

Commodification and Objectification of Women in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing: New French Feminism's Critique

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ABSTRACT

New French feminism asserts that the structured deprivation of women has its core in language. A society governed by the Symbolic order views women through patriarchal lenses and considers them as verbal constructs. Such representations reflect the cultural views of society. This paper uses the psychoanalytic and language theories of new French feminism to explore the depictions of women in *The awakening* and *The golden notebook* to identify the representations that subjugate, exclude, and repress them from selfhood. The analysis is more of a textual interaction than sociological, with emphasis on the use of patriarchal language in creating the woman. While *The awakening* and *The golden notebook* seem to confirm the representations of the woman as an object, a deficient binary opposite of the male and nothing more than a caregiver and sex provider, this study foregrounds the underlying voices of the texts sceptical of the representations. Both texts question these representations implying that the arbitrariness of language highlights the dichotomy of ascribing fixed and negative identities to the female; hence, patriarchal language is defective.

INTRODUCTION: REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN

Society depicts the woman based on her domestic and maternal functions without recourse to her individuality as a subject. Patriarchal culture permits the man the right to represent the woman and connotes her negatively if she deviates from her prescriptions. The representations of the woman in society and philosophy sustain most of her representations in literary texts. Unlike the more reactionary Anglo-American feminism that aligns itself with cultural materialism and Marxism, the present study focuses on the more explicitly theoretical French feminism, relying on its argument that language creates the woman. Hence, the representations of the woman are arguable and liable to change. The present study focuses on literary representations of the woman predicated on French feminism's argument that language creates the woman, thereby raising doubts about these representations. It uses the language and psychoanalytic theories of new French feminism to identify the representations of the woman as language constructs and explores the arguments raised by the texts concerning the constructions of the female

in *The awakening* (Chopin 1984) and *The golden notebook* (Lessing, 2014).

The representations of women in literary history from the classical to the postmodern epoch, were similar with a few exceptions. The classical age ascribed several noble Homeric women with certain dignities, but the predominant constructs of women were that of inferiority and docility. When they were not docile, they were termagant. For instance, the mythological Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife stayed home while her husband spent years acquiring glory through "manly" valour and enjoying respite with other women. The story paid minimal attention to Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter and bringing a strange woman into his matrimonial home; it rather highlighted Clytemnestra's involvement in his death and recounted her matricide as due punishment for an adulterous wife and a husband-murderer. The classical age valued women for their submission and painstaking attention to their domestic duties and subjected them to reprisals if they misbehaved. Patriarchal authority created these representations as a means of keeping the woman within bounds and the

woman “was” only because she served the husband and children.

Women are born into an “allotted and confined space” (Berger 1972, 46), and they need to manoeuvre situations and adapt to that “space” for survival. The intellect becomes adept at simulation attempting to survive, devising its way through deception and “masquerading, conventions of concealment, playacting before others and before oneself” (Nietzsche 1968, 247). Many women have traversed the path outlined by Nietzsche especially with patriarchy’s association of femininity with irrationality. Wilgefortis in the medieval legend, for instance, sprouted a beard to masquerade her sex but was later crucified because she failed to conform to her father’s expectations. She seemed assertive like some other women of her period, yet she had to conform to cultural dictates. The Renaissance did not deviate much from their medieval predecessors in representing cloistered or domesticated “saintly” women or the abhorred deviants regardless of the advent of the novel, which allowed a minimal number of home-educated women to write, albeit secretly, as well as the weeny voices arising in concern for conditions related to women and children. The men took the credits for the accomplishments of their women. “Did women have a renaissance?” (Kelly-Gadol, 1984) might have resuscitated interest in digging up the accomplishments of women, as did *A literature of their own* (Showalter, 1977). Nonetheless, these interests and their subsequent clamour for the emancipation of women had limited impact because of the entrenched constructions of the woman. Women live their lives to correspond with the prescriptions the men attribute to them. Seeing that a woman “is” only because the man calls her into existence Kristeva asserts, “[o]n a deeper level ... a woman cannot ‘be’ ...” (1980, 137). The subsequent parts of this paper use the new French feminist theories of Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous to read *The awakening* and *The golden notebook* as depictions of the patriarchal representations of women as verbal constructs. Underlying the portrayals of the female characters is the argument that although language accumulates meanings to represent the women based on the ideology of the society, both texts question the absoluteness of these meanings since language is arbitrary.

The Constructed Nothingness: Patriarchal Views of the Woman

A woman cannot “be” probably because patriarchal discourse marginalised her and did not allow her to exist as either the man’s binary opposite or his inferior. Irigaray explains that the Freudian structure of development makes it very clear at the Imaginary phase that the woman is “castrated” (1985a, 68); her body lacks the signifier, the phallus.

