feminine language.

Half-fish, half-woman aquatic female creatures have been a part of male fantasies, looking to seduce men and showing man's desire to explore the savage, unfamiliar femininity that dwells in the depths of the water. The sexual connotation highlights men's weakness for beautiful, seductive women. However, in this context, it can be lethal if men give in to their weaknesses. Female sexuality is controlled and exploited by men because it poses a threat to the patriarchal imaginary. The term patriarchal imaginary is a term used by Luce Irigaray.

"Irigaray employs the Lacanian imaginary body in her discussions about Western culture's bias against women. Irigaray argues that, like people, cultures project dominant imaginary schemes which then affect how that culture understands and defines itself. According to Irigaray, in Western culture, the imaginary body which dominates on a cultural level is a male body" (IEP).

Woman's sexuality represents a lethal weapon and is feared by men, because the freedom of female sexuality means gaining control for women. When men lose control over

female sexuality, they also lose their control over women, because the patriarchal system survives on the oppression of female sexuality. But this fear is not projected on to women, but onto dehumanized versions of them. Looking back on the ancient connections between women and water, it is evident that these fluid women figures are often represented as lustful, sensual and sexually free. However, these fluid women have been pushed back down in to the water, (into the unconscious) just like the dead women in *Bodies of Water*, to be silenced and forgotten.

As mentioned before, both novels have images of aquatic mythical creatures, but particularly in *Bodies of Water*, the references are very explicit. In *The Awakening*, the waves are described as “white serpents” around Edna’s ankles which projects that mermaid outlook. In both novels, imagery of mermaids, or serpent-like creatures symbolize the metamorphoses which entails a certain transgression. Watery women, whether depicted as monstrous beings or as irresistibly beautiful creatures, are a product of the repressing toxic masculinity. What is repressed is feminine sexuality, and the expressions of this kind of drive, or energy are represented as something intoxicating and dangerous. Both Edna and Evelyn go through a kind of metamorphosis which symbolizes their rebellion. In the process of change, they become engaged with the water, and become one with it, a part of it. By merging with the water, they become fluid, and they dissolve the rocky shores of patriarchy slowly, by splashing, stroking, crashing against it. They are flexible just like any liquid, they are able to fit into, leak out of, flow through, over flow from and against any object they come against. Recognizing the hidden, unexplored desires of the unconscious is an awakening from the dream like existence, where they have been living up to the expectations of a patriarchal society. Once they have come to that realization, they do not want to be apart of it, even if it means giving up their bodies. Contrary, Evelyn and Edna choose to roam free within the ocean, released, and in form of liquid, and fully awake.

Based on my reading, mermaids seem to have transformed from their fertile, nurturing images to become dangerously seductive and threatening to men. Certainly there has been a strong interest in painting mermaids and sirens during the 19th century, as can be seen in some famous art works such as *Ulysses and the Sirens* and *The Fisherman and the Siren*. Along with the mermaid depiction, the image of the drowned woman has also been a popular subject, drenched in water or beside the water, her beauty preserved on her dead body. It seems that myths about these female entities first originated in a positive light. They represented female divinity, empowered by their potent fertility and gifted with beauty and aesthetics. However, these creatures have endured a second metamorphosis, changing their reputation and their intention into man-hunters. Their targets are men in particular, not women, and this highlights the power conflict between men and women. In contrast with the dangerous male hunting-mermaids, the aquatic women prior to that representation were free, unconfined and respected for their fertility, and for their contribution to nature. However, their representation of the latter suggests that they are bound to hide, beneath the surface, they are limited. They are seen as outcasts. Either they vanish, or they lurk in the waters to hunt men down, using their seductive talents. These women seem to have turned against men, not because they wished to, but because men might actually be the ones who turned them against men. Since they were keeping them locked away in the depths of the ocean for so long, and by oppressing their sexuality, these creatures may have had no other choice other than returning to the surface with aggression and destruction against the patriarchal imaginary. The powers of their beauty and fertility are associated with nature, but also reduced to a male fantasy. The creatures represent nothing more than a dangerous sensuous woman, one that man irresistibly fantasizes about but cannot reach. In fact, 'siren' or 'mermaid', was a code word for prostitute. (Alexander). By looking at the evolution of the

water-dwelling female creatures, it is possible to say that repressed female sexuality is contained in the image of the women in the water, oppressed by patriarchal power.

At the root of this transformation from the positive, to the negative image of the mermaid, there is the repression of these powerful female entities. The patriarchal society in the 19th century was focused on labelling and classifying women morally, as good, angelic women or wicked, evil women. I suggest that the mermaids and sirens depicted as dangerous and deadly in canvases are painted warnings for women, unconsciously reminding them of the boundaries which they should not cross. The suppressed feminine sexuality is projected through mythical creatures, and remains a repressed part of the patriarchal society. Thus, the patriarchal system remains safe and undisturbed by taming feminine sexuality, until it returns from the repressed, to the surface. The fact that the mermaids, projected as morally corrupted, seductive temptresses, were bound to bodies of water, indicates a separation of the sexes as higher and lower, placing men on higher ground. Their semi-aquatic nature and physical form prevented them from being able to live on land, which is the most important factor that separates them from their male targets. They have been known as goddesses of fertility, an embodiment of fertility, and because of essentialist thought, the feminine has often been connected to the water, and therefore, water came to be the representation of the feminine.

In order to understand the association between the “fluid” and the “feminine”, it is important to know that a major part of this concept is actually based on the physical attributes of the male and female bodies. Earlier, I have mentioned that this association is linked to the body, and now I would like to provide an extended account. Hetta Howes has studied the subject of water and women specifically in the Middle Ages and her article shows some important facts about the history of this association (Howes, Emotions Blog). According to her research about fluids in the medieval era, health was understood to be

maintained by the balancing of the four humors (liquids). These four humors that are within the body are yellow bile, black bile, blood and phlegm. Every substance represented an element. Each of these elements had a meaning of its own and should each be in balance with the others in one's vessel (body). An imbalance of any substance would affect one's temperament as dictated by the elements. Having too much blood and phlegm resulted in the temperament of being too wet. Women were considered to be too watery due to things like menstruation and child birth. We can conclude that the female sex was thought to be weaker than the male and therefore women were "lacking" solidity while men "maintained" solidity, firmness and strength.

Howes states that "in the middle ages, it was a common belief that all bodily fluids were variants of blood, including water. Thus the monthly purging of watery blood perpetuated the association of women with water" (Howes, *The History of Emotions Blog*). Women's bodies were considered to be more watery than men's. Things like childbirth, vaginal fluids, urine and tears were thought to be those of a woman's body produces excessively. Women were often thought to be more emotional than men, and this is why women were seen to produce more tears. Women are seen as being wet in nature where as men are seen dryer. This is understandable, considering that the female genital organ is moist and the male organ is not. The monthly menstrual cycle that most women have also supports the idea of wetness. The hormonal changes that affect a woman's emotional/mental state, as for producing sensitive or as presenting an emotionally unstable state, all of which contributes to the forming of the association of woman and water. This leads to the masculine idea of woman, possessing a character that is unstable, liquid, like water. Through the research in this thesis, it can be seen that the natural biological system of a woman's body is used against her by the patriarchal imaginary, which restricts her. An essentialist ideology evolves, forming oppositions in language that render vocabulary into those that are

feminine those that are masculine, which will be discussed in further detail. Thus it can be seen that a gendered language with all of its complexities, inevitably serves patriarchy, helping it to keep control over the feminine, by subordinating the feminine to the masculine power. The female body becomes a cage, which encloses female sexuality, keeping it from releasing it outwards. Thus, the patriarchal imaginary is safe from the threat of female sexuality.

The association between water and femininity is a powerful one, but looking at the depictions of women and water, it can be said that generally, the depictions of women are represented as passive and weak. An example would be Shakespeare's Ophelia, where we see Ophelia lying in the water, beautiful and elegant, surrendering her body to the flow of the river. Ophelia is depicted as passive, showing no sign of life out action. This shows that the masculine views the feminine as something that lacks power and control. And yet what is passive/suppressed, as we see with mythical feminine creatures, soon becomes aggressive/threatening. If we explore this issue on a wider scale, we will see that the patriarchal language helps to form the way the female body is represented and exploited. Whether aesthetically, spiritually or physically, women have frequently been understood as somewhat watery beings as opposed to men and, as mentioned earlier, the notion of solidity is frequently projected as a male, "phallic" figure. Analysing language explains much about the social hierarchy between men and women. Oppositions and binaries are a source of gender discriminations. In order to understand how the masculine language operates, I will now explore it in more detail, which will enable a clearer understanding of the theoretical arguments of French feminists.

Certain critics such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray developed an approach which has come to be known as 'French feminism', which consists of feminist thoughts and criticism with a literary, psychoanalytic and philosophical approach. This approach criticizes

the Western written-spoken language in the sense that it displays a male bias in language which leads to the subordination of the feminine. French feminist critics discuss the masculine form of language which places the male as norm and excludes women. In an attempt to retrieve the repressed feminine from within masculine discourse, feminists have criticised the male-centred language that is described as phallogocentric or phallocentric and have come up with a revolutionary concept of “écriture féminine” which means female or feminine writing. The theoretical approach is one that deconstructs the masculine subject. One way of doing this is by analysing the metaphor in text that uses the feminine and the female body as an object of desire and suppresses female sexuality. The idea of the “phallus” being the centre of the structure of language, is a feature, in particular of the works of Jacques Lacan. Lacan discusses the “Symbolic Order” in language which is represented by the phallus, which he describes as a “signifier” as opposed to Freud’s theory of the phallus which he describes as a representation of the penis. However, even though Lacan de-biologizes Freud, the “phallus” is associated with masculinity. Therefore, the dominant imaginary is male which excludes the feminine from language and culture.

The oppositions between the two sexes, male and female, can thus be seen as embedded in the language which contributes to the patriarchal construction of society. Language is saturated in hierarchical oppositions that estimate feminine and masculine objects to be more or less valuable. As Luce Irigaray states, syntaxes in language form an understanding, and meaning that involves a hierarchy among the sexes as “above or below” and feminine representations are almost always lacking, insufficient, repressed “by the masculine and for the masculine”. (132). the phallogocentric use of language results in women being reduced and manipulated, turning notions of femininity into projections of inferiority.

Phallogocentrism is a term that refers to the understanding of the phallus being in the centre of the social order and sexual development. Sigmund Freud’s theory of the phallic

developmental stage was criticized by Ernest Jones and other analysts including women. He criticized Freud for centring his argument on the male sexual organ. The term then gains a linguistic dimension by Jacques Lacan, who called the Phallus a 'signifier' rather than an object, an image or a bodily organ (Plato.Stanford.edu/Psychoanalytic Feminism). The phallus detaches from the biological meaning towards a "representational domain in which the world takes on meaning" (Plato.Stanford.edu/Psychoanalytic Feminism). Jacques Derrida, as well as the French feminists criticises the term 'phallus' that represents the 'masculine symbolic' by developing the theory of phallogocentrism.

Within the discourse of post structuralism Derrida takes the critique of pallogocentrism, and focuses on language and meaning, coining the term phallogocentrism, by merging the two terms 'Logocentrism' and 'Phallogocentrism' (Plato.Stanford.edu/Psychoanalytic Feminism). The term phallogocentrism was then acquired and used in some of the readings of French feminists who argued against a masculine form of spoken language. Derrida's term phallogocentrism is linked to a set of other terms that go hand in hand with his theory that Western metaphysics is based on a system that operates through binary oppositions.

The anthropologist Claude-Lévi Strauss claims that the human mind thinks in terms of binary opposites in language, in order to create meaning (Levi-Strauss, *The Structural Study of Myth*). In oppositions like light/dark, the two terms depend on each other to create meaning, and the theory is based on the idea that language operates through a deeply embedded structure. Derrida and the French feminists claim that the binary oppositions in language are hierarchical and that one meaning out of the two opposites represents a meaning that is superior compared to the other. In her work 'Sorties', Hélène Cixous discusses how the order of hierarchical male/female gender relations affects all aspects of human social existence. Looking at binary oppositions, Cixous explains how human thought operates within literature and language in general, stating "thought has always worked

through opposition, through dual hierarchal oppositions. Superior/ inferior, all oppositions are couples. (3). In the binary system, all couplings are related to the opposition man/woman, which puts women in the inferior position because she has always been considered to lack something in opposition to the masculine subject. “Where is she?” Cixous asks her reader, to question the position of women.

Activity/ passivity?

Sun/Moon,

Culture/Nature,

Day/Night,

Father/Mother,

Head/Heart,

Intelligible/sensitive,

Logos/Pathos. 54

Influenced by Derrida’s theory, Cixous focuses on binary oppositions and explains that the oppositions in language represent the male and female in all dimensions. The power struggle between binaries which are represented as masculine/superior and feminine/inferior, contributes to the oppression of women in society. This masculine language is not that easy to change, but Cixous states that women have to start somewhere, and writing is the place to start, in order for women to start owning their own bodies, and liberate women from patriarchal writing and language.

Bodies of Water and *The Awakening*, are written by female authors and both novels echo the ideology of écriture feminine. These women writers have created a text of their own

and have full authority over their product and language. Even though, in both novels, traces of masculine patriarchal ideologies exist, such as binary oppositions and the aim to silence feminine sexuality, the style of *écriture féminine*, manages to untangle itself from the patriarchal imaginary, and manages to liberate the feminine.

Simone De Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex*, criticizes the idea of biological aspects affecting the perspective of society on gender and sexual difference, stating, “Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature” (Beauvoir, 7). She is against the idea that woman is limited by her bodily attributes, and criticizes this perspective which has produced “unchangeably fixed entities that determine given characteristics, such as those ascribed to woman, (Beauvoir, 3). The essential task which only woman can perform, the act of giving birth, is seen by patriarchy as something that limits women. However, this is not true. As Wallace argues, “The uterus has come to be associated with powers of femininity in both physical reproduction and artistic creation” but on the other hand, it has “served as a locus for debates regarding the relation between woman’s reproductive capabilities and social and cultural definitions of female subjectivity” (Wallace, 578). The feminine is expected to accept her role as the passive and ends up suppressing all that doesn’t fit in with the inferior submissive characteristics that a patriarchal society determines. This leads to the repression of female desire which is preserved in the unconscious. In further analysis, we will see a reading of how the repressed elements return to the surface, and how the repressed is depicted as non-human, monstrous creatures, which symbolize their return.

One may question why bodies of water particularly call to the women in the novels? What is it that women feel about the water and how is it connected to nature? To understand this, we need to take a look at the Nature/woman association. The term Mother-Nature reflects the nurturing aspect of mothers which is projected on to nature. Catherine Roach, in

her article *Loving your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation*, discusses the relation between woman and nature and how these relations function in the patriarchal world. Specifically speaking about western culture, Roach states that women are seen as closer to nature in comparison with men. However, men are seen as closer to culture, not nature.

As we have already seen in Cixous' analysis, we are faced with the binary opposition, which is significant because the perception of women being closer to nature brings many problems along with it that contribute to women's oppression in the patriarchal culture. Understanding the power relations between culture and nature will clarify the position of woman within the binaries. It is important to understand that "culture is made by human, nature not made by human", and according to this perception, "in the patriarchal culture, women are seen as less human" (Roach, 51). As a result of this opposition, automatically, 'human' is the superior subject which is considered to hold the power of reason. This association between culture, human and reason is considered as a masculine trait, owned by men and puts the woman in the lower position by showing their lack of control. Nature is seen as feminine because the force of nature is an uncontrollable power, and female sexuality is seen as a part of this force. Considering that women in western culture are not valued, Nature is not valued either.

This whole association of nature and women stems from the "objectification of women and personification of the environment" which affects both negatively. The perception of a 'Mother' is similar to the way patriarchal culture sees the Mother figure, as something inferior. Roach writes that the "Mother in patriarchal culture is she who provides all of our sustenance and who makes disappear all of our waste products, she who satisfies all of our wants and needs endlessly and without any cost to us" (Roach, 49). Roach claims that the way western culture sees mothers and the meaning given to mothers mirrors the meaning given to nature, and in order to reverse the destructive impact on women and the

eco-system, the perception of motherhood needs to change. Women are affected by the association with nature, as they are seen as resources that are exploitable. “Nature is perceived as a female, as a virgin resource to be exploited or raped”, which makes both women and the environment suffer as there is a “disempowerment women experience from being identified with nature” (50/52).

The Earth depicted as the mother and life provider is an empowering connection to women; however, the idea serves the power of the men that walk over her. The hands of men have long physically penetrated the Earth. During and after colonialism, the earth’s lands have been explored by groups of men who seek to exploit and reap the benefits, by performing destructive behaviour towards newly discovered lands they claim to have conquered. Evidently, the male is represented as a destroyer, penetrator and claimer and the female as a metaphoric object that is destroyed, penetrated and claimed.

The metaphorical link between bodies of water and women appears to be strong. Oceans, seas, lakes, rivers and streams, commonly are all represented as something feminine. The sea is frequently seen as the earth’s womb where life begins and develops like that of a foetus growing inside the womb of a female body. The symbolism of water and femininity derives from the productive aspect of the female body in connection with nature. Because of this notion, in many cultures, water is considered as a feminine symbol, which has inspired many writers and artists to depict water and woman in their works. It is significant that entities that are labelled as feminine are most of the time, things that can be controlled, pursued or claimed. The earth, personified as the ‘Mother Earth’ is an example of metaphorical gender that is widely used in many other cultures. This is due to the biological similarities between a woman’s power of fertility and nurturing, and that of the earth’s provision of life.

The representation of water and femininity along with the metaphoric notions, are misused as an aid to practice power and dominance. However, the feminization of water does not only originate from aspects of fertility. It is also because of the behaviour and characteristics of the water that male authors have likened it to a woman. A woman was seen to be unpredictable, mysterious and often thought to disrupt the order of things which relates it to the character of the oceans and rivers. It can be understood why some stories of rebelling, untamed women emerged out of the oceans in forms of monsters, serpents and mermaids, which will be read in relation to female sexuality as an excessive, dangerous quality.