Presumably, the external view of the biological sexual organ provides the basis to denigrate the woman as a lack, which, unfortunately, she brings upon herself by not being a man. Her deficiency prevents her further development into the Symbolic. She must depend on a man for her recognition in the Symbolic. The patriarchal culture discards the woman to alterity where her representation arises from the man whom she relates with as his inverted negative mirror image

(Irigaray 1985a). She is already a lack and her visibility only reflects what the man is not. Hence, the woman means nothing. It is a waste for language to spend time describing nothing, and this keeps the woman at the in-between space between her origin and the Symbolic. She opens up herself to the man’s representations to cope with the hysteria created by her loss of the penile; “...she borrows signifiers but cannot make her mark, or re-mark upon them” (Irigaray 1985a, 71). Unable to “make a mark,” the woman formulates her reality based on the man as the reference point.

It is evident that patriarchal culture through the language calls into being women’s representations, enmeshing women “in a system of meaning which serves the auto-affectation of the (masculine) subject” (Whitford 1991, 122). The subsequent sections examine the experiences of the female characters that limit them to the category of man’s other. The analysis anchors itself on the new French feminists’ ethical engagement with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical views of sexual differentiation.

Linguistic derogation of woman

Irigaray (1985b) argues that the exchange value of women built Western culture. Women resemble commodities displayed for sale. Their exchange value depends on their bodies and their descriptions by language, and patriarchal society compels them to accept definitions that language imposes on them. Irigaray’s idea that the masculine employs language is plausible. Based on Saussure’s linguistics, the arbitrariness of language indicates that meanings do not reside in words, but on the assumptions that each society places on words. Culture employs language to decide how things are and how they are organised. Therefore, meanings of words undergo Semantic Shift depending on conventions adopted by society because “language is never innocent” (Barthes 1968, 16). As depicted earlier, the woman is outside symbolisation and studies in tandem with this view have reported that words used to describe males and females tend to acquire negative overtones when referring to women (Khan & Ali 2012; Radzi & Musa 2017).

Consequently, any word for a woman, in the right context, can be a prostitute (Lakoff 1975). This statement recalls Irigaray’s argument that the male system of value accepts the woman as a prostitute (1985a). Based on this postulation, the Free Women’s paratextual section of *The golden notebook* (*GN*) highlights the hues of meanings evoked on a word based on sexual differences. Within the context of *The golden notebook*, the adjective “free” qualifying “women” undergoes a semantic shift and accumulates several changes in meanings. Etymologically, “free,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2003), is an Old English adjective originating from an Indo-European root verb meaning “to love.” Some of the meanings attached to “free” are - not under the control or in the power of somebody else; able to do or say what you want; not a prisoner; not caged; not blocked -. However, to depict the worldview of *The golden notebook* and its linguistic system, “free” undergoes semantic derogation when attached to the noun “women.” It acquires negative attitudes and meanings with sexual undertones; thereby

creating a peculiar register reserved for women in what Hermann calls "a micro-language filled with winks and allusions specifically aimed at [women]" (1989, 7). Additionally, the negative and sexual undertones seem to override every other definition of "free" concerning the female characters and take an act of performativity in these women's live relationships.

The golden notebook begins the first of its five "free women" sections in a third-person narration, akin to the voice of Anna Wulf, the fictional author of sections of the text by translating her thoughts and perception of events. The section seems to focus the reader's attention on Anna and Molly concerning their categorisation as free women. Apart from being friends, the two women resemble on several other grounds, one of which is that they are both divorced single mothers, and thereby free in several ways. Richard's satirical description of them as "emancipated females" (*GN*, 47) foregrounds the dichotomy evident in the word "free" or "emancipated" while, indirectly, presages the meaning adopted by their culture about the women.

Accordingly, Anna and her alter-egos who tried to write themselves into the patriarchal word, to mimic the masculine by asserting rights over their bodies as virile women are considered women of loose morals. Irigaray reiterates a similar scenario in her rhetorical diatribe on the values placed on women: "In our social order, women are "products" used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, "commodities." How can such objects of use and transaction claim the right to speak and to participate in exchange in general?" (1985b, 84). Anna and Molly feel that their society has developed enough from the nineteenth-century society of *The Awakening* to allow women the equality of status to live "freely" and retain rights over their bodies forgetting that the man determines the language of equality. To depict the right of ownership over language, *The golden notebook* explores the play on the adjective "free." The positive undertone associated with "free" derogates to the extent that Anna expresses bitterly: "Free women... They still define us in terms of relationships with men" (*GN*, 26). The euphoria of equality could have elevated Anna's hope that in the binary logic of language man pairs with a woman without the reminder that the reference point for this equality is the masculine; the woman is present only to reflect the man's image. Relating to women, the meaning of "free" mutates to imply a corruptive influence on society's moral values. Anna is reminded that a divorcee like her "needed extra dignity of behaviour" (*GN*, 122) since she has declared herself "free" to "have lovers" and behave as she likes. Because of her "free" status, Michael abandons Anna after five years of complete dedication to him, and Richard, her friend's ex-husband, offers to share her bed. The men consider her freedom an opportunity to satisfy their sexual needs outside their homes. Anna's rejection of Richard's proposition earns her a castigating remark and denies her the label of a beautiful woman, giving rise to Richard's: "Anna, you should take more care of yourself, you're looking ten years older than you should, you are getting positively wizened" (*GN*, 60). Inferentially, based on Freud's "penis envy," the men believe