Due to the perception that women have watery, sexually excessive characteristics, hysteria was considered to be a woman's illness. Here I would like to introduce another important discussion, in order to analyse the subordination of the feminine. In *Bodies of Water*, we can see that "hysteria" is a central part of the novel. In order to draw connections between fluidity, femininity and the repression of female sexuality, I will provide information about hysteria and symbolic readings of the condition. As hysteria is directly connected to the characteristics of femininity and the fear of female sexuality, I will also provide a general perspective on the role of the "Ideal woman" according to the patriarchal imaginary, which is in conflict with the image of the hysterical woman. The expectations of the 19th-century woman in Western societies explain how the protagonists in the novels are pressured by a patriarchal culture. I stress that the hysterical condition is a gendered one, as it was specifically diagnosed in women. It is most significant that Hysterical women were treated in hydropathical facilities where water is seen as a source for relief and treatment for this condition. According to Hillary Mayland and Jane Adams' research about hydropathy and the water cure treatment, in the 19th century, water therapy facilities were common in western countries. Originally, they were established for both men and women. However in

time, mostly women ended up receiving treatment. The first hydropathic treatment facility was established in Britain in the year 1841, 20 years after the theory of healing through water emerged. As Mayland and Jane Adams point out, the “system was described as being particularly appropriate for women” (5).

It is clear that society viewed hysteria as a “woman’s sickness”, but profound research show that the condition is not based only on sex, or gender, but it is due to the social structure of society. “Hysteria was a widespread and - in the intellectual history of medicine – significant disease” (Carroll Smith Rosenberg, 2). Rosenberg states, “virtually every era of Western culture of some clinical entity called hysteria; an entity which has always been seen as peculiarly relevant to the female experience, and one which has almost always carried with it a pejorative implication” (2). She argues that, in the 19th century, conditions were tough for families as social and structural change affected and caused stress for many women who were trying to keep up with domestic roles and therefore “Hysteria serves as a valuable indicator both of domestic stress and of the tactics through which some individuals sought to resolve that stress” (4). In both novels, representations of the 19th century woman reveal the level of pressure, which aims to oppress female sexuality, thereby emphasizing the image of the “ideal” woman. But we also see evidence of what Rosenberg describes hysteria as a tactic which women use in order to reduce the stress of having to hide female sexuality and aggression.

Rosenberg analyses the expectations that the American society had of women in the 19th century. “The ideal female was expected to be gentle and refined, sensitive and loving. She was the guardian of religion and spokeswoman for morality” (6). In these novels, we see female characters facing the conditions described by Rosenberg. Specifically, we notice the pressure on Edna from *The Awakening* and the way she is expected to be selfless and sacrificial for her children and for her husband. In *Bodies of Water*, we see the kind of things

that happen to women who fail to achieve this ideal image, and how women become identified as a “fallen woman” and as a hysterical woman”. A woman was centred inside the home, being expected to overcome the exhaustions of daily life, while trying to preserve the vulnerable, delicate persona that she is meant to portray. This duality within ideal expectations manifested in the psychological breakdown of women. “She was expected to face severe bodily pain, disease and death - and still serve as the emotional support and strength of her family” (Rosenberg, 7). Women who were wedded at a young age were hardly prepared for the demands of marriage, child bearing and housekeeping. “Frequently women, especially married women with children, complained of isolation, loneliness and depression” which caused reported cases of psychological disorders and hysteria to rise, especially among women (Rosenberg 7). It is reported that men also experienced hysteria, but their experiences were claimed to be different to women, and rarer compared to women’s experiences with hysteria. Hysteria came to be known as the ‘woman’s sickness’ because of the way patriarchal society viewed women with a delicate “nature”. This essentialist view supports gender based biases that exist in society. We can also observe the binary thought in this idea where the “nature” of woman is seen as delicate, but the man’s is durable, and therefore the two are in opposition to each other. I believe that the water cure for hysteria is based on this idea where water is seen as suitable for woman’s nature, because of the symbolic attributes, which include changeability, fluidity, and purity.

The following passage is about the water cure and how hysteria was treated with the aid of water. The water cure was a highly researched and increasingly widespread method of healing at the time. Women who were diagnosed with hysteria frequently entered water cure facilities and were sometimes forced to receive the cure. The water cure consisted of various methods which included a change in one’s diet and lifestyle while receiving the cure. The diet was bland, watery and required an increase in water intake. There were hot, iced cold

and warm baths, wet sheets, and some other painful and humiliating ‘treatments’ which distressed the patient. Through time, the stereotype of the hysterical woman evolved. Women who had been diagnosed with hysteria became socially rejected and denied any sympathy. “Physicians saw hysteria as caused either by the indolent, vapid and unconstructive life of the fashionable middle-class and upper-class woman, or by the ignorant, exhausting and sensual life of the lower-class or working-class woman” (Rosenberg 17). Women were thought to be more vulnerable to hysteria, simply because they are women. Therefore this understanding strengthened the connection between women and water. The water cure was believed to be quite affective.

19th-century physicians thought that physical and biological differences among men and women increased the chance of having hysteria, as it was seen as the flaw in woman’s essence. Connected with the womb, we can see that “female sexuality” is the source of the flaw in a woman’s body according to the patriarchal imaginary. Sexuality is alienated from the female body through the idea that it brings corruption and impurity. This idea is the result of a masculine fear of female sexuality, because the freedom of female sexuality poses a threat to patriarchal control. Female sexuality could potentially disrupt the order of patriarchy, which relies on silencing the feminine. A woman who was excessively sexual even with her spouse, was thought to be in danger of contracting the illness. Masturbation was forbidden, which was seen as a symptom of hysteria. “In an era when a sexual perspective implied conflict and ambivalence, hysteria was perceived by physician and patient as a disease both peculiarly female and peculiarly sexual” (Rosenberg 19), so this inevitably reflected the way women were portrayed and labelled as “impure” or “abnormal” in the eyes of society.

In both of the novels, we see problems related to women’s mental health issues. The protagonists from the novels are thought to have a psychological problem, based on their

assertive behaviour which are in conflict with the dominant patriarchal ideology of their society. In *Bodies of Water*, we see an image of a river full of wombless bodies, which is linked to the idea that the womb is seen as the source of corruption. Patriarchy views female sexuality as a threat which brings corruption upon patriarchy, thus they take away women's wombs, leaving their bodies barren. Based on the representations of the women in the novels, their experiences with doctors, mental health issues and attempts to express female sexuality, it is evident that there is a connection between female sexuality, the womb and women's mental health problems, which needs to be discussed. Kaara Peterson, who has devoted her article to the subject of "fluid economies and hysterics" discusses these issues of fluids and hysteria from the times of the Renaissance. Peterson's article also explores Greek models of femininity and medical practices, which explains a lot about the construction of the liquid and feminine notion and its connection with female sexuality. "The Greek adjective *hysterikos* means 'from the womb; as such, it is a purely physical description of cause, showing the part of the body from which other symptoms emanate'" (6). As the womb was considered as the root of 'female illnesses', ideas and theories were shaped according to that understanding. There were even theories of female sperm, and "women were thought to produce a greater amount of sperm, though of considerably more inferior quality than male sperm" and women were thought to be less capable of controlling their sexual desires. (Peterson, 6). When women couldn't satisfy their sexual desires, it was thought that female sperm or 'seed' built up in the reproductive organs'. "The belief in the build up of fluids thought to turn into noxious stews and even poisonous vapours extremely quickly is related to holdovers from ancient Greek models of female sexuality, which stated that women are the sex predisposed to uncontrollable sexual appetites; by comparison, the male body, with its superior humoral composition and physiological structure, easily regulates its desires" (6). Here we can see the essentialist idea of corruption stewing inside the female body, due

to its own 'nature'. The excessive production of fluids represented the female body as inferior, and this fluid characteristic contributed to the association with water and nature as a whole. The uncontrollability of female sexual desires produces a fear in the masculine figure which leads the patriarchal figure to try to control this desire, to manage it and hide it. Underneath the concept of the water cure and the condition of hysteria, we see that this is an attempt to alienate sexuality from the female body.

The balance of a patriarchal society is ironically built on a foundation that relies on the imbalance of gender roles and its lack of equality. While men are free to express their sexuality, women are not given equal freedom. Women's role in society is fixed and they are expected to stay within the boundaries set by the patriarchal system. As a result, women were expected to remain silent, passive and weak. Women were supposed to be the opposite of men in order to prevent equality because equality meant freedom for women and the loss of power and authority for men. Women who were delicate and weak were labelled as 'good women'. However, as Klaus Theweleit points out, "women who don't confirm to any of the 'good woman' images are seen as prostitutes, evil and out to castrate." (171). If women do oppose the law of patriarchy, then it is seen as a threat among men who feel the need to strip the women of their decency, by labelling them as the fallen prostitute. The ideal representation of woman in Western culture is based on ideas of sexual purity, and virtue. For women who have fallen from that ideal, water is a possible path of redemption, to purify their bodies and souls. Women fall, for having pursued the sinful path which is strictly forbidden, especially for the female sex. They fall because they aren't seen as pure anymore, having experienced something that is sexual and having tasted the lustrous fruit. In her work, Elizabeth Trigg points out that "Women are not only classified as 'other' to the male, but also have a binary opposition operating within the category 'female', where all that is sexual, assertive, powerful and free is regarded as undesirable, even evil" (Trigg, 6).

“Women’s desires are muted by masculine society, which intends to silence sexuality in women, rendering it anti-feminine and abnormal. The patriarchal, masculine language deforms, lies, deceives as women always have reputed to do. It is a subordination of feminine desire to phallogocentrism” (Irigaray, 138).

Conforming to society’s expectations, women’s sexual desires become repressed, and these repressed desires leak to the surface from the unconscious, which is analyzed in both of the novels in this thesis.

Of course the law of integrity, morality and decency which shaped the ideal woman, is a man-made construction, serving to protect the ego of man, to prevent any occurrences that would reveal any kind of lack on behalf of men. Because this whole idea is based on the ‘complete’ masculine figure, anything that would threaten to disrupt the completeness, the wholeness that is founded on division and discrimination, eventually leads for the woman to be alienated in society, confronted and silenced in every possible way. Women who don’t conform to the social norms are given labels which separate them from the ‘good women’ image. Women are already seen as the tempted weakling who was not able to resist the apple. It was seen as a flaw detected in women’s nature which contributed to the creation of a hierarchical foundation. Men considered themselves as both physically and morally superior, wiser, and stronger. Women, already at a disadvantage, had no other choice but to obey the law that patriarchy had founded. The figures who did not obey, however, were projected in various strange lights in art and literature as we see through depictions of mermaids, sirens, serpent-like female creatures, who symbolized the female resistance, against the patriarchal imaginary.

Klaus Theweleit’s book, *Male Fantasies*, draws connections between fluidity, femininity and masculine desires. Theweleit refers to the works of Sandor Ferenczi who

“speculates on the connection between femaleness and water”, and argues that the female interior is referred to as a “substitute for a lost aquatic existence”. Theweleit uses this information to form a foundation of a genital theory, which provides an understanding of how women and water have such close associations, especially in the masculine language for which the “female image lives in the water” (273).

A river without end, enormous and wide, flows through the world's literatures. Over and over again: the women-in-the-water; woman as water, as a stormy, cavorting, cooling ocean, a raging stream, a waterfall; as a limitless body of water that ships pass through, with tributaries, pools, surfs, and deltas; woman as the enticing (or perilous) deep, as a cup of bubbling body fluids; the vagina as wave, as foam, as a dark place ringed with Pacific ridges; love as the foam from the collision of two waves, as a sea voyage, a slow ebbing, a fish-catch, a storm; love as a process that washes people up as flotsam, smoothing the sea again; where we swim in the divine song of the sea knowing no laws, one fish, two fish; where we are part of every ocean, which is part of every vagina. (283).

This quote is powerful and one which reflects the criticism of the patriarchal imaginary, and its fantasy of the “fluid feminine”, therefore I would like to interpret it through my perspective. The sense of endlessness highlights the female body, seen as an infinite resource for exploitation. The many forms of fluidity described by Theweleit, give the sense that woman is identified as a constantly changing, transforming being. The “bubbling” sensation reflects the sensuality which bubbles with sexual energy. The female organ is referred to as anything other than itself, “wave, foam, a dark place” because it does not belong to a man, it is a part of nature. To a males perspective, the vagina represents sexual pleasure. The vagina has acquired a collective meaning within the masculine language, which shows that the female body is objectified. The collision of two waves refers to the fluids of bodies that

collide during intercourse; which can be referred to as the “sea voyage”. “Smoothing the sea” suggests that the love making subsides the stormy state of the female sexual drive. (In the descriptions, it seems that Theweleit is building up the ideas of the male fantasy, in order to knock it down). Lastly, Theweleit states that the sea “knows no laws” which suggests that it is opposing a patriarchal law, which is the source of all metaphors to do with the female body and fluidity. Fluidity is an effect of the male imaginary because it projects the uncontrollability of nature’s forces on to the feminine, which can sometimes overflow and cause damage. The fear of an uncontrollable feminine energy is also threatening to the patriarchal imaginary, which is why the male imaginary aims to eliminate the possibility of such a destruction by keeping the fluidity of female sexuality under control. But in reality, there is no law that can control the waves, oceans, river or seas, which implies that there is no way of controlling female sexuality, for the sexual energy is a part of nature, and the natural forces are a part of every vagina.

The human body and its form is the result of a natural process and of a social production. The result of these social and biological transformations is that femininity in particular has been muted by patriarchy as they have always been “objects and raw materials, pieces of nature awaiting socialization which has enabled men to see and use them as a part of the earth’s inorganic body – the terrain of men’s own productions”. (Theweleit , 294). This is the result of a prolonged oppression of women, dehumanizing and reducing them to the principle of flow, which gives power to the man, being immersed in masculine pleasure. These depictions of watery women decorate the male fantasy, imagining the female body as a source of a limitless space to indulge in sexual pleasure and to exercise power. The process of dehumanization makes it possible to exploit the female body and enables men to implement their own patriarchal law. To extend the analysis about the oppression of women through the use of metaphor and similes in connection with water, (which will be explored in

chapter 1 and 3), we must consider the effects of the language that is spoken and how divisions occur within language. As mentioned earlier, language itself is immersed in hierarchical calculations which estimate feminine and masculine objects to be more or less valuable or powerful in meaning. Notions of femininity have been turned into projections of inferiority by the phallogentric use of language which results in women being reduced and manipulated.

I will now proceed with a detailed analysis of *The Awakening* where I will discuss the symbolism of fluids, the representations of sexual awakening and repressed sexuality and assertive female resistance against patriarchal dominance, using a psychoanalytic approach. By using Frenthe theory of '*écriture féminine*', I will discuss the binary oppositions in the novel and their purpose which can be subverted in order to liberate the feminine from patriarchal control. I will then move on to the analysis of the second novel *Bodies of Water* where I will be doing a comparative reading analyzing the same concepts, by using the two theoretical approaches. I will deal with the details of both novels, by in relation to the historical information given in the introduction. In the 3rd chapter, I will discuss 'death', and the suicides of the female characters in both novels, as well as re-birth from a psychoanalytical perspective. I will show how stylistically, these two novels can be seen as examples of *écriture féminine* and I will analyze the complexities within the discussions of suicide and self-autonomy, in relation to a movement towards a possibility of escape or liberation and the possibility of *écriture féminine*.

CHAPTER 1

The Awakening; the Fluid and the Feminine

The Awakening, written by Kate Chopin, is a canonized feminist literary work, set in the late Victorian era, when it was written. The novel revolves around Edna Pontellier, a woman living in a Victorian society, featuring the evolution of her identity, her bodily awakening from a long-lasting submissive passivity, to find her sexuality. This drives her to rebel against the male-dominated society in order to reach self-fulfilment. While on a summer vacation on the coast of Louisiana, Edna frequently spends time on the Gulf in Grand Isle, where she becomes aware of her emotions and desires, but at the same time, she is faced with the struggles to escape society's oppressive boundaries. Edna follows a path which she finds herself walking alone. She strays away from the idealised image of women who show complete devotion and dedication to their husbands and children, leading a life of simplicity, and submitting to their only role as wife and mother without any apparent desires regarding sexuality.

Edna develops feelings towards Robert Lebrun, who shares the same interest in her, but the relationship does not evolve physically. However, Edna's internal revelations are sparked by Roberts's affections towards her, which leads her to become aware of her independence and awakens her sensuality. Robert also encourages Edna to learn how to swim, which inevitably changes her. By learning how to swim, she is able to gain confidence and experience her independence. As their relationship progresses, Robert decides to remove himself from New Orleans in order to avoid further steps to adultery. Meanwhile, Edna realises that parts of her self have awakened, and she starts to gain control and indulge her freedom to do as she pleases. She starts to paint, nurturing her artistic personality, but at the same time, she ignores her social responsibilities and her parenting obligations. During this

time, Léonce, Edna's husband realises that his wife is going against social norms, so he decides to consult a doctor. They have ongoing talks about Edna's disobedience; nevertheless, Edna continues on her path.

While her husband is away on business matters and Robert having left the town, Edna meets Alcée Arobin, a charming man who is attracted to her. She has an affair with Alcée and discovers sexual pleasure, releasing years of repressed sexuality. However, Edna is in love with Robert and wishes to be with him and to lead an independent life, leaving her prior one behind. Robert confesses his love to her but will not continue the relationship any further, for she is married to Léonce.

Edna starts living in her own home by herself, which she establishes completely by her means. She grows distant from her husband and children, enjoying her freedom to do what ever she wants, exploring art and her sensual side. Her friend Adele goes into labour and Edna pays her a visit. Adele tells Edna to think about her children, and Edna realises that there is no place for her in that world, so in order to escape, she commits suicide by drowning in the ocean.

This section offers a close reading of Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening* which explores the symbolism of water and the ways in which it is linked to femininity and female sexuality. The symbolism of water bears a strong connection to the repressed femininity which lies within Edna's unconscious. The notion of the fluid and the feminine has been formed by the patriarchal imaginary, and we will see how this notion helps to break apart the patriarchal machinery. We will be analyzing though Edna's story, her role as a woman and her journey toward "the unlimited, in which to lose herself" in order to discover an unexplored part of her self/identity. Within this analysis, hierarchical binary oppositions within language will be explored, which is important for the discussion Edna's resistance

against the patriarchal ideology and the power of woman's writing, which will be discussed in chapter three in relation to *écriture féminine*.

Water bears great symbolic significance in *The Awakening*. Issues of repression and identity are connected to the symbolism of water. Edna's struggle with her repressed desires are projected through the movement and sound of the ocean. The restless sexual energy within her drives her to rebel against male-dominated society in order to gain control of her freedom to express her sexuality. The seaside is the setting where Edna spends most of her time and it is where she goes through an identity transformation. The water and the ocean allows this transformation, and offers Edna the possibility for freedom and escape from patriarchal pressures. After Edna discovers her repressed sexuality, she experiments with her sexuality and her desires that are truly new to herself. She feels free to love whoever she wants, regardless of her marriage. "The achievement of women's sexual power is a central goal of oppositional nineteenth-century feminist ideology, and a vital aspect of Edna's role as the "free-woman." (Gray, 18). It is evident that Edna is acting out an 'active' role regarding her partner selection, rather than a passive role where men get to choose their sexual partners. In this sense, Edna transitions from passive to active which is significant for the discussion of binary oppositions that are represented as active/passive.

In order to understand how Edna begins her journey to her inner awakening, It is important to discuss her role as a woman in society, and the social norms and expectations of the society she lives in. A woman of the Victorian era was not expected show her sensuality. Women were merely seen as fit for procreating and remaining in the home as the 'angel of the house'. The feminine is mostly represented as the passive other, which we can see throughout the depictions of the lives of the protagonists of both novels, Evelyn, and Edna who both live under the pressures of patriarchal social norms. Women of their time, were expected to behave in a passive way. Men were supposed to take on the role of the bread

winner, the one who encounters the daily stress and physical exhaustion that the working life entails. Women were expected to stay home and bring up children, as well as keeping up with household chores. Looking at the division between men's roles and women's roles, It is evident that a hierarchical order exists among men and women who are seen as the opposites of each other.

The phallogocentric system divides the differences of sex within language and projects the masculine on to the symbol, which carries a higher position compared to the feminine. Considering this, the opposition of solid/liquid is a distinctive binary opposition in the novel. The binary opposition system contributes to the patriarchal order of society which puts man in a higher position, and it is possible to see that "the same double is leading us throughout literature" (Cixous, 3) By deconstructing the text in the novel, we will see how the hierarchal binaries in the novel unravels, and the inferior meanings become subverted. As a result, binary oppositions fail to achieve the purpose of maintaining a superior vs. inferior relation.

In a phallogocentric or masculine-centered society, the feminine is required to submit to the masculine ideology, in order to keep the patriarchal system at work. As Cixous argues, "subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery's functioning," that machine being patriarchy. "Logocentrism creates a foundation for Phallogocentrism to guarantee masculine order" (5). In the novel, the representations of active/passive binaries become undone. As we will see, the contrast of land and sea serves to create understanding of the masculine and feminine binary. This opposition can be read in Edna's imaginary visions that accompany the music she listens to. While Madame Ratignolle plays a piece on the piano, Edna imagines a naked man on the shore and "a distant bird winging its flight away from him" (37). The naked man could be

read as a representation of male dominance governing the life on land, and the bird symbolizing Edna, flying away from the masculine power in order to gain freedom.

However, we see that the next time Edna listens to the piano played by Madam Reisz, she waits for the similar 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.” (37) This indicates that she has been opened up for such passionate arousals, which her body was longing for in the past. Her sexuality and her desires are projected in liquid form, swaying and lashing within her, dancing to the music within her. “She trembled” at the end, which projects an orgasmic experience. By looking at the sexual, orgasmic experience, it would be right to say that her desires and the effect of music is represented as fluid, and what used to be impossible to move, like a solid element, is now liquidized and is able to sway within her.

In the prior daydream, we see the division of land and sea clearly. This division, as mentioned earlier, symbolizes the masculine and feminine. Within these divisions, we can also see the relation of the oppressor and the oppressed. At that moment when Edna dreams about the bird and the man, she is longing for solitude, compared to the second experience. She is overwhelmed with life and hasn't got any hope for gaining pleasure because her inner sexual identity is limited. It is evident that Edna is under the constraint of patriarchal society. Thus, we can relate the land and sea symbolism to the structure of the psyche. Within the psyche, there are oppositional forces which are in conflict with each other. The land representing the ego, which is conflict with the instinctive sexual desires of the Id, which can be thought of as the ocean. The patriarchal social norms that we see in the ego (land) try to push down the instinctive desires to the Id, which manifests as repression. Thus we can see that the sea actually represents the unconscious, where the repressed drives try to reach the surface slowly with a lashing and swaying motion.

The transformation of Edna's identity can be observed in the way she approaches the ocean. At the beginning of the novel, Edna does not know how to swim, which immediately places her in the passive position. However, she is drawn to the water as if the water itself invites her in. Robert Lebrun teaches Edna how to swim. This is the first step in her transformation from passive to active. As a result of her close interaction with the ocean, her melancholic visions transform into passionate, sexual arousals, which are likened to the waves splashing against her body with a "swaying, lashing and beating" motion (38). Here, we can see the reflection of Edna's inner sexual desires through the movement of the ocean. The aggressiveness of the description of the waves gives a sense of distress. Edna's unconscious desires are trying to come out, in order to be set free. Her desires have now awakened and they are swaying, lashing and beating her inside.

The land, as explained, evidently represents the masculine and sea feminine. This only serves the masculine "male privilege, shown in opposition between activity and passivity which he uses to sustain himself" (Cixous 4). Women are inclined to be passive, so that the dominant control remains with the masculine. A woman has no other choice than to adapt her self to this system because "either woman is passive or she does not exist" (Cixous 4). The fear of losing that control, drives the masculine, to limit female sexuality. The hierarchy between men and women creates the 'traditional' stereotypical gender roles. Edna discovers that these divisions and roles are illusions, like a bad dream. She realizes she had been "remaining a dupe to illusions" all her life (165). The fact that Edna questions her place in the world, and slowly proceeds towards a transgressive position, which points out her inner awakening. She comes to the realization that she cannot go on living passively. Edna chooses to exist in her own terms. The way Edna neither chooses to fight the patriarchal imaginary nor give in to it nor live by accepting it, shows us that she is keen on making her own decision regarding her body and her mind. "As a sexual and autonomous

being, she is threatening to patriarchy and is conspicuously rebellious against dominant ideology” (Gray, 2).

With all of her senses, Edna experiments and embraces the connection she has with the ocean. We witness her journey to a close relationship with the sea at the beginning of the novel. After sketching with Madame Ratignolle and Robert, Robert invites Edna to come and bathe in the water, stating, “The water must be delicious; It will not hurt you. Come” (31). Edna declines his invitation at first, but she changes her mind and walks down to the beach with him. She doesn’t know why she made the decision to go, but she is aware of a “contradictory impulse” within her. (33). This contradiction is the clash between her inner desires that are repressed, and her social role as an obedient woman, as discussed previously, by referring to the ego, and the Id. Implicitly, Edna’s flowing sexual desires are exposed to the reader by the presence of the water. Edna appears to be attracted to Robert, but rather than explicitly stating it, the water calls her over, echoing Edna’s desire, whispering to her, to connect with her inner sexuality.

The gulf itself has a luring effect. The water’s “sonorous murmur” that “reached her like a loving but imperative entreaty” is like a delicate invitation for her to join the water. (18). The waters invitation is affectionate, but it also has a dominant presence, irresistible and seductive, waiting impatiently to welcome her in. “The voice of the sea speaks to the soul, the touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace” (34). We may read this as a projection of Edna’s soul or her identity which she has yet to discover as her a hidden part of her self. Deep within, Edna’s desires and sensual side are eager to come out in to the open. Edna’s realization of the movement of her sexuality is her awakening. As she stands in the water, she realizes that “a certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her, the light which, showing the way, forbids it” (18). This foreshadows the actual path that she will pursue, which is evidently forbidden because she is a married

woman and a mother, supposed to follow the rules of a male dominant society. The light is a symbol of an illumination, showing the way to the depths of her unconscious, which also represents her enlightenment.

The unveiling of Edna's inner contemplations can be shown through the image of the moon and the moon light. During an evening of entertainment, Edna dances with her husband and also Robert and she settles by the window overlooking the ocean. The scene has a magical atmosphere: "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" (63). The fact that the water is restless indicates a sense of movement that is active, unlike still waters. From this perspective, it can be said that the active motion of the sea is reflecting her inner awakening and her newly activated self. The light emphasizes the illumination of her path towards the liberation. The light from the moon shows her the way to her repressed desires which await to be released. The moon and moonlight bare great significance for Edna's transformation. As we see in Cixous' work, *The Newly Born Woman*, the sun is classified as masculine and the moon as feminine. The moon has often been associated with the female menstrual cycle. The image of the moon, presents a sense of mysteriousness, and the light revealing the dark side of nature. We can see the reflection of these ideas when Edna is in the presence of the moon.

One night as Edna listens to Mademoiselle Reisz's piano performance, she expresses how deeply affected she is by the music. She says that she doesn't understand the emotions that "swept through" her that night. She wonders if she "shall ever be stirred again". The use of words here suggests that the form of her emotions, and her sexual desires is fluid, as it can be swept and stirred within her. The "stirring" may also emphasize an unsettling sense, as if stirring the patriarchal system, by activating female sexuality.

Edna thinks “people about her are like some uncanny half human beings, there must be spirits abroad tonight” (43). As she is talks to Robert, she speaks her mind, without thinking what she is saying. The art and music plays an important role in Edna’s awakening senses. As she seeks her independence, she feels disconnected from the people around her. The “uncanny” feeling which Edna feels is because of her change in her personality. She finds it difficult to relate to, or identify with the people around her because she has gained a different perspective regarding the social roles people assume. Most people around her take on the social roles determined by a patriarchal society, therefore they are half-human according to Edna. Because for her, to be fully human means being fully awake to your senses, living freely and being able to express sexuality. In reply to Edna’s speech about the presence of spirits, Robert teases her about the “spirit that has haunted these shores for ages” and says it “rises up from the Gulf” (42). This description resembles the myths of the aquatic creatures that have been discussed previously. According to Robert, “the spirit seeks someone mortal worthy to hold him company” (42). The spirit is male, contrary to those tales of the mythical feminine creatures. But it is said to be seeking Edna, to keep her under its “spell”. When we look back to the luring, inviting sensations of the ocean, it presents a parallel image with the description of the spirit. Although it is an illusion, or perhaps even Robert’s own fantasy of luring Edna into his embrace, the supernatural element does present an interesting point regarding Edna and her hidden desires. It could be said that the ocean as an embodiment of Edna’s desires, wants to mix with Edna’s fluid identity, and the “spirit” or force identifies with her, and wants to connect with her.

The supernatural element shows that there is a force within the ocean, trying to connect with Edna, and attempting to get in touch with her. It can be said that this interaction between the ocean and Edna is like a feminine seduction. When we think of the ocean as a

space of the unconscious, the repressed feelings of sexuality which have remained contained for “ages” rise up to Edna’s conscious, in order to be set free. Following this conversation, Edna waits for her husband while Robert decides to keep her company until he comes. There is a moment of silence between them and “no multitude of words could have ever been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first- felt throbbings of desire” (44). The sexual tension between Edna and Robert is explicitly narrated in this quote. The words chosen to project the sexual desire, the “throbbing” motion and the “pregnant” state of silence, suggests a fullness, contrary to the emptiness of Edna’s state, prior to her awakening desires. This sexual activation is further emphasized by the image of the moon which shines on Robert as he walks, suggesting an illumination of Edna’s sexual awakening.

Edna’s husband Léonce realizes that his wife is going against his authority, and suspects that her assertive behavior might be a symptom of a mental illness. He decides to consult a doctor and makes sure that the doctor keeps an eye on her. This is an attempt to try to control Edna. Although Léonce does not present himself as a dominant male figure earlier in the novel, his attitude changes once he encounters Edna’s disobedience following the night after the party. While Edna lies down in the hammock outside the house, Léonce comes and questions her, “I thought I should find you in bed” (45). He seems baffled, because Edna isn’t acting how she usually would. It is stated that “His wife did not reply”. The choice of the word ‘wife’ reveals that Edna is not her self, her own identity, but she is just a wife, something that belongs to ‘him’. However, while with Robert, The narrative refers to her as ‘Edna’, which suggests that she belongs to no one, she is her own individual.

The moment when Léonce asks Edna if she is asleep, she replies “No” and “her eyes gleamed bright and intense, with no sleepy shadows, as they looked into his”. This moment is rich in emotion and meaning. The question does not only imply that she is physically sleeping, but refers to her inner state, whether she is asleep or shut off to her desires. It

questions whether she is in the dream-like state which she had spent most of her life in, disconnected from her sexuality, her body and her 'self'. But Edna replies "no", and from her wide-open gaze to her husband we can see that she is awake, which emphasizes her inner awakening of repressed desires. As Edna further refuses to go inside, we see a different side to her husband, more firm and impatient and irritated. "Another time she would have gone in at his request" without questioning her obedience, automatically, "through habit". This quote highlights how the patriarchal authority over women is deeply embedded into lives, so much as it is unrecognizable. It is normalized and done unconsciously, "as we walk, move, sit, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us" (45). This life has been portioned out by the patriarchal imaginary.

After the intense moments, Edna confronts the reality of her life. She realizes that up until now, she had been submissive but doesn't understand "why or how she should have yielded" . Coming face to face with reality, "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" (46). The dream that is mentioned, which seems impossible and delicious, reflects her experience of finding her self, and achieving an independent version of her identity, freeing her body and her mind from the patriarchal imaginary. The impossibility and grotesqueness of this dream refers to the illusions of patriarchy. It reflects how the patriarchal imaginary keeps women passive, asleep and dreaming through life, without knowing their body, or them selves or without having to explore their sexual desires. By awaking from the patriarchal dream, she is able to confront the reality of her life, that everything she did automatically, is based on a patriarchal illusion.

Nature corresponds with her internal conflicts, presenting no longer a movement in the ocean. Everything in nature is silent and still as "the world seems to hold its breath" and "the water-oaks had ceased to moan as the bent their heads. (46). The atmosphere in this

scene reflects Edna's hopelessness and the tiredness of her soul. However, she has put up a fight, she has resisted, and she goes in the house when she decides. When she asks Léonce if he is coming in, he replies "yes dear, just as soon as I have finished my cigar". He will not go in when she calls him, but only when 'he' wants to. At this moment we see Léonce's final attempt to show his male authority. Edna is faced with the reality that, coming against patriarchal society norms will lead to conflict, which Edna feels tired to confront. However, she continues to resist and over-step the boundaries which are forbidden.

In Chapter twenty-seven, Edna talks about Mademoiselle Reisz and how she put her hands on Edna's shoulder blades to feel her 'wings' and that 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" (123). The bird imagery is symbolically important for understanding the issue of Edna's struggle against patriarchy. Looking at both metaphors of the bird and land, it is evident that the land is equated with patriarchal norms and expectations. Edna is depicted as the bird that is trying to fly away from those pressures. However, the bird is destined to fly back to the earth if it should fail to stand strong against patriarchal society. Through the division of land and sea, we encounter the binary oppositions which imply that in the society which Edna lives in, a woman is not able to spread its wings and fly, or in other words, she is not able to gain her independence. The patriarchal imaginary holds a limits the feminine, which oppresses women which their desires to become repressed.

The struggle towards a feminine independence requires the "melting" or liquefying of the binary oppositions, which blends the masculine and feminine into each other, thereby eliminating any boundaries between them. A clear example of this can be identified in the setting where Edna achieves to discover her identity, which is the beach, where there is no line that separates the land and the sea. They is merged together. The water meets the land,

which crumbles in to sand particles, and the opposition of land and sea melts and fails, as the fluid of the water liquidizes the sand. Therefore, we can see how the fluid breaks apart the solidity of the land, and disrupts the binary opposition system. We can also see that in the novel, the verb “melt” is used repetitively, which indicates ways in which that the binary way of thought fails.

Edna’s struggle for independence is reflected through her struggle to swim. As she learns how to swim, she feels she has “conquered power” and gains confidence. Thus she swims further away from the land, symbolizing her achievement in recognizing distance from the pressures of the patriarchal society. Away from the land, she can see the view of the sky, merging with the ocean “the vast expanse of water, meeting and melting with the moonlit sky” (40). The “melting” suggests that there the land which divides and comes between the sky and the sea, is not visible. The sky represents her flight to freedom, which is now an open passage, considering that the masculine order on land is not visible. The ‘melting’ represents how binary oppositions fail as Edna proves that by believing in her self, she can do what she sets her mind to, and not what is expected of her. Once she has overcome her fear of swimming, she awakens from long lasting passive dream. She can no longer see the land which represents patriarchy. There is nothing that can stop her from gaining her freedom.

The change within Edna’s personality is noticeable by others. Her husband cannot accept that Edna has grown independent, but instead, he links her actions to the possibility of her being mentally sick. The doctor he gets advice from, observes Edna during the night on which Edna gathers everyone for her fathers visit. In one room, we can see a projection of the dynamics of the psyche at work. What was repressed before, has now surfaced from her unconscious. Edna gives a speech to everyone about “her father’s cause,” and the doctor notices “a subtle change which had transformed her from the listless woman he had known

into a being who, seemed palpitant with the forces of life” (103). Edna shines through the night, like “some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun” (103). The woman he sees is the real Edna, who is “warm and energetic” and without any “repression in her glance or gesture” (103). Edna is the person who is hosting the evening, and she is showing her talents by sketching her father and giving speeches. She is the main organizer and this shows that she is active, and has control. She acts “excited and radiant” and has “no trace of that morbid condition which her husband had reported” to the doctor (102). In the evening full of entertainment, “the unpleasantness melted and vanished with the fumes of the wine”. Here we see the repetition of the word “melted” in a similar content which has been used previously. Once again, there is a situation where she is playing an active part rather than a passive one, and she is doing something that normally wouldn’t be suited for the feminine, as the feminine is expected to acquire a silent, passive role. In this case, it could be said that the binary oppositions which subordinate the feminine, melts, and diminishes. There is no unpleasantness, because there is no trace of repressed emotions.

As I have mentioned earlier, the repetition of the word ‘melt’ is significant for the destruction of the binary couplings. We come across the word again, this time when Edna visits the pianist Mademoiselle Reisz at her home. Mademoiselle Reisz mentions a letter she received from Robert. However, she also mentions that the letter was mainly about Edna, and perhaps it would have been better if Robert had sent the letter to Edna. Edna insists on reading the letter herself, but Mademoiselle Reisz doesn’t allow it. However at the same time, she mentions that in his letter, Robert asks Mademoiselle Reisz to play Chopin’s Impromptu for Edna. Edna then demands, “Then play the Impromptu for me” (93). Mademoiselle Reisz changes the subject and asks her what time she has to be home? Edna is offended and makes it clear that she decides when to go home, saying “Time doesn’t concern me. Your question seems a little rude. Play the Impromptu” (93). Here, Edna is going against

the social norm. As a mother and a wife, it is expected of her to be at home in the evening, to fulfill her duties for the household. Instead, she decides to act independently and make her own decisions as to when she will return home. By wanting to see the letter, which is forbidden, she has already acted in an assertive manner. Edna mentions that she is becoming an artist, as a painter, which Mademoiselle Reisz laughs and makes fun of. Mademoiselle Reisz tells Edna that in order to become an artist, one must have a “courageous, brave soul. The soul that dares and defies” (94). Edna suggests that her persistent behavior might prove that she is worthy of having an artist's soul, which Mademoiselle Reisz accepts and then she hands over the letter. While reading the letter, Mademoiselle Reisz plays the piano, “a soft interlude, it was an improvisation” (94). The music she plays at that moment is hers, and she is the author of that harmony, she is in control. Then, “gradually and imperceptibly, the interlude melted into the soft opening minor chords of the Chopin Impromptu” (94). As we see, the merging of the two separate pieces is not described with any other word, such as blended or connected. But specifically, it ‘melts’ into the second piece of music.

It is significant that the ‘Impromptu’ which Mademoiselle Reisz plays is the product of a male composer which represents masculine authority. Chopin composed his music in the 1800's and he is an artist listed among the many canons of his time. However, it is important to acknowledge that most famous composers were men and not women. Although there were many female composers, “their works were almost never able to enter the realm of canon like the compositions of men due to lack of recognition and the societal norms that held music composition to be an exclusively ‘male’ pursuit.” (web,Libertyparkmusic). Looking at this, it is clear that patriarchal ideology emphasizes that instruments are meant for men. However, Mademoiselle Reisz puts her composition before Chopin's, and her music represents the feminine authority, emphasizing her control over her body and her mind which she reflects with her bodily movements and her composition. The fact that she does

not stop to end her piece and start Chopin's, shows that she does not think it is necessary, and that a balanced harmony is possible by blending in the two pieces. The patriarchal ideology which separates the sexes is represented through Chopin's music. Composed by a woman, the feminine interlude merges and becomes one with the masculine composition. As a result, the binary opposites 'melt', and dissolve. Repeatedly, the word 'melt' presents itself to the reader, in circumstances where there is a crossing over or an act of assertiveness on behalf of the female figures, against the patriarchal ideology. The act of melting suggests that women have the power to liquefy the fixed, seemingly solid system of binary thinking. This liquefaction is significant for the role of the fluid, because the act of melting suggests that the perception of a distinction between sexes can be changed, and the fluid creates the neglected, necessary space for the feminine.

Edna's expanding relationship with the ocean reflects the inner transformation of her identity, especially her sexual identity. "Her awakening involves a heightened sensitivity to many different sensory experiences." (Baldwin, 2). In the following paragraphs I will be analyzing ocean imagery in psychoanalytic terms in order to make connections to ideas of repression and sexuality. The ocean used to be a domain that Edna feared to step into. She would only linger in the shallow waters, avoiding going deeper for the fear of drowning. However, after learning how to swim, her curiosity concerning the ocean grows and she laments her previous passivity. On a night when Edna goes down to the beach with a group of people along with her husband and Robert, Edna's sexual awakening reveals itself even more. People enter the water cautiously at night as if it were a "native element," but Edna surrenders herself to the water as though she was a part of it. The soft waves that brush upon the shore are referred to as "slow, white serpents" which, as suggested above, symbolizes the temptation of sexual desire that dwells in the ocean (40). The ocean represents Edna's unconscious where her repressed desires are hidden. Therefore, the serpents which surface

around Edna's feet represent the repressed sexuality that is returning to the surface of her conscious. Considering that the surfacing repressed material is symbolically represented as serpents in the sea, we must also know that these "serpents" pose a threat to the patriarchal imaginary. Symbolically, the serpent can be seen as a representation of the phallus. The phallic symbol in female sexuality, leads the masculine subject to experience castration anxiety, where the masculine who has and represents the object of desire, is in fear of losing it. The masculine men forbid women to enter and explore that zone for they are afraid of the white serpents that might awaken in women's sexuality and threaten masculinity. Therefore, the serpent imagery is feared as something that is destructive to patriarchy. In addition to this reading of the serpent imagery, there is also a positive symbolism which have already been mentioned earlier, which indicate healing, is also significant for Edna and her identity, specifically her symbolic re-birth which will be discussed more extensively in the following chapters.

Edna begins to see that she has total control of her body, and she is not afraid to explore it. The connection between Edna and the ocean builds up until the very end when it consumes her. "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" (19). This particular call of the water is striking. The consistent, persistent sounds the voice makes projects a sense of dissatisfaction. It is pleading to Edna, to let it out. Again, here we can see that Edna's individual struggles are mirrored by the ocean. It also reflects back on Robert's myth about the water spirit, trying to reach Edna. The way it is narrated inevitably leads the reader to think of the literal souls that wonder in the depths of the waters. It would be right to think that the voices that whisper seductively have something in common with Edna, and also something that is a part of her. In this case, we might think that the ocean is the symbolic representation of Edna's

unconscious. As she connects deeper with her inner contemplations, the repressed desires reach the surface, where she is able to unleash inner repressed sexuality. The way the voice of the sea is described presents a complexity due to the structure of the space described as an “abyss” or a “maze,” which also resembles the complex structure of the psyche. As the psyche could also be thought as a maze which is complex, it being divided into layers of consciousness. The previous quote that touches on life’s ‘disturbing and chaotic’ ways creates a contrast with the latter that projects a calmer feeling. Considering Edna’s unhappiness in life, this contrast shows that the watery zone has great significance for her inner emotional state and even foreshadows the freedom that awaits in the ocean. As for the voices in the depths of the water, they could also represent a collective femininity that is free in the ocean in contrast with the land which represents the male dominance that is oppressive. We see that the voices call to Edna, and lure her into the water. She joins the voices in the ocean, as a woman who has awakened her sexuality and gained her freedom to herself, her mind and her body. Even though she achieves freedom within her self, she feels that the ocean is the only place where she can fully experience her independence, without the presence of patriarchy. For this reason, the ocean may represent a pre-patriarchal realm, and a feminine unconscious.

Edna desires Robert and she is prepared to leave her old life behind to be with him. However, Robert is not ready to face the consequences of being involved with a married woman. So he does what he thinks is best for himself and Edna, by leaving town and distancing himself from her. Edna realizes “that Robert accepts tradition and that he does not truly understand her. He does not realize that she belongs to herself, and soon after she discovers this she loses hope for a fulfilling female role” (Gray, 20). When her close friend Adele goes into labor, Edna visits her for support. Adele tells Edna to think about her children, implying that she should think about the consequences of her actions of living so

freely, and how it might affect her children in the future. We can see that Adele's role is to guide Edna, trying to get her to think more about the moral implications of her desires. As discussed previously, Edna represents the id. She demands for her desires to be satisfied, but Adele advises her to be selfless, for her children's sake.

In the novel, it is evident that Edna struggles with her role as a wife and a mother, and this leads her to feel alienated and therefore, she distances herself from everything which aims to confine her to a specific role that is expected of her. Through the analysis of the symbolism of water, we are able to explore Edna's femininity and sexuality, in ways which show that they are represented as fluid. By exploring hierarchical oppositional thought of the fluid/solid binary, it is possible to undo the binary, thus it frees the fluid and the feminine from the patriarchal imaginary. The process of undoing the binaries bares great significance for the liberation of woman's writing, which will be explored in more detail in my third chapter. Edna achieves to free her sexuality, however, she feels that there is no place for her in the universe, and her only escape from the patriarchal laws and regulations would be to exit out of it all, to end her life that she could not fully live up to. In the end, she joins the depths of the ocean and drowns willingly, devoting her body to the boundless waters. Edna finally manages to escape the pressures of a patriarchal society.

CHAPTER 2

Bodies of Water; the Fluid and the Feminine

The second novel to be analysed and contrasted with *The Awakening* is *Bodies of Water* by V.H. Leslie, a British writer of gothic novels. *Bodies of Water* has a dual timeline narrative that focuses on the past and present lives of two different women. In the 21st century, we meet Kirsten, who has recently broken up from her boyfriend and moves to Wakewater Apartments, which face the Thames. These apartments are newly renovated and are attached to what was in the 19th century, a hydropathic treatment facility for women. After Kirsten moves to her flat, strange things start to occur that involve the presence of water. The fascination she has with water and the Thames drives her to find out more about the mysteries of the apartments' history. Her only neighbour is an academic, obsessed with the history of the building and provides a source of guidance for Kirsten in her search for answers.

The second strand of the plot is in the past, featuring Evelyn, a lesbian/bisexual woman living in the year 1871. She is a patient at Wakewater sanatorium receiving treatment for her 'hysteria'. In the Victorian era, though she is not shown as a prostitute, Evelyn is labelled as a "fallen woman" as she has close relations with the prostitutes in London. She used to help the fallen women, but her story reveals that she became intimate with Milly and fell in love. However, Milly committed suicide by drowning in the Thames, and her spirit haunted Evelyn to the point that she broke down and her family sent her to receive treatment at Wakewater. As the narrative is flitting between the past and present, the secrets of the Wakewater house unravel and in the end, Kirsten becomes part of the water by committing suicide, joining the women in the watery world.

In *Bodies of Water*, we meet Kirsten, a young woman who has just moved in to a newly renovated apartment, who is very enthusiastic about her new home. She is very interested in the view of the river. It is mentioned that she had been longing to be around water, as she had been living in the concrete parts of the city for far too long. But Kirsten's feelings about the water seem far deeper than just a sense of longing. The novel starts with the sentence, "She needed to be close to the water" which shows that her interest goes further beyond, to the point of necessity (Leslie chapter 1). This quote has been repeated twice in the first chapter which points out the significance of Katie's relationship to the river.

The connection she feels towards the water is projected as instinctive. Kirsten feels drawn to the water instinctually, but fears that her connection will disappear. Kirsten states, "What if the curious lure of the water, the almost physical need to be in its proximity had somehow evaporated?" (chapter 1). The water has a luring effect on Katie, as we see with Edna, and she doesn't want to lose that connection which feels familiar to her. It feels to her as if "the water is washing over her, taking hold of her body and rocking her gently in its calming depths" (chapter 1). There is a hint of a metaphorical reference to the watery cradle, which can also be identified as the womb. The womb has frequently been associated with senses such as calmness and has been represented as a soothing place, protected from the dangers of the outside world. It represents safety and nurture. We have come across this notion in *The Awakening*, which will be discussed within the theme of re-birth in chapter 3. Along side the positive references to re-birth, oceans, rivers and lakes can also represent sublimity. The depths that are dark and unknown cause a fear but at the same time a curiosity, which can be destructive along side being productive in its nature. Kirsten notices the curiosity and she feels an "uncanny pull" that draws her in to the water. This uncanny feeling could be read as the familiarity of once having occupied that watery cradle which the river projects. It's not only an unconscious longing for the state of "non-being" but it is also

the connection with womanhood, and the women that have returned to the watery cradle to escape the heavy burden of daily management with life. As we have discussed the watery depths as the space of the unconscious in the previous chapter, it could also be read as the pull for what is repressed in the unconscious mind. The way the water is inviting and luring the female protagonist in both novels is very similar. Both women, Edna and Katie find the water tempting, to the point that they feel the need to be close to it most frequently. The water is projected in similar qualities, both as nurturing but at the same time mysteriously uncanny. The water lets them escape from their focus on their current state and connects them to a different consciousness. In Edna's case it is the consciousness of a free being and for Katie, it is the consciousness of another woman.

In the second chapter, the narrative changes, and the reader is introduced to Evelyn, in the year 1871. Evelyn, too, has a connection with water but, unlike Katie, she avoids it. The opening paragraph in Evelyn's story, (the second protagonist in the novel from the past) immediately shows that she dislikes the water from the river. While passing by the river in a carriage, she avoids looking at it. It is later on that Evelyn's past is exposed to the reader. The water reminds Evelyn of her tragic past with her girlfriend. While working to help women get out of prostitution, Evelyn got involved in an intimate relationship with another woman whom she had helped. However, as it is revealed in the later chapters of the book, her girlfriend Milly had taken her own life in the river, which is the reason for her resistance against the water. The sight of the water feels like "torture" to Evelyn, and it is stated that she was sent to the waterfront by her father who is "guilty of insensitivity" (Leslie chapter 2). The place she has been sent to is Wakewater House, a water treatment facility for women diagnosed with hysteria. It happens to be the same building as Kirsten's home. There is a contrast of the two buildings, old and new, occupied in different centuries. However, some appear to have not changed. The river that flows beside Wakewater has always been there.

Even though the building has been renovated and appears to conceal its secrets and its terrible occurrences, the river has always encountered and witnessed the events. The many women who have perished in the river are reminders of the concealed terrors. The narrative reveals the tragic moments in the following chapters, but already in this first paragraph it is evident that the river is an embodiment of memory: specifically the memory of Evelyn and the women who have suffered in the treatment facility. However, memory can also be understood as a space for collection, for memories that are too distant to be extracted from the mind. In this sense, the space for memory which is the Thames, could be read as a collective space of the unconscious, which will be discussed further on in this chapter.

At the treatment facility, Evelyn is introduced to Dr. Porter who is responsible for her healing. He welcomes her with an opening speech “only water can truly awaken the body and mind” (Leslie chapter 2). Here we come across another dominant male figure who is trying to keep control over women. As we see in *The Awakening*, water is associated here also with the awakening of the body and mind, though the irony is that the treatment the water is supposed to offer, ironically awakens the parts that are supposed to keep un-awakened and unnoticed, which is female sexuality and resistance. Evelyn, portraying her resistance, questions her surroundings in the hydropathic treatment facility. She questions whether everyone is mad or delusional, which then Goddard (an employee at the facility) replies, “Of course we’re mad dear, we’re women.” This remark clearly shows the attitude towards women and their connections with madness, which is related to the issue of hysteria, discussed in the introduction. Women’s weakness, “emotional regression and instability was rooted in woman's very nature and it was assumed as well that woman's blood was "thinner" than man's” (Rosenberg 18). As stated before, the idea of women’s blood being thinner than men’s blood, is indeed a very ancient theory related to the theory of the four bodily humors. This mentality can still be traced within the social constructions of men and women in the

19th century. This leads us to the discussion of binary oppositions which presents a hierarchical order.

We have analysed the previous novel by discussing the binary way of thought within the text, in order to reveal the gendered meanings which contribute to the subordination of the feminine towards the patriarchal imaginary. The same method will be applied in the reading of *Bodies of Water*. The distinction between men and women in this novel again relies on the binary oppositions. Woman's blood is seen to be lacking the quality that prevents it from becoming weak and vulnerable whilst men's does not. Men are seen to be naturally born superior according to the construct of patriarchy. They deal with things that are solid and hard, things that can penetrate and remain stable. Unlike women who were seen as unpredictable, unreliable and unstable, representing a fluid like personality which contributed to the idea that women especially responded well to the water cure. Evelyn's story, reveals the connections between women and water which show in a different light, a light that illuminates the traumatizing effects of a man made analogy between women and water. It brings light to the issues regarding gender roles, imposed by patriarchal ideology that also gave shape to women's consciousness.

In chapter three, the narrative begins to reveal supernatural occurrences. The strange and mysterious atmosphere that is projected gives the reader a gothic feeling. Here, we can see an anonymous woman, making contact with the water, for the first time. Until the third chapter, in Kirsten's narrative, the water was just observed and looked at. While watching from her window, Kirsten sees a figure of a woman with long dark hair, standing in the waters of the Thames. The mysterious woman disappears into the water, and Kirsten is left puzzled about this sight. As the novel progresses, continually switching from Kirsten to Evelyn's narrative, the mystery of the dark-haired woman starts to be revealed to the reader. In chapter four, Evelyn's story continues with her taste in style and fashion and her

relationship with Milly. A “green taffeta” dress is mentioned and the image is repeatedly shown throughout the rest of the book. The green dress that Evelyn wore was Milly’s favourite and Milly is described portraying a mermaid like image while wearing the green dress. “It had given Milly an almost aquatic quality, with her hair hanging loose over her shoulders, the sea green skirt rustling as she walked, which she did as a mermaid might if suddenly finding herself standing upon human legs” (Leslie chapter 4). This statement is quite important as it is related to the ‘aquatic feminine’ context which is a highlighted theme in this thesis. The image of Milly being likened to a mermaid suggests that Milly is a woman that is unwanted in society. She is an outcast, a strange unfamiliar woman who doesn’t belong in the world of her time. Considering that Milly was a prostitute and she had a romantic relationship with Evelyn, then it makes sense for Milly’s feelings of not belonging because she does not fit into the mould of the 19th-century ideal woman. Mermaids are generally depicted as mysterious, alluring and seductive creatures. Milly, like a mermaid was an attractive woman, and her aquatic image suggests that her connection to the water is significant. In both of the narratives, there is a woman seen in the Thames river, with long black hair. It is unknown who the woman is, appearing in two different centuries, however it is hinted that Milly has some sort of connection, which foreshadows the upcoming events about Milly’s return.

Milly is particularly interested in female figures that inhabit the watery world. Milly asks Evelyn if there are any other women in the water to which Evelyn replies “of course, there are Rusalkas, and Nixies, Sirens, Undines”. (chapter 8). But Milly wants to hear something more reassuring to her, like knowing for sure that there are no men in the water. Evelyn assures her that “the water is a female domain”, because generally, men were the reasons why women ended up in the water. It was because of the patriarchal oppression the women endured. Evelyn’s relationship with Milly was intimate as they were romantic

partners. Therefore Evelyn didn't want to upset Milly by talking about the obvious fact that there were so many drowned women in the river, rather she preferred to lead the subject in the mythological direction. Instead of talking about the ugly truth, she decided to mask it. Perhaps all of the mythological women who inhabit the waters are a masked version of the truth. Perhaps the truth was too disturbing that putting it at a distance enabled others to get satisfaction out of looking at it without the feeling of being judged or criticized.

In the following chapters, Evelyn finds the green dress submerged in the bathtub. She pulls the dress out of the water which is described as slimy due to the water which seems to be contaminated by Milly. Evelyn hangs the dress up to dry, but it doesn't. She finds herself watching the wet dress forming puddles on the floor and at that moment, she recalls her memories with Milly. The question of what ever happened to Milly is finally answered with the recollection of her memory. Other than the fact that she jumped in to the river and drowned, no other information about her life was revealed. It turns out that Evelyn "saw when Milly's dead body was pulled out of the river; then there was no denying it: her stomach swollen, not just with the river water but because of the child she carried" (chapter 20). So it became clear that she committed suicide while she was pregnant, which directly relates her to the legend of the Rusalki, haunting the body of water from which they drowned, particularly stronger if pregnant.

As the plot progresses, it becomes clear that Milly is back to haunt the Thames, where she committed suicide. She particularly wishes to avoid men, for when she was alive she made sure that there weren't any male figures residing in the water, except for women. Considering Milly's life, her occupation as a prostitute, it is no doubt that she was abused, degraded and deprived of her worth and dignity. This market that exchanges women's bodies as commodities has been founded by men. The need and demand on account of men, enabled this market that allowed women to be involved in such circumstances which rendered them

powerless. Evelyn had attempted to rescue such women and one of them was Milly. The idea that women became powerful, through change, with beauty and monstrosity, captured Milly's attention. She wanted to redeem her identity as a powerful woman. She could achieve that in death, where death serves as a gate to the fluid underworld. In the fluid underworld of mythical women, sexuality is power, used only by women, unlike the reality on land, where it is used for men, and permitted by men.

In the following paragraphs, I will be performing a close reading of the architectural detail of the building, through psychoanalysis in order to extract the space of the unconscious, where repression is kept. From the beginning of Kirsten's story, we see her interest and curiosity in the Wakewater building. As she asks more questions about the strange happenings with the water, her curiosity grows. Wakewater is a big building with two wings, one which has been renovated and established as the Wakewater apartments. The other wing is untouched, which reveals more about its history as the hydropathic facility. The water leads Kirsten deeper into the 19th-century building, where she begins to understand a lot more about the significance of the place. The architecture of the Wakewater building is explored thoroughly and each discovery represents symbolic meanings that are connected with issues of oppression and repression.

In chapter 21, Kirsten walks up the staircase which leads her to a corridor brightened with daylight, "entering the building from overly large windows" where she discovers a balcony. The light is symbolic, because the light serves as both an illumination of the space and of the quest Kirsten has started. The glass room that she stands in, enables her to see the view of the river, yet it doesn't let her get too close to it. It serves as a boundary, almost like a cage, but the glass doesn't make you feel encaged, on the contrary, it makes you feel free without permitting the actual freedom. The women receiving treatment in that house in the 19th century were given the illusion of freedom, by receiving treatment and to be cured, in

hope of joining society. But there is little freedom in a society that treats women as the 'other'.

The house itself serves as a metaphorical psyche. Freud explains in his theory of the id, ego and superego, that the mind has a structure which consists of different parts, such as, the part that is conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious. This structure can be applied to Wakewater apartments. The renovated wing represents the part of the psyche which is conscious and aware. The irrational or supernatural aspects of Wakewater are dealt with in this part of the building. However, underneath the renovated walls, there is a history that remains hidden or repressed. The renovation serves as a facade, concealing and masking the past that is overwhelmingly traumatic. The other wing, which is untouched, holds all of the secrets to the past experiences. This part reflects the unconscious, where all memories and lived traumatic experiences are repressed. As Katie descends deeper and deeper to find the source of the water, the repressed material surfaces. We might call this the 'return of the repressed'. This is significant for women's connection to fluids, as it is a major part of the history of traumatized women who perished in the river. It could be said that the fluid, enables the repressed material to leak towards the conscious while also unravelling the truth within the story.

We see that the water keeps finding its way into the apartment. It is a part of something that is restless and unforgiving; therefore it returns to the surface. Following the water, the dark haired woman, Milly appears from the past. Milly is the embodiment of repressed women. She is the one who leaks the water (the repressed memory) into the conscious mind. As the story revolves around Milly and her relationship with Evelyn, it addresses all of the issues that women faced in the past, which are buried under the present. Evelyn's story reveals the cruel facts about the past and it affects Katie's life in the present time. As the repressed enters the conscious, Katie feels the urge to dig into more

information. She reaches the information in Manon's apartment where she discovers Manon's research about drowned women and their representations. Manon's room represents the pre-conscious part of the mind, where information can be found and retrieved within control. But there is something that neither Katie nor Manon can control which happens in the old wing of the house, where it has been used as the treatment facility for women back in the 19th century. This section stretches far out in to the depths of the water where the unconscious has preserved the darkest of events which seep to the surface.

“The Freudian goal of bringing repressed ideas to the conscious' attention is metaphorised as the sub-conscious and the conscious. These two initial metaphors aided by the subconscious' polyvalent metaphorization as 'depth', were further combined into the prolific metaphor of the psyche as water” (Aurora, 1). The depths of the ocean and sea are unknown and considered a mystery to the human mind. As a result, it is reasonable to use the water as a metaphor for the unconscious mind. What is first of all conscious, undergoes some sort of transformation in the mind and it ends up in the unconscious. The unconscious material can leak in into the conscious, and “in order to achieve this, it is necessary for the person to overcome certain resistances, the very same as those which at some earlier time placed the material in question under repression by rejecting it from consciousness.” (Freud, 116). As a metaphor of this theory, we can observe the water, that contains the repressed material, leaking out to the surface within the building in *Bodies of Water*.

When this theory is applied as a metaphor for the land and sea, the construction of man and woman and the social roles can be seen in a hierarchical structure. The land represents the part in which our behaviours are shaped and acted according to social normality, in order to ensure acceptance. The unaccepted parts reside in the water. Women undergo a similar transformation from the conscious to the unconscious, especially women who are categorized as 'fallen'. Fallen from honour and virtue, the women who are socially

rejected, end up in the water as can be seen in both novels. The water, seas and oceans, representing the unconscious, provides the space for these women who have been pushed under. They are the opposites of the ideal woman, and they pose a threat to the patriarchal system, so therefore they are excluded, oppressed, and they transform into dangerous serpents, mermaids, and sirens. These mythical projections of women represent the sexuality that is considered to be unfitting for the ideal woman and damaging to the structure of society.

The discussion of the unconscious is significant to the discussion of women and its connections with water, because the symbolism of water and its linkage to femininity originates from the patriarchal language interpretation, that man symbolizes anything that is stronger, more reliable compared to women. By looking at binary oppositions, we can see that women are represented through fluids according to characteristics that rely on biological elements. The representations of women in the watery element come across as dangerous, sexual and aggressive, which are the traits that men reject which leads to the repression of these traits but still it remains a spectacle for men and women to indulge in paintings and novels. These projections of women represent the very elements that are repressed and alienated within women and society.

In the following paragraphs, I will be discussing elements of transgression and resistance against the patriarchal order. Evelyn is a woman who has “already transgressed, in the eyes of society” and therefore she feels that she can take more risks and do the things that other ‘respectable’ women don’t have the courage to (22). She has fallen out with her only friend in Wakewater facility, a woman named Blanche. Evelyn has developed feelings towards Blanche, and their romantic intimacy extends beyond friendship for a night. But Evelyn sees her with Dr. Porter, the head physician. She notices the way Blanche blushes around him, and feelings of jealousy rise. She goes trespassing to Dr. Porter’s office which

she expects to be locked but “he was a man who trusted his patients, confident in his power over them and over women in general” (22).

The fact that he trusts women enough for them not to go sneaking about his premises tells us that he has established the dominant patriarch figure. This was the reality for some women who had a male figure above them, they did not disobey or object. But Evelyn feels that she has nothing to lose as she has lost her respectability in any case. It is possible to see the how women are perceived as the weaker or gentler, more vulnerable sex, as it is stated in the novel; “the gentler sex were too respectful too timid to go sneaking amongst his things”. (22). However, Evelyn has transgressed and she is no longer gentle, therefore she doesn't feel the necessity to obey any rules ordered by men, because she has awakened just like Edna. Evelyn is ready to own her authority in order to satisfy herself.

In the office, she discovers various tools used for gynaecological purposes. These tools are referred to as objects of torture for women, for they were used when women were examined by “police and doctors in the lock hospitals on women suspected of prostitution” to check if they have any venereal diseases. (22). It is stated that women object to this sort of examination but it is forced upon women regardless of their consent. Women's bodies are touched and observed like pieces of meat. They are not respected, they are degraded. While analysing this passage, I refer again to the woman/nature association discussed earlier in the introduction. Considering that men, through out time, have harmed nature, penetrated it with tools and machines, stolen from it its jewels and extracted its oil, it is apparent that men don't respect nature and so what is disrespected is projected on to women. This fixed idea contributes to the construction of a society that doesn't value women and treats it with disrespect. Men take things away from women as they do with nature, they take away women's own right to be themselves, their freedom to speak, or their right to own their bodies. Thus, we can see in the scene from Dr. Porter's office, the gynaecological tools are

devices that take away more from women. They are robbed both physically and emotionally. The objects Evelyn finds in Dr. Porter's office symbolize the masculine power that is used against women's bodies. These are tools that are used to dismember parts of the reproductive organs. As mentioned previously in the section about "hysteria" and "female sexuality," women's reproductive system was thought to be the cause of distress, instability and other symptoms that manifested in the diagnosis of hysteria. "Their nervous systems were seen as fragile and easily disrupted and some physicians assumed that women had naturally thin blood, causing instability in their neural system" (Donovan, 76). So as a solution, women's bodies were tampered with and adjustments were made for wombs that 'wandered' through the body.

Looking at the tools, Evelyn feels the need to take something from Dr. Porter in return and she "pulls a scalpel from its leather sheath" (Leslie, chapter 22). The scalpel being an extremely sharp surgical blade is put into her pockets like a weapon for battle. Out of all the other blunt instruments, she chooses the sharpest, most dangerous tool within the set. Evelyn is now equipped with a tool that can cause permanent damage, and after all of the taking and stealing from women, she will not just keep the tool as a token, but rather use it to take something more essential. This scene foreshadows a castration, hinting at a possible revenge, taking away, or stealing something, like the phallus. This idea of revenge symbolizes the power that is yet to be taken back from the patriarchal order which will be discussed in chapter three.

Evelyn catches Dr. Porter and Blanche making love in a metal pool down in the basement. She feels crushed seeing Dr. Porter taking advantage of the situation, calling their love making a "treatment". Evelyn had almost believed that Dr. Porter was truly dedicated to his practice in the Water Cure, but she discovers that "he was governed by baser instincts, like power and lust". (chapter 25). Evelyn feels obliged to solve this problem. She feels that

lust is the curse of all men and “the Rescue Society would have no fallen women to rescue if men could only control what was between their legs”. Men and their lustful impulses seem to be the root of the problem and Evelyn is ready to put an end to it. All this time, the cure for venereal disease was directed at women, not men. Using the scalpel to cut and slice women’s body parts, never thinking that the cure might be solved by castrating men.

Based on feelings of revenge, Evelyn makes her decision to “emasculate” Dr. Porter. Women who were taken advantage of, raped or prostituted, who were impregnated out of wedlock, were driven to commit suicide. Evelyn feels passionate about protecting women who are under the oppression of men. So Evelyn waits for Dr. Porter and Blanche to come to the basement to have sex again. She waits in the basement, and scratches the name *Melusine* into the metal surface. This scene, taking part in the basement, is significant for it symbolizes the unconscious, the deepest part of the mind where the most basic of instincts are kept. Evelyn is now portrayed as a monster-like creature in hiding, waiting to catch her prey. Slowly, her refined figure is fading and is becoming something destructive, like Milly, who is depicted as the reappearing dead woman with the wet green dress. There is a sense of doubling, and the images of the two women, Evelyn and Milly, overlap, especially as Evelyn scrapes Milly’s name on the metal surface with the scalpel, which gives the uncanny feeling that represents the return of the repressed. It is evident that something potentially dangerous unsettling and unfamiliar is emerging within Evelyn. She is transforming into a man’s nightmare, his utter fear of a woman, threatening his masculinity, by castrating him. It is the repressed fierce femininity, returning to the surface, to claim authorship, by breaking the order of patriarchy, and by cutting the roots of the source, which in this case is the phallus, the male organ.

It is important to consider that this metamorphosis is happening inside the basement that holds the water tank, secretly kept hidden by Dr. Porter. This transgression begins close

to the water, which then evolves inside the water in the tank. There is an image in the mosaic, “Neptune, holding his trident high, surrounded by a throng of beautiful half drowned creatures” (chapter 26). This image can be read as a reflection of Dr. Porter’s fantasy, to be sexually served by women, gaining power, by manipulating women who are rejected and alienated from society (which take the form of mermaids).

Through patterns of repression, women have become unaware of their bodies, utterly alienated from their own libidinal desires. As Cixous states in “The Laugh of Medusa”, “woman will return to the body which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display- the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion” (880). Thus, the ‘returning to the body’ as stated by Cixous, describes that very moment which the woman transforms into that strange creature, men’s ‘nasty companion’, paradoxically feared and wanted at the same time by men, but remained off limits, and even unknown for women themselves.

Dr. Porter’s basement is the foundation of the unconscious, possessing the primitive sexual fantasies and his narcissistic impulses. The waters are contaminated with female oppression and male domination, and they spread all through the wake water building, circulating through the interior, carrying it to the surface. The water which was originally meant to ‘cure’ women in the Wakewater facility is now contaminated with the very things that condemned women; Sexuality, adultery, female violence and madness, all of which takes place in the water tank that feeds the building and touches women’s bodies.

Evelyn plans her moves carefully, and waits until Blanche and Dr. Porter finish their love-making. Once they become “too immersed in one another to notice anything else” she would dip into the water as “Melusine would have done with her tail”. Again, we can see the reference to Melusine during a mischievous scene and it is clear that Melusine represents the female rebel. The myth of Melusine, (as explained in the earlier in the introduction of this

thesis), is connected to elements of deceit and revenge. She was angry towards her father for upsetting her mother and unlike her siblings, Melusine was the only one who went out to seek revenge for the sake of her mother which proves just how strong and daring she is.

Right before Evelyn approaches the water, it is stated that “she would hurt them the way they had hurt her” (chapter 26). Directly, the “her” refers to Evelyn, and the way Dr. Porter and Blanche deceived her, but also, it refers to Milly and Melusine, both women who have been deceived by men and who have suffered. The line that separates Melusine and Evelyn are blurred again in this moment, causing a doubled image, as both figures are in search of revenge and both go through metamorphosis. Since Evelyn imagines herself as a serpent-like creature, she feels more in control as soon as she enters the water, “the water was her element now”. Evelyn, like a serpent in water hunting its prey, moves “through the water with speed and slices him across the stomach” causing severe internal damage, turning the water bloody red. Evelyn is an example of the female representation of a fluid being which is disappropriated of herself and depersonalized “because she, exasperating, immoderate and contradictory, destroys laws, the ‘natural’ order” (Cixous, 22). This monstrous being, this uncanny stranger, remains in the ‘unconscious,’ which the depths of the ocean, and the darkest parts of lake and rivers symbolizes. When Evelyn enters the water tank with the intention of castrating Dr. Porter, she portrays that dangerous destructive creature. The repressed feminine, bursting out from inside the water, resurfacing from the depths of her being.

It is not clear whether or not Evelyn actually castrates Dr. Porter, but the fact that the cut is in the abdominal area reflects back on the image of women, cut open from their stomachs, floating as empty vessels down the river. The Doctor manages to climb out and head to his escape, abandoning Blanche, “her rescuer, her dashing doctor”, which the narrator mocks in sarcasm and a hint of jealousy, pointing out his lack of decency. Evelyn

heads towards Blanche, ignoring her pleading, she holds “her by the throat, holding her in the same way that Milly had done, her fingertips finding the bruises that were already there” (Chapter 26).

The fact that her fingertips fit in the exact places that Milly had marked on Blanche’s neck, produces the doppelganger effect, pointing out the possibility that Milly, being a part of Evelyn, has symbolically died within her, killed by the patriarchal society, but seeks revenge, making an assertive return from the repressed. Evelyn pushes Blanche deep into the water as it “was the only path to redemption”, sarcastically criticizing the belief in water purifying the sins committed. The narrator makes a reference to the women who committed suicide by jumping into the river, thinking that it would wash away their sins, which presents an irony, as they are jumping into a river that is dirty, and corrupted.

The irony in the novel highlights the corruption within society, that the belief of some sort of catharsis or cleansing is possible by the water in the river “despite the murk and filth, it could wash away their sins” (chapter 26). But whose sins are meant to wash away? It is society that created the murk and filth in the river, which symbolizes the corrupting effects of patriarchy that treats women as the opposite othered object. The society projects its corruption on to fallen women. Therefore, a woman committing suicide in the water, then, serves as a scapegoat for washing away society’s sins. But as the novel indicates that there is no possibility of purification, for the water its self is corrupt.

As Evelyn attempts to drown Blanche in the water tank, Milly appears and offers her hand, and they both resurface out of the water. Milly leads Blanche towards the main part of the house where the large windows overlook the grand river. The narrator describes the river, depicting a picturesque moment that is “Primordial and ever lasting, inherently female” (chapter 26). As they step onto the balcony, Evelyn knows that she is at a point of no return.

“Treatments would begin all over again, different treatments this time, for Evelyn was sicker than *she* realized”. It is implied that Evelyn does have a sickness, beyond realization which may indicate a certain mental illness of some sort. Perhaps Milly doesn’t exist at all, and Milly may be just a part of Evelyn that personifies her repressed desires and resurfaces to her conscious reality.

The destructive effects of repression in women is a reoccurring theme throughout the novel. As we see in the Wakewater apartments, on many occasions, Katie encounters the water coming from the lake which finds its way inside, flooding the house. The presence of the dead water women also project the destructive quality which all evidently symbolize the return of the repressed. “When the “repressed” of their culture and their society returns, it’s an explosive, utterly destructive, staggering return. (Cixous, 186). The river that is inhabited by dead women who are the victims of a toxic patriarchal society, extends throughout the region, and circulates within the buildings interior which symbolizes the culture that is infected with patriarchy. So, by looking at this analysis, it can be said that water, in particular, *Bodies of Water*, acts as an instrument, used by women, especially women who have transgressed in the eyes of society. This instrument serves as a trigger, or like a haunting awakening for other women. Initially, the association of water and women can be seen as the instrument of man, a word contrasting with solidity which categorized women as liquid, unstable creatures, making it a valid opportunity to gain control of women. But it can be seen how fluid characteristics of the feminine has been used as a source of power by women through language and writing, which will be discussed in chapter three.

CHAPTER 3

Death, Liberation and Women's Writing in; *The Awakening* and *Bodies of Water*

Death is one of the major themes which is explored in the novels. Thus, I have devoted a chapter upon to this subject. The important detail about death in these works is that it takes place in the water. I aim to provide a historical perspective on suicide by drowning as I believe it will help draw the crucial connections between the fluid and the feminine. As I have mentioned earlier, the concept of the fluid and the feminine is linked to the subordination of women by patriarchy, which fears to lose control of women. According to this perspective, the concept of a “feminine death” and how patriarchal ideology has influenced a gendered death will be discussed. In the following paragraphs, I shall explore the references to water and death and their connections to ideas of “purity” and “aesthetics”, which are controlled by men. The image of a feminine watery death can be seen in art, often painted by the male, which will be a topic of discussion as well. I would like to highlight the fact that these concepts are explored in relation to gender issues and binary oppositions which have contributed to this construction there by shaping art and literature and even the way in which death is pursued among women and men.

I will provide a reading of women's suicides and historical information about women's watery deaths, which will show meaningful connections between water, women and death/suicide. I will include a reading of the representations of female deaths by the male perspective, which will open up discussions of patriarchy and its fear of the feminine. The analysis of patriarchal fears of femininity helps to comprehend the aspects of female sexuality represented as a threat to masculinity, hence the reason it is censored. I will attempt to provide a reading of death, which offers a possible liberation for the characters in both

novels. To understand how death could mean a possibility of escape, we will look at the characters roles and how patriarchy limited them or prevented them from reaching a sense of freedom within the self. I will also provide a psychoanalytic reading of Edna's dream-like existence, and the meanings it entails. I aim to discuss the theme of re-birth and metamorphoses within the scenes of death, and its relation to the struggle with patriarchy and its connection to the sexual awakening of Edna.

Following the analysis of death in *The Awakening*, and the themes mentioned above, I will move on with an analysis of death in the novel, *Bodies of Water*. In relation to female sexuality, I will discuss the fluid aspects of the novel. We will see how water brings the women in the novel closer together, forming, what I call, an underwater womanhood. With this idea of unity, I will analyse the notions of female authority and woman's writing, and how it might be connected to ideas of freedom. The image of dominant, assertive dead women from the water leads to ideas of power, thereby possibly presenting death as a victory. In order to explain this idea, I will discuss the presence of authority in female suicides and how death by suicide could be seen as a kind of writing the body, or writing with the body, emphasizing a kind of preservation through destruction. The idea of authority is linked to the discussion of women's writing and the theory of *écriture féminine*, where I will be analyzing the stylistic attributes of the novels, in order to show how both of the novels fit in with the theory of *écriture féminine*. Within the style and content of the novels, I will discuss how the fluid aspects represent the *écriture féminine* and the ways in which the fluid can be considered as an element of the *écriture féminine*.

I would like to start this discussion by first analysing the watery deaths of the 16th century. Many women were murdered, drowned in lakes, rivers and seas. Women who were thought to possess supernatural powers were condemned to witch hunting trials. If found guilty, they would be dunked into the river tied to a seat, unable to free themselves. Anne

Barstow's study *Witchcraft as Women's History*, gives a detailed description of the prosecutions of the 16th and 17th century. She states that generally, historians have not interpreted the witch trials as a matter of gender, but Barstow argues the opposite. Over 80 percent of the victims were women, according to Barstow's research. "The sudden rise in prosecutions for witchcraft that began in Europe c. 1560 was related in part to attempts to take away women's control of their sexual and reproductive lives" quotes Barstow, highlighting the patriarchal dominance and men's fear of losing control over female sexuality.

Women who were deemed to be witches were believed to possess qualities such as being "liars, unfaithful, immoderate, sexually insatiable, and downright evil" (11). "The witch-hunters of the sixteenth century had models of castrating, death-dealing female type" which Barstow points out that women were oppressed and silenced for reasons that mostly derive from issues related to "female sexuality" which threatened the patriarchal ideology of the phallic centred man and his masculine power (Barstow, 11). After being accused of witchcraft, most women went through a water trial, where they were thrown into the cold water, tied by the hands and feet. If they sank, they were considered innocent. However, paradoxically, those who swam were seen as witches. It is important to point out men's fear of female sexuality, and how women were alienated and punished because of it. Looking back on these monstrous events, we can see how female sexuality has been pushed down in to the waters and also subconsciously leading women to push their own in to their unconscious. In the novels, this is explored symbolically through bodies of water which represent the unconscious.

Russel Zguta's research about this subject explains the origin of such a barbaric ordeal, stating that "the basis for the ordeal by water was the widely held belief that water, the pure and cleansing element, the instrument of baptism, would refuse to receive those

tainted with crime” (221). From this, it can be understood that water symbolizes purity. Purity is a characteristic which is associated with women, and is expected from women, often depicted as innocent angelic figures. The lack of purity in women is not tolerated compared to men, who have a greater flexibility in overstepping the boundaries that cross over to corruption. This is because men were privileged over women and had more power and control over women. It is ironic that actually, men are the ones who are acting as evil, by murdering women who are unable to fight for themselves. Men think that “nature” shares the same ideology of purity and ethics with themselves, as they think that the water will not accept any woman who is impure, based on the “patriarchal ideology”.

In the following paragraphs, we will be examining death and how it might be gendered. Within this topic, I aim to make clear the connections between “death” and “water” and the “feminine”, and how this has gradually been formed by a masculine perspective, in terms of aesthetics and stereotypical character traits (passive, elegant, submissive). Again we will see references to purity and water, which are important to the discussion of the associations of the fluid and the feminine. Meessen’s research into “Water and Femininity” provides a clear understanding of the associations of water and femininity, specifically within the theme of death.

Representing the feminine act of submission, death by drowning was a popular subject of paintings in the 19th century. This connection can be seen to have evolved from “patriarchal anxieties to enact complete control over women’s bodies”. (Meessen, 35) It is evident that men controlled the depictions of women in art as painters were mostly men. Therefore, the image painted was completely dependant on a male perspective. So it can be said that the fascination of dead women in the water derives from a male induced fantasy, one which controls and dominates the female image. In comparison with the death of the

protagonists in both novels discussed in this thesis, we will be able to distinguish whether death in the novels, is an act of assertive, aggressive claim to the self or passive surrender.

I have introduced the discussion of gendered language, and how objects have feminine and masculine representations in terms of symbols and metaphorical meaning within the binary oppositional system. The following arguments show that death is another subject that has been gendered, or rather the ways of dying have been defined as masculine and feminine. Meessen refers to Thompson Jopling's 'Statistics of Suicides' "which discusses the suicides that occurred in London between 1846 and 1850" (Meessen 26). Statistics show that "violent methods such as stabbing, throat cutting, and shooting were much more frequent among male suicides. Women on the other hand, seemed to prefer less aggressive methods." (Meessen, 35). Jopling states that, men committed more violent and bloody suicides compared to women. Meessen sees the reason for this as the "influence of stereotypes and ideology, pressuring suicidal men to end their lives in what are considered to be honourable, 'heroic' or 'manly' ways". (35). Violent crimes among women were considered to be unnatural and unsuitable, because it tore apart the ideal, gentle image of the Victorian woman. As women were seen to be passive and men active, women were expected to act in a passive way, and drowning, hanging and poisoning reflected this passivity which were gendered as feminine. Therefore "women were believed to naturally feel abhorrent towards blood and violence, and consequently, to refrain from brutal methods of suicide". (36).

Meessen points out that iconography focused on the image of the woman 'drowning' rather than hanging or being poisoned. Based on this research, it is clear that women have chosen death by drowning far more opposed to men. We can see that women's suicide by drowning has been a topic of influence for various artists. The image of the dead women in the water became idealized from the male perspective. The fascination with the female body

in the water was based on the perspective of aesthetics. Drowning and hanging prevented the ruining of the physical appearance of the female body, as there would be no blood or deformation of the body. Therefore, it was considered aesthetic to the male gaze. Even in death, women prevailed to the patriarchal ideologies of the Victorian era. The Victorian imagination grew fond of the image of the drowned female body, so many paintings were based on this fascination.

The patterns of female suicide by drowning are connected, which shows the representations of 'fallen women'. From the 19th century, we can see some depictions of the "drowned woman", portrayed as "an oversimplified surrendering to the waves, simply waded into the water, never to return" (Meessen, 36). Shakespeare's Ophelia, (painted by John Everett Millais in late 18th century) is an example of a watery feminine death. In this painting, we see Ophelia "who famously drowned, and who could be seen to function as a model for the Victorian fallen (mad) woman." (Meessen, 27). Ophelia, who is known as a fallen woman figure who 'surrenders' herself to the flowing waters of the river, represents 19th-century society's view of the feminine death as an aesthetically pleasing, subtle way of passing. Drowning is symbolically related to ideas of catharsis and cleansing of the body and soul. Fallen women who succumbed to their watery deaths, "symbolically washed off her sins" (Meessen, 35) and therefore their acts "signifying purification, which offer salvation and redemption" (Meessen, 35). This final act preserves the 'pure' image of the woman as the 'ideal Victorian woman' a passive, controlled figure, which contributes to the patriarchal ideology. Again we can see the idea of purification, which carries similarity to the discussion of the "witch hunt trials". I find it interesting that not many men who act on their sexual impulses take the plunge into the water in order to cleanse. It seems as though it is mostly women who feel the need to escape in a way which provides redemption. Though it may be said that the possibility of redemption is provided only for society, rather than the

dying woman. I stress the subject of sexuality here, because it is specifically female sexuality which is prohibited. Women drown their desires, as they do their bodies. The fantasy of watery female deaths can also be observed in novels and poetry. Thomas Hood's poem "The Bridge of Sighs", is an example of this, which is about a woman committing suicide. The poem refers to London's Waterloo Bridge, which was notorious as a preferred place to commit suicide during the Victorian period. Meessen indicates that Hood's poem idealizes female suicide and also eroticizes the corpse of the drowned woman. The way in which the female body is portrayed in the water, for example, a dead woman's floating loose hair, was "often interpreted in Victorian thought as an indication of sexual looseness" (47). In comparison to paintings that represent a more passive image, Meessen discusses some other paintings that represent woman's "self-assertion in taking their own lives" that were painted during the Victorian times. The iconographies consist of women jumping to their deaths from bridges or windows, in mid-air. In opposition to the former passive depictions, the later express "self-determination, energy and agency" (38). This suggests that these paintings have less negative interpretations, as they project feelings of courageousness and willingness and therefore they can be read as 'active' daring women. Despite the fact that there were self-assertive depictions of female suicides, the passive, vulnerable interpretations prevailed through the nineteenth century.

By exploring the depictions of the dead female body, symbolically we can understand the power struggle and the hierarchic differences between the feminine and the masculine subjects. In her book *Over Her Dead Body*, Elizabeth Bronfen analyses the representations of female deaths in the Victorian era, stressing that the 'survivor perspective' is masculine and the corpse is feminine. The lifeless female image is narrated by the "male survivor" which Bronfen explains as the "survivor complex". By looking at the dead body of a woman, the spectator experiences death but not it's own, and this brings some sort of satisfaction

knowing that he is not dead. (65). She states “such gender designations occur in the image repertoire of a culture, not in biological reality, depending on the values attributed to the positions of the feminine (vulnerability, inferiority) and of the masculine (domination, superiority)” (65). I would like to add to Bronfen’s reading of the masculine “survival complex” and state that; not only does the masculine spectator get satisfaction from surviving death but also there is satisfaction from knowing that the feminine sexuality has died with it. Thus, there is no more threat towards the patriarchal power which survives. The fear of “feminine sexuality” explains “The necessity of killing off the fallen heroine in this tradition has been related to patriarchal anxieties about female (sexual) deviance, which has often been read to pose a threat to male order and the control of women” (82). The notion of control, and the difficulty in controlling women projects the form of a liquid matter that is slippery and uncontrollable, wild like the waves of oceans, nutritious and essential for life, but also dangerous and life threatening. This destructive image of femininity is projected through monster-like female aquatic creatures which have been analysed in the novels. Femininity and its representations are all based on cultural constructions of society. The association of women and water is also a part of that analogy where the concepts like fluidity and purity are often represented through the image of the feminine. Looking at cultural myths of femininity, it can be seen that “traditionally concepts such as womb, tomb, home are linked to the analogy between the earth and mother”. (Bronfen, 65) As discussed earlier in this thesis, this association reveals how the feminine is subordinated by the masculine.

Representations of the feminine carry the signature of the masculine figure, which symbolises patriarchal power. The issue of authorship and power is a central theme analyzed in this thesis, and I aim to discuss this in relevance to the deaths of the protagonists from the novels and provide a perspective which justifies their deaths, and their attempts to be the authors of their own bodies. Meessen addresses the beautification of the female corpse as a

central issue in her analysis of “*The Bridge of Sighs*” from a feminist point of view. In Hood’s poem, the “poetic speaker tells the reader to re-arrange the woman’s limbs before they reach the state of rigor mortis” in order to preserve beauty and aesthetic. The body is “revised by a male hand and shows a final act of control through which the poetic male asserts his superiority”. (48) Considering that throughout the nineteenth century, works of art, novels and poetry were produced by men, women’s depictions were projected according to men’s aesthetic point of view. Even when a woman commits suicide by her own will or self assertiveness, she is appropriated according to the male gaze, and therefore she is stripped off of her own authorship. Her death is in the hands of a man and “no longer carries her own signature” (Meessen 48). Death through suicide is discussed in this thesis through its relevance with authority and assertiveness in action. In both of the novels, we see the protagonists take their own lives in order to free themselves from the patriarchal imaginary. I read this as an example of an act whereby women, as the author of their lives, claim ownership of their own bodies which is a part of the idea of “feminine writing” (*écriture féminine*).

It is significant that the major characters from both novels commit suicide. At the end of *Bodies of Water*, both Evelyn and Kirsten offer their bodies to the water, resisting the pressures of a patriarchal society. Their willingness to drown opposing the struggle and chaos created by patriarchy, suggests an ending which is full of triumph. Evelyn escapes the doctor who symbolizes control and oppression and joins her lover Milly in the watery world. Kirsten joins a large group of women in the water, contributing to the feminine power that resides under the surface of the river. Edna embraces her newly discovered identity in the welcoming waters of the ocean which is a symbolic re-birth, and preserves that newly-born self in her death. These characters all have common struggles and concerns related to patriarchal control. In order to understand the resistance and a movement towards freedom, I

will extend the reading of the protagonist's personal experiences about resisting patriarchal pressures and their relationships with water, which foreshadows the death of the characters.

At the beginning of the novel, Edna isn't so fond of the ocean. However, she spends a lot of time close to the water. Despite her fear of water in the beginning, she overcomes that fear and anxiety, and towards the end of the novel, she is very comfortable, as if she is in her own element. Edna finds her peace in and around the water and keeps coming back to the water to relieve her soul from long lasting constraint. She wants to break free of the masculine dominance that limits her and contains her. The moment when she swims in the ocean by her self, she feels a sense of relief.

But that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who all of a sudden realises 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 (40).

Until she swims alone that night, she realises that she previously had no faith in her self, and she always depended on others, unaware of her identity. She realises that she only needs herself, which she never knew was there. Through her own efforts, she comes to the surface, from underneath the water. It is significant that Edna shouts for joy at this moment. She has finally been released. This scene mirrors the birth of a baby. The way babies struggle, sweeping and stroking through the birth canal, with their effort, shouting after they exit the womb, is identical to the description in the novel. She is in the ocean which symbolises the womb. Edna, discovers her self, who is now daring and reckless, a newly born woman. The repressed part of her identity is finally free from the depths of her unconscious.

“She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before.” (40). Here we get a touch of Edna’s reality. The fact that she wants to explore the parts of her self, her sexuality and her desires, like no woman has ever done before, reminds us that in order to fully detach herself from the patriarchal imaginary, she needs a lot of strength, which the narrator implies she does not have. She swims further and further, the vision of death scares her and weakens her senses. She swims back to the shore, to her husband, who embodies the patriarchal dominance. We see Léonce only on land, but never in the water, which suggests that he represents the solidness of patriarchy. He is a part of the land that stands higher than the sea, overlooking and watching the water. When Edna expresses her fear of drowning, he tells her “You were not so very far, my dear; I was watching you” which is a performance of power over her. He implies that she is safe so long as he keeps his eyes on her. She is too weak to swim far out, for if the gaze of the husband is lost, she is prone to death. ‘Death’ in this passage can be read in two different meanings. The first is the obvious literal meaning, the death by drowning whilst the other is the underlying metaphorical meaning, which is the death of her own identity as it has been shaped by the masculine patriarchal society. The line between land and sea can be seen as a representation of a boundary that should not be crossed. I would like to analyse this threshold from a psychoanalytic point of view. By swimming far out, she is able to explore the hidden desires (in her unconscious). The exploration of these desires give life to a new sense of being but on the other hand, it kills the old self (governed by the ego), which gives definition to the known identity. Edna’s ego is shaped by the social and cultural norms of the Victorian age, which is influenced by patriarchal ideologies. The clash between the Ego and id is represented through Edna (sea) and her husband (land), which brings us to another reading of death in this passage. For Edna to swim far out would mean that she is disobeying her husband. This form of resistance causes damage to the

patriarchal order, which would suggest that the patriarchal imaginary fears the death of female obedience. Edna unconsciously fears the death of her current identity, the one which reflects an obedient woman. This leads her to swim back to shore. If she could somehow kill her socially constructed identity, that would leave her own construction, which also could be explained as a part of her self which she newly discovers.

Edna's journey of self recognition develops along with her illegitimate relationships. Ultimately, Edna's happiness lies in her desire for Robert, the man whom she genuinely loves and desires. After a long period of distance, Edna is devastated to find out that Robert is unwilling to face the challenges of being with a married woman with children and also, it seems that he doesn't want to put Edna in a situation that would be so hard to endure because it would require her to "trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others" as she states while speaking her mind to doctor Mandelst who offers his help at her door. (165). It is in that moment that she speaks of her sincere thoughts about her life, "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" (165). This quote offers a clear description of what the journey of *The Awakening* is all about, all that it entails and the moral implications of the novel. She has awakened from a dream-like existence, a whole life unaware of the different possibilities of happiness that life offers, through fulfilling desires and overcoming challenges, falling in love and pursuing things that expose your soul to various emotions, awakening sensuality and receiving pleasure. In the midst of her awakening, she endures suffering for not being able to grasp what she finds possible, her happiness, in front of her, but out of reach. Edna is limited by the prejudice of society.

To evaluate the "dream-like" life of Edna in more psychoanalytic terms, we need to explore the theory of dreams. According to Freud, dreams are like wishes, some of which are

unacceptable in the conscious mind. Those wishes and desires which are suppressed by the conscious mind can resurface in dreams. Edna is constantly under the watchful eye of society which judges her and tries to influence her. The society can be read as the mechanism that monitors her every movement and suppresses her desires and thoughts, which are pushed down to the unconscious. Most of Edna's life consists of wishes that are unfulfilled and suppressed, re-emphasising her dreamy existence. Waking up, for Edna, is realising that she is not living the life she wishes, but living the life that the patriarchal society approves of.

She can not overstep the boundaries of society without being judged by the law of the patriarchal system, so she is like an imprisoned bird in a cage, as the bird imagery in the novel symbolises. She is expected to sacrifice herself for her children, to remain in her undesirable marriage and to stop fulfilling her wishes. She can not fulfil her sexual or sensual desires because she is tied to her domestic responsibilities, to housekeep and bring up her children. Fulfilling her own happiness would require for her to trample on her children's lives, to upset and damage them. She decides not to sacrifice herself, but she also refuses to live in a dream-like state. Instead of unwillingly agreeing to confirm to society's expectations and living without happiness, she decides to enter a permanent state of non-existence. With this thought, she walks down to the beach for the last time. She thinks of a statement she had made earlier, "she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children" (76). The unessential is her life, her living breathing body, which she would give up. She would give up anything for her children except her 'self,' which holds her essence, her identity that is preserved in her unconscious. Edna spends her last moments of life in the water. "The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamouring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in the abysses of solitude" (170). This particular quote is placed at the beginning of the novel as well as the end which

suggests that her awakening of her repressed desires begins with the sea's call and her journey ends with her accepting the invitation to the "abysses of solitude".

The scene of Edna's death is described with a melancholic atmosphere, as it is stated that there are no other living things that can be seen. The bird imagery appears again, "with a broken wing, disabled down to the water", symbolizing Edna's disability and inability to use her wings to reach freedom, caused by the limitations of a patriarchal society. Edna stands in front of the sea, refusing to put on her bathing suit, and for the first time "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" (170). By rejecting her swimsuit, she is rejecting all human constructed customs of society, and instead she is unlimited, freely projecting the unconscious through her naked body. She has taken off the layers and she is ready to escape the last, which is her flesh and bone. Her body is the unessential for Edna. She is willing to sacrifice her body and existence in the material world, in order to preserve the essential, which is kept in her unconscious, her repressed 'self'. Some people critique Edna's death as a defeat, similar to the bird symbolism, however, I see it differently. Escaping the body, is achieving freedom for Edna. Perhaps she will not exist in the world she felt she didn't belong, but her resistance lives, and her rebellion is permanent, which is a motivation for other women who struggle with the patriarchal imaginary. This means that she would have her way, without submitting to patriarchal demands. If she had continued to live, by suppressing her desires, then I would consider this as a defeat. But never the less, the novel itself would always be a part of a feminist movement, because it gives voice to a woman, who is alienated, oppressed and pressured by the patriarchal imaginary, and rather than surrendering her mind and identity, she makes the choice of surrendering her body. In this sense, it is a moment of victory for Edna.

In connection to freedom, within the theme of death, we can also see a theme of rebirth in *The Awakening*, which bears great significance for the connection between water and femininity. The more time Edna spends in the ocean, the more she awakens to her unconscious desires. She develops her swimming skills and gradually grows confident until she can no longer relate to her previous identity. At the end of the novel, Edna stands by the shore, portraying the image of a baby, naked and unshaped by society. She enters the ocean which metaphorically symbolizes nature's womb. Edna discovers something primitive in herself, through the ocean, something that pre-existed within her but she wasn't aware of it. The womb symbolizes the pre-existing state, where one is unexposed to the outside world, untouched and unshaped by society. In the womb, you are safe and preserved by the nurturing, guarding structure of the womb. Edna feels like "some new born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (170). Edna's encounter with the Earth's womb symbolises an uncanny moment of returning to the womb/ Mother. This suggests that there is a longing for a world that is pre-Oedipal which means that the world remains at a point when it depends only on the mother, without the influence of the father. Therefore the Oedipus complex does not form. This means that the symbolic power of the father does not exist, therefore the world remains pre-patriarchal. Within this uncanny womb, Edna transforms and she identifies as a 'creature'. This reference of a creature is connected to the idea of a metamorphosis discussed earlier in this thesis, which could also be understood as a re-birth. Unlike the destructive serpent symbolism, this particular image could be read as a serpent with healing potential. The effect of the serpent is healing for Edna, and in a way, she sheds her skin like a snake and awakens her body to a different identity which relieves her from being constrained.

The discussion of transformation can also be explored through Edna's discovery of her sexuality, and her awakened desires, which reveal how much she has become alienated

from her desires, due to years of constraint.. Once she is aware, she gets angry at herself. “It is nothing, why didn’t I discover before that it was nothing. Think of the time I have lost splashing about like a baby” (40). The time wasted does not only refer to the time wasted in the water but also the time she wasted in her existence in the world. She could have lived her years full of passion and joy, free to explore and conquer her dreams and desires but instead she devoted herself to her husband and children and remained restricted within the boundaries created by the patriarchal society. She discovers her potential and steps in a different direction to overcome the fear of a new self that she had unconsciously blocked. The “baby” reference in the quote above suggests that she is reborn in the water like a baby in the womb. However, she finds that her new ‘self’ is not welcome in the world. In psychoanalytic terms, the ‘self’ or a personality that exists in a newly born baby, consists of only the ‘id’. As Freud states, the ‘id’ is governed by instinctual drives also known as “the pleasure principle” which is in the unconscious. In this sense, we can see how Edna’s desires within her unconscious might be echoing the primitive needs of the id. Therefore it is possible to connect Edna’s existential circumstance to the idea of the “newly born baby”, which demands satisfaction. Even though Edna might have undergone a state of renewal, this new sense of self which is buried in the unconscious is socially rejected in the patriarchal society which Edna lives in, thus she finds herself on a lonely path of solitude. It is significant that Edna should become a newly born personality in the ocean, which consists of elements that would (in a patriarchal society) undergo repression. As the ocean symbolises both Edna’s unconscious and, on a larger scale, a feminine unconscious, it makes sense that Edna transforms, as her prior known ‘self’ dies. The idea of a transformation or a re-birth softens the sense of a cold, permanent ending that death would normally project. The fluidity of the novel makes it possible to interpret the novel’s ending. It is open-ended for discussion and debate on whether Edna does set her ‘self’ free and the end. Without the

stylistic qualities of the novel, we would not be able to divert, or interpret the ending of the novel, and because of those flexible interpretations, the style of the novel is very different from a masculine style of writing, which I will discuss further along in this chapter.

I will now analyse 'death' in *Bodies of Water*, and discuss the themes, stylistic qualities and discussions that are parallel with *The Awakening*. I would like to start by going back to the image of the scalpel first seen in Dr. Porter's office, which reflects other connecting imagery in Kirsten's story. There is a dream in which Kirsten is floating on a little boat on the river "that is littered with corpses. Hollow, floating women, bereft of what made them biologically female." (chapter 23). There is a description of one of the dead women's bodies: "an incision began just under her breasts and the skin had been pulled back to reveal a hollow space inside". It is pointed out that the dead women have no wombs and they have been taken away. As discussed above, the scalpel would have been an instrument used to create such an incision, and so the projection of stolen things and emptiness continues to project a stolen, manipulated female sexuality. The image of the river, embedded with barren female bodies is significant, because it is a projection of the reality of the 19th century where frequently, dead female bodies would be found floating in the Thames. This novel is drawing the readers' attention to some gruesome imagery because it has a historical reference to the women who committed suicide in the Thames river. Women's relationship with the water extends beyond the living. It extends towards death, and particularly death that is inflicted towards the self, death by suicide among women. This scene brings the attention to a central issue of the novel. Patriarchy exercises discrimination and sexism towards women, because of the physical and biological qualities that enable women to reproduce. The wombs inside women define them with the extended meanings that are given by the patriarchal society, whether they are conditions assumed to be hysteria, womb fury, wandering wombs, watery and fluid bodies or other false diagnoses and

meanings. Men have taken from women their wombs and turned them into something that imprisons them, restricts them and reduces them to a function or an object. The image of the 'wombless' bodies focuses on this point, that women, without their functions, without their wombs that define their femininity, are just bodies. Bodies that are useless, and disposable. The assertive act of suicide is a permanent reaction that denies this essentialist ideology and rejects the definition of femininity fixated by patriarchy. It could be said that men fear the womb because of its 'powers' that caused 'trouble', that meant danger to men, to their honour and pride. The wombs watery nature is seen as something that defines femininity, permits the feminine character to become fluid itself, and is unreliable, and slippery, presenting a treacherous figure. Women were made to fear their own bodies and potential destructiveness so that they would remain tamed in order to preserve men's authority and order in the society.

Opposing the solid, destructive masculine order, there is the fluid water element. The novel suggests that the river's essence is female, and it is not still or passive but on the contrary it is "dark and tumultuous" rushing and spraying water around. The depictions of water and the river embrace womanhood as the untouched entity, formed of something which is deeper than that of which is constructed by the patriarchal society. Ever flowing, which suggests something unstoppable, no matter how much patriarchy tries to contain it or oppress it, a woman is wild, capable and full of life energy. The body is merely a mould, which Evelyn wishes to escape, in order to be free. Evelyn's sexual preference, her lesbianism, is a taboo which society would condemn as a sickness. Also, her diagnosis of hysteria and assertive, destructive actions contribute to the negative judgment that would lead to a lifetime of being "examined, prodded, denied books and ideas, to float unresponsively". In opposition to the patriarchal law on land, the river is inviting Evelyn, which is depicted as a female source, a domain that she belongs to, that offers an escape

towards freedom, and so Evelyn lets go, ready to “uncoil her tail so that she could join Melusine in the river, ready to join that elemental sisterhood that existed just below the surface” she falls to her freedom. (chapter 26)

In the last chapter, the novel returns to Kirsten from the modern world. The part begins with two women walking beside the river, in contrast with the two women falling to the river in the end of Evelyn’s chapter. The water of the river is calm this time, and Manon states that dying in water “can’t be a bad way to go, to belong to that watery world” (27). There is an implication of an underwater womanly existence, owned and governed by women. We can see that the novel includes the stories of real women and places them in that underwater womanhood.

As they talk about watery deaths, Manon mentions Virginia Woolf, and her suicide. Pointing out the feminist perspective of this novel, it is a valuable moment that brings light to the suicides that are committed by women. “You know that she walked out into the river? Filled her pockets with stones?” Manon says, and, referring to Woolf’s novel *A Room of One’s Own*, “she said that women need a room of their own, a space to think, to write. In her day that wasn’t easy to acquire. Freedom for oneself had to be negotiated” (chapter 27). The image of Manon holding her walking stick along the river resembles an image that would have appeared on the day Virginia Woolf committed suicide. After Woolf’s family finds the suicide letter, they find her hat and cane beside the ocean. So it is possible to imagine Woolf walking to the shore with her cane in her hand just like Manon with her walking stick.

The two women mirror each other in many ways, since Manon is also an intellectual woman who is an academic writer. Virginia Woolf was a mentally ill woman, bipolar and depressed. She was also romantically involved with women. Looking at this fact, it is evident that this novel explores these themes of mental illness, sexuality, and suicide,

specifically death by drowning and these intertwined themes serve as a foundation for the rising feminist discourse which resists patriarchal dominance and ideology that leads to the oppression of women.

“A room, no matter how large, will never be big enough. A flat, a house, even a mansion like Wakewater, why, still not enough. We- us women- need something more. We need a larger space. A river, a sea, an ocean. To counter all those years, those centuries, of being so confined. Of being sealed in and locked away”. (Leslie, chapter 27)

The novel highlights the main perception behind the watery realm that is filled with women. It is a unity of women, gathering together, luring women into the water in order to gain strength and increase in number. They are the outcome of an oppressed female society, underwater, in opposition to the land. They dominate the watery depths. Leslie’s novel rejects the preservation of male authority and creates female figures who are indeed dangerous and mysterious. The passivity of the Victorian woman figure transforms into one which is aggressive, reaching out to other women, in attempt to form unity in the watery world, “the ghosts of drowned women, calling to join their number” (chapter 25). They have claimed the authority of their own souls and let no man enter their domain. On solid land where they have been pronounced ‘fallen’, they rise up in oceans, seas, lakes and rivers. Now they belong to “an eternal female underworld”. After trying to save Manon from getting pulled into the water by the wet women, Kirsten finds herself standing near the river, holding Manon and looking at the wet woman Melusine, holding her arms open, welcoming them to their world. At this point, we see Kirsten convinced of joining the wet women, so she lets go. And now, Kirsten and Manon too belong in the watery world of women, untouchable by the patriarchal effects of society.

Identifying death as something victorious is itself problematic. In order to understand just how the deaths manifest as a victory, it is important to change perspective and to empathize with the protagonists in the novels. The fact that each death is carried out by the women themselves, is significant as it is the most destructive act one could possibly carry out. But this is one of the key factors that define the characters as rebellious and assertive. From the perspective of the patriarchal imaginary, women do not act in a destructive way. However, looking at Evelyn's and Edna's lives, considering at some point they lived their lives according to patriarchal norms, it would not necessarily mean that they are non-destructive. Bronfen states that "the feminine subject presents itself by maintaining its status of "not one", a double, divided and shifted subject, fatal for her but healing for the man" (217). Therefore, by surrendering to patriarchy, and by submitting to man's authority, women are actually killing themselves, portraying a 'living dead' or perhaps Edna would say "sleeping and dreaming". This suggests the ultimate destruction of one's 'self'. Thus, when we observe the deaths of the protagonists, it can be said that rather than continuing a life of destruction towards themselves, they choose to preserve their construction of their own 'selves' through destruction. Bronfen explains that "suicide implies an authorship with one's own life, a form of writing the self and writing death, a position between self construction and destruction" (Bronfen, 207). Authority means power, and both Edna and Evelyn resist handing their power over to patriarchy. By committing suicide, they sacrifice their bodies but they free their minds and their unconscious from the devouring patriarchal imaginary.

In this way, it could be said that these women who committed suicide, made their own choices concerning how to proceed with their lives, and this is act of power, for women gain authorship with their own bodies. In a way, they are writing with their bodies, instead of surrendering to patriarchal authorship. Only by gaining authorship can women get rid of their oppression connected with the female body. Death becomes a "feminine strategy"

which is important for women and their gaining control over their bodies (142). Elizabeth Bronfen defines this as “fatal authorship” where women who have committed suicide actually destroy the cultural attributes that have been formed by men. From this perspective, it can be said that through the deaths of the characters in the novels, they are able to preserve ‘the self’ but at the same time, aim to destroy the patriarchal system.

The Awakening was written in the Victorian period, and as in those times, the associations of women with water was idealized in certain ways, which makes it understandable to come across such a theme in a literary work. However, *Bodies of Water* was written in the 21st century, which shows that still today, the same association is preserved in a similar theme and context. I offer a reading of this preservation, which is not pessimistic. In the contrary, I claim that this association, has been altered and transformed by women and for women because it is written by women and in the form of women’s prose. Many feminist critics have discussed the dominance of masculine language which creates a barrier for women. Within the discussion of breaking the linear structure of masculine language, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray have produced works that reinforce a structure of writing which is feminine, known as *écriture féminine*. Considering that writing is what gives power and liberation, it can be said that certainly *Bodies of Water* and *The Awakening* are echoing the ideology of *l’écriture féminine*. Introduced by Hélène Cixous, the theory of *L’écriture féminine*, stresses on the feminine style of writing which liberates women from the world that is constructed by men. Cixous challenges women and men to acquire this style in order for women to claim their own discursive place. This requires all fixed meanings to be displaced, which leads to the concept of ‘Voler’. Voler has two meanings in French to steal and to fly. Cixous explains that in order to fly, women must first steal their right to speak. The whole idea of women’s writing is to gain the freedom of talking about femininity, female sexuality, and the female body, which is ignored in masculine writing. Some writers

criticise that the discussion of such a revolutionary theory repeats masculine language. However, stealing the masculine language implies a sense of disruption which unsettles the patriarchal system that dominates text. In order to create difference and to distinguish feminine writing from masculine writing, one must first steal from the masculine text. To make change possible, one has to begin somewhere, in this case, where the problem lies, in masculine text. We can not create a difference by ignoring the fact that 'woman' is ignored within the text. We can not go around the problem, but instead, we have to go right through it. Then, once woman has gained back her self, she can fly, she can be free.

Hélène Cixous in her work, *The Laugh of Medusa*, has put forward the idea of a kind of revolution, in terms of women writing by themselves. Cixous discusses the masculine language structure, stating, "let us not be trapped by an analysis still encumbered with the old automatisms. It's not to be feared that language conceals an invincible adversary because it's the language of men and their grammar". (887) Cixous expresses that there is no need to be restricted by the masculine language. Her argument implies that a feminine language is without limitations, fluid and open ended, without barriers. The masculine dominated discourse prevents a woman to own her 'self, by distancing female sexuality and the female body from women. Thus, by using feminine writing, women can free the woman in the text. By this point of view, it can be said that the two novels can be read through the light of Cixous' approach, as being a part of the *écriture féminine*.

In his reading of *The Awakening*, Francesco Pontuale claims that the novels "narrative reenacts on the level of language and writing what can be construed as the feminist struggle of the protagonist, Edna Pontellier" and that is an example of feminine writing. (2). Pontuale explores *The Awakening*, through the concept of feminine writing and highlights the parts of the novel which show the breaking of the linear structure of masculine embedded language. For example, he writes that the references made of beauty in pregnant

women broke the “traditional pattern of a literature did not dare to describe the physical appearance of a pregnant woman” until *The Awakening*. Considering the social structure of the 19th century, the novel would have been open to a lot of criticisms due to its explicit references of female sexuality and adultery on behalf of women, which are daring themes to write about, particularly if you are a woman writer of that era.

This is an example of breaking the patriarchal law within language, a crossing of the borders of masculine language. Pontuale, supports his analysis with the works of Cixous which focus on the *écriture féminine*. According to Pontuale, the novel fits in with the aspects of the theory of feminine writing because of its characteristics, some of which can be defined as fluid and flexible, open-ended and open to interpretation. Pontuale explains the elements which mirror the imagery of *The Awakening*.

Cixous relates this fluidity to feminine sexuality and consequently to *écriture féminine*, a language characterized by, to use a Derridean expression, the "freeplay of the signifier," which defies the fixity and the linearity of male discourse. The relation of fluidity, sea, and woman finds expression also in the allusion to the "Medusa" in the title of Cixous's essay, the symbol of the New Woman. The Medusa is a mythological figure characterized by the writhing, always moving snakes on her head" (9).

By contrasting and merging the imagery of Cixous's works of feminine writing to that of *The Awakening's* symbolism, Pontuale highlights the breaking of a phallogocentric structure with Chopin's writing. Pontuale attempts to point out that "*The Awakening* anticipates aspects of *écriture féminine* on the level of themes: the female body, bisexuality, and motherhood, and on the level of images: the sea and birds. *The Awakening* also anticipates *écriture féminine* on the level of narrative" (11).

Pontuale's reading suggests that the frequent imagery of the ocean used in the novel has a powerful outcome which gives power to women. Pontuale notes that the ending of the novel is open to a pessimistic reading, for it has been debated whether Edna, in her death, has been defeated by because it is debatable, the novel's ending is open ended, stating that it made up "of open-ended meanings that explode 'phallogocentric' closure" in contrast with masculine language which is fixated and evidently leads to a strict closure. (11).

I offer to take Pontuale's reading further and develop it by using the association of water and women, and how this notion has been transformed with women's transgressive writing, which manifests in feminine power and authority against the force of a patriarchal order. Cixous said "Now, I woman am going to blow up the law: an explosion henceforth possible and ineluctable; let it be done, right now, in language" (887). In both of the novels, the notion of fluidity in imagery, theme and narrative is persistent. Pontuale too focuses on this aspect in *The Awakening*, stating that the narrative's "movement backward and forward imitates the ebb and flow of the sea. Its repetition of the participles—"ceasing," "whispering," "clamoring," "murmuring," "inviting" and "reeling," "fluttering," "circling"—also suggests movement and fluidity, not unlike the fluidity that is symbolized in the writhing snakes of Cixous's Medusa" (12).

The same theory could be applied to *Bodies of Water*, for the way it continually and repetitively uses the imagery of the river and the flowing motion of water through the Wakewater building. The plot in *Bodies of Water* switches back and forth from Kirsten to Evelyn, which suggests that it resembles the movement of the waves swelling towards the shore and then pulling back. The endings of both novels can be interpreted through different perspectives. Death and the meaning of death can be connected to notions of re-birth, and this fluidity in interpretation suggests that the conclusion of the novels cannot fixed. Very much like *The Awakening*, the ending is open ended and open to multiple points of view. It

is possible to fit into different moulds. Therefore the narrative is identifiable within a fluid concept, changeable and flexible like water. As thoroughly discussed in this thesis, the theme of the novel is full of fluid imagery which reminds us that it is a fluid piece of work. But besides imagery, there are other factors which should be noticed, that is, in the style of the novel. *Bodies of Water* is a Gothic novel, which carries all of the Gothic elements that determine the genre. For example, the haunted atmosphere, the mysterious elements, supernatural or mythical creatures like the ghostly women, and gruesome, dark imagery are some of the characteristics of the novel which are a part of the gothic elements. However, the author has done something different with this novel, which makes it unique in the way that it achieves a position within Gothic feminism.

Generally, the female characters in Gothic novels are victimized, angelic beautiful women, struggling against patriarchal powers. Or on the contrary, we might come across promiscuous, dangerous woman figures who are lustrous and mysterious. In *Bodies of Water*, the female characters cannot be put only in these two categories. Kirsten is an ordinary modern 21st-century woman who has broken up with her boyfriend and is living on her own. She doesn't portray the innocent angelic figure who is haunted or limited by a masculine power, nor is she saved by a masculine other. In fact, she is guided or led by a mysterious woman from the water who is shown as if she is being haunted by her at the beginning of the novel, but actually, the ghostly wet woman is only trying to lift the veil from the hidden history of the Wakewater building. Hidden underneath the renovated exterior, the pressures of patriarchal power unravel and bring light upon victimized women. However the victimized women are not depicted as morally pure or angelic but instead as women who have been deemed as "fallen". Leslie's novel addresses the struggle against patriarchy and women's struggle towards claiming their bodies, thus by including feminist

discourse in her work, it anticipates the *écriture féminine*. In order to show how it fits in with the ideology of *écriture féminine*, I will now discuss the stylistic attributes of the novel.

Écriture féminine stands against the masculine thought in writing, which has dominated fiction and has excluded women, particularly the female body. The dominant fictional structure in Western culture generally persists on a linear plot movement. The stylistic qualities in *Bodies of Water*, in terms of syntax and language, follows a conventional style. However, there are other elements which show disruptions within the text which shows that it does not entirely follow the classic structure of masculine prose. According to Fuchs' article about Women's experimental fiction, "nonlinear, non-hierarchical, and decentering- are, in themselves, a way of writing the feminine" (p.3). The stories in the novel flick over between the past and present, and channel into various characters lives, which plays with the order of a classical plot structure. This can be seen as an example of a non-linear plot structure, emphasizing the fluidity of women's writing. As I have been discussing the fluid and it's relation to the feminine, I have shown much about imagery and theme. Fluidity within the style does not have to be only in imagery or theme, or content. It can be a part of the style of the novel, which emphasizes a sense of disorder, changeability and interruption in the movement of the text. This is why it can be called "fluid", because of the chaos oceans and rivers can cause, the way water shapes or distorts land and rocks, and by shaping, it can make its way into any direction, forwards, backwards. Therefore the fluidity of text may not always lead to one direction, or one conclusion. It can be open to multiple points of view or various directions. The fluid, non-linear style breaks the one directional movement in a novel, thereby releasing itself from patriarchal forms of discourse. All streams eventually form a larger amount of water, be it a lake or an ocean, it is bound to collect somewhere. This stream effect can be detected in the novel, as we see small amounts of water, gradually guiding the reader to larger bodies of water. This stream effect

slowly collects bits of tension and information and at the end, there is a bigger picture where all elements form a homogeneous state. While the mysteries are unraveling, something else is building up and forming as we see with the power of the water women. Additionally, the readers experience also has a fluid effect, which is significant. Just as the character uncovers and lift layer beneath layer to get to the truth, the reader is also in need of lifting layers in order to achieve a deeper reading of the novel itself. In this sense, the reading process of this novel is very much like the ocean, as one may never truly know what lies in the deep, until you descend down from the shallow surface. Otherwise, without the effort to dive down towards meaning, word play, or metaphor, on the surface, the novel would seem quite basic.

As the feminine style of writing makes space for the imaginative use of fiction, It distances itself from patriarchal notions of fiction, which are considered to be less imaginative and more logical. *Bodies of Water* engages with fluid mythological motifs and metaphors which subverts traditional modes of narrative. Rather than presenting a transparent medium for thought, Leslie uses figurative modes of writing which draw attention to the fictional qualities of the novel. Thus, as a woman writer, her work succeeds in “subverting closure, logic, and fixed, authoritarian points of view”, thereby undermining patriarchal forms (Friedman and Fuchs, 7). *Écriture féminine*, calls for a feminine literature “that writes the body, by imitating the rhythms and sexuality of women” (4). *Bodies of Water* certainly emphasizes the female body, instead of censoring it or hiding it. Female sexuality is, in its most explicit form, a major theme in the novel. The text brings out ‘the woman in the text’, not just in context, but also in the textual movement from beginning to end. The text portrays the sense of the libidinal dynamics that Cixous insists authors must write, in order to break free from the limiting masculine way of writing. The erotic parts of the novel can be seen as tension within the plot, which can be likened to rising, swelling moments within the journey to climax or an orgasm. We come across the rising tension

whenever the water oozes into the building, where Kirsten sees the wet woman from the water. Or perhaps the slow buildup of frustration, until the moment where Evelyn enters the pool in the basement with a sharp knife in her hand. These can be read as throbbing, pulsing moments which write the female body, imitating the sexual experience of a woman. Additionally, the movement of tension going back and forth, ultimately ends with silence, as both Kirsten and Evelyn slip into the currents of the river. This resembles the movement of the waves, in the manner which the tension rises and swells and calms at the end, when the sea resembles a sheet of paper, calm and smooth. This suggests that the wateriness of the content is also detectable in the novel's form.

There is a distinctive tension in this chapter which might suggest that on the one hand, the fluid is a feminine element which calls to the women in the novels, leading them to access their unconscious, but on the other hand, the fluid also represents a dangerous threat to their lives. Ultimately, as we see in both novels, the water takes the lives of these women, which does create a paradox in itself. However, it is important to realize that in order to become themselves and to achieve freedom for the self, it is necessary for them to kill the part of themselves which represents the phallic world of solidity. In the water, the characters symbolically become undone, they dissolve into the water, which is the representation of a feminine unconscious. Their selfhood is preserved within a feminine realm, and we can see that this tension justifies itself in terms of aiming for a movement of liberation and the possibility of *écriture féminine*, through psychoanalysis and French feminist theory.

CONCLUSION

The ideas of the fluid have been associated with notions of femininity and female sexuality as we see in examples of literature, mythology and art. The symbolism of water in these novels is connected to these notions, which are deeply connected to issues of patriarchy. The fluid and the feminine are placed within the binary and hierarchical organization our conceptual world which is associated within the patriarchal order. The “fluid,” seen as something lacking, stands against the “solid” which symbolically represents the masculine. In the phallogentric conception of the world, this association of fluidity and femininity are the effects of a patriarchal logic which aims to oppress female sexuality and to place the feminine in the position of the “other”.

Symbolically and linguistically, there are elements of repressed femininity/sexuality, which are encoded in the text. The femininity or female sexuality that is repressed is located in the watery depths. Therefore, in both novels we can see how the fluid makes it possible to stage the return of the repressed. It is by the theoretical approach of the *écriture féminine*, and psychoanalysis that we can decode the repressed material. We see in this novel that the only way to undo the fixed meanings of binary couplings is to change meaning and representation that is given to the symbol. In this case, what is perceived to be weak and powerless represented through water, through a different perspective becomes one that is powerful and liberating. The fluid represents an uncanny threat to the patriarchal ideology. The association of the fluid and the feminine is also intimately linked with patriarchal fears. We are able to locate this fear with the help of psychoanalysis, which provides a deeper understanding of the symbolism of fluidity in both novels. As a result, we are able to see connections between the fluid and female sexuality that is projected as an instability, or overflow which is constantly under the oppression of patriarchy. The chaotic, monstrous representations of female sexuality have surfaced through uncanny images of aquatic

creatures and watery women. The patriarchal imaginary attempts to associate femininity and female sexuality with something that lacks wholeness and stability. However both novels show that these notions are overflowing, excessive and uncontrollable within the phallogentric imaginary.

In both novels, *The Awakening* and *Bodies of Water*, there are female figures who have fallen in the eyes of society. Edna and Evelyn are both from the Victorian period, and they are faced with having to put up with the patriarchal norms of society and the expectations of men. Both figures are unsuccessful in becoming the angelic innocent woman model that they are supposed to be, according to the Victorian ideology. Edna enters the ocean, knowing that she would never return to shore, because she felt that she didn't belong to the land. She escapes her body, just like Evelyn, in order to preserve her freedom. Free from judgment, free from oppression, they sacrifice their own bodies so that they could claim their existence, rather than hand it over to patriarchal control. Kirsten is the symbolic figure of the modern woman and she reflects the effects of a history of oppressed femininity. She is there to show the reader that the women who have died have not forgotten the past, and that they linger in the depths of the water, representing memory, history, which is distressing and frightening. This is the reality, a history which is filthy, revolting and unforgivable. They both fight for their place in the world, to claim their bodies and to own their voices. But they have a whole society against them, ready to mute their voices and to gain control over them. The only place they can go is the water, a place that is untouched by man, possessing the female power within its slippery currents which are powerful and wild. The fluid is wild and free, which invites the women to roam freely in its element.

Comparing these two novels, it is clear to see the similar concerns about female sexuality. However, the implications of the times which the novels were written, and its effects of the style and narrative of the novels are also significant. In *The Awakening*, the

references to female sexuality are implicit and subtle, which show that there is a struggle to achieve freedom in writing. Being a female writer in the Victorian society requires dealing with restrictions, so addressing the issue of liberation of female sexuality is challenging, for this reason it is implicitly encoded within the text.

When compared to *Bodies of Water*, although the references to female sexuality are explicitly open and revealed to the reader, we still come across the same discussions about female sexuality and liberation. The comparison of both novels brings clarification to the question of women's writing and just how far it has come on the path to liberating the woman in the text. We can see the ability to express female sexuality and the way which repressed sexuality is untangled from the symbols of the patriarchal order. However, even though female sexuality has freed itself in text in the 21st century, the novel still discusses the effects of patriarchy and how women are still in a fight to escape the patriarchal imaginary. Women are still trying to claim right to their bodies, though it is also clear that forming a unity of women is essential in order to achieve this, which suggests that more texts which explore the woman in the text and enhance the feminine, should be written and analyzed. The presence of historical content bears great significance which helps to connect the patterns of patriarchal oppression on women. This is why I have incorporated the historical background in this thesis. I feel that I had to go beyond French feminism and psychoanalysis to address questions of history that psychoanalysis is not that good at addressing. With the knowledge of the past, it is possible to see how far women have come with their struggles against the patriarchal imaginary, which brings fuel to the desire to want to achieve more for women and their right to write freely and liberate the woman in the text. After writing about these two novels, I imagine Edna, Millie, Evelyn, and Kirsten along with all of the other women, splashing about, wildly, glancing over the horizon, unlimited and free.

WORKS CITED

- Alexander, Skye. *Mermaids - the Myths, Legends, and Lore*. N.p. Adams Media Corporation, 2012.
- Aurora, Vincent. "Leiris Failles: The Unconscious and the Sea." *LittéRéalité*, 13,1, Jan. 2001
- Bachelard, Gaston, and Edith Rogers Farrell. *Water and Dreams*. Texas. The Pegasus Foundation, 1942.
- Baldwin, Gabrielle. "The place of female writers in American literature: The case of Kate Chopin." *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 5, 1, 1986, 50–56. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41053404.
- Barstow, Anne Llewellyn. *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*. n.p. HarperOne, 1995.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. New York, Vintage Books, 1989
- Bronfen, Elisabeth. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*. United Kingdom. Routledge, 1992.
- Cixous, Hélène, "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, 1, 4, 1976, pp. 875– 893. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3173239.
- Cixous Hélène (*The Newly Born Woman Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément ; Tanslation by Betsy Wing ; Introduction by Sandra M Gilbert*. University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Chopin, Kate, *The Awakening*, Enchanced Media Publishing, kindle edition, 1899.
- Freud, Sigmund, *Interpretation of dreams*. London. FLAME TREE PUBLISHING, 2020.
- Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: the Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontent, 1927-1931*. London. Hogarth Press, 1961.

- Gray, Jennifer B. *The Escape of the 'Sea': Ideology and 'The Awakening.'* The Southern Literary Journal, vol. 37, no. 1, 2004, pp. 53–73. *JSTOR*
- Howes, Hetta. “Watery Offerings: Women and Water in the Middle Ages.” *The History of Emotions Blog*, 8 May 2014, retrieved from: emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/2014/05/watery-offerings-women-and-water-in-the-middle-ages/. Accessed 23.apr.2018.
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu/irigaray/. Accessed 5. Feb.2018
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Kowaleski-Wallace, Elizabeth. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. Routledge, 2009.
- Leslie, V.H, *Bodies of Water*, Salt, kindle edition, 2016.
- Meessen, Valerie. *Post-Mortems Representations of Female Suicide by Drowning in Victorian Culture*. Radboud University Nijmegen, 2017.
- Peterson, Kaara L. “Fluid Economies: Portraying Shakespeare's Hysterics.” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 34, 1, 2001, pp. 35–59. *JSTOR*.
- Pontuale, Francesco. ‘The Awakening’: Struggles Toward L'écriture féminine.” n.p. *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 50, 1996, pp. 37–49. *JSTOR*.
- Roach, Catherine. “Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation.” n.p. *Hypatia*, 6, 1, 1991, pp. 46–59.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th-century America. Womens Bodies*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, pp. 652-678.
- Study.com*, [academy/lesson/claude-levi-strauss-biography-theory-structuralism](https://www.study.com/academy/lesson/claude-levi-strauss-biography-theory-structuralism). Accessed 10.march.2019.

- Theweleit, Klaus. "Male Fantasies. Volume 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History." *South Atlantic Review*, University of Minnesota Press, 53, 2, 1988.
- Marland, Hilary, and Jane Adams. "Hydropathy at Home: The Water Cure and Domestic Healing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 83, 3, 2009, pp. 499–529.
- Zakin, Emily. "Psychoanalytic Feminism." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University, 16 May 2011, [Plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-psychoanalysis](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-psychoanalysis). Accessed 24.may.2019.
- Zguta, Russell. "The Ordeal by Water (Swimming of Witches) in the East Slavic World." *Slavic Review*, 36, 2, 1977, pp. 220–230. *JSTOR*.