that they are what the women need and that without them the women remain unfulfilled. The text collaborates with this view while intruding with a critical undertone. Furthermore, Molly is categorised by her ex-husband as "immoral, sloppy and bohemian" (*GN*, 36) because she prefers to hold acting jobs rather than crawl into a safe marriage. These negative terms seem hard-wired into the psyche of the society concerning women who decide to match the lifestyles of their male counterparts. Anna and Molly's psychoanalyst, Mrs. Marks, true to her predecessor's legacy labelled them as "insecure and uprooted" (*GN*, 30), continuing in the psychoanalytic tradition of Freud and Lacan who could not relate the female sexuality with her libido except as a lack that the man satisfies through penile penetration. The desire of Anna and Molly to choose how to live their own lives returns them to the mythic community of women who defied tradition - the "Electras" and the "Antigones -." However, in the broad category of this mythic community is the disappearance of individual action and responsibility. Anna and Molly become a type.

Furthermore, society labels attempt by the woman to satisfy her sexual needs a taboo, and if the woman becomes unresponsive because she is aware that the man sees her only as a receptacle, the man tags her "insecure." *The golden notebook* is stealthily laying the ground for a critique on patriarchy and the psychoanalytic institution, an institution that privileges the right of men to be sexually uninhibited but becomes a sign of neurosis in the female. Based on the Symbolic order, Anna and the alter egos' lifestyles connote destruction metaphorically, despite the "free" qualifying them. "Free" becomes a critique of society's representation of woman since it harbours the paradox between what it signifies with the man as the signified and the woman; although, the man reserves the signified position for the woman while he retains that of the signifier.

Additionally, a similar mechanism of sexual differentiation used by Freud operates in tenses, insidiously. Tense operates as a gender marker. Using the word "lay," Anna explores the shades of meaning entrenched on its use with a male subject who actively acts on the passive female object: "... - surely I get laid, she gets laid, they (female) get laid. But surely you, as a man, don't get laid, you lay" (*GN*, 490). While the active term "lay" applies to men as the subject, the text uses the passive and sexually vulgar "laid" on women. Anna further relates "lay" to many other words used pejoratively on women as indicated in:

<...> but you talk about getting laid, you never say a woman, you say a broad, a lay, a baby, a doll, a bird, you talk about butts and boobs, every time you mention a woman I see her as a sort of window-dresser's dummy or as a heap of dismembered parts, breasts, or legs or buttocks (*GN*, 490).

The excerpt recognises the woman as body parts against the man's wholeness and recalls Lacan's "mirror" stage of child development where the child identifies its wholeness distinct from the mother's body serving as prosthesis (Lacan 2002). The female, incidentally, cannot amount to anything more than as a prop, a "thing" on which the male's image is confirmed, a "less than..." not a whole (Irigaray 1985a, 83).

Saul Green's response to Anna when she asked him not to give her his "pompous socialist lectures about the equality of men and women" attests to this hierarchical binary legacy. According to Green, he enjoys "a society where" he is the boss, and "women are second-class citizens" (GN, 526).

Saul Green discards the veneer that enshrined his earlier discussions with Anna as equals and reveals his true feelings about the place of the woman. According to Green, the woman's role in life is to make coffee for the man, not to write a bestseller novel. The most confounding aspect of this statement is that it reflects the views of every individual male character in *The golden notebook*. The complexity inherent in the novel's structure allows the same character to run through the entire bulky text in different pretexts and names. Green's confession about his true feelings is the text's invitation to question the truth about equality that the society claims to uphold. For a language that links intricately with the psyche of its users in the creation of gender dichotomy to represent a sexual category as a "lack", it invites a relook on its ability to represent humanity if the female exists as the binary opposite of the male.

The golden notebook employs words to represent the female as a "thing" in response to a tradition that establishes meaning. As such, Marion becomes "[a] nut-brown maid" (GN, 250) and "a nursemaid for the children" (GN, 252); while Ella in the yellow notebook's metafictional novel, *The shadow of the third* becomes "a pretty, flighty piece;" "sexy piece ... living a gay life" (GN, 207-08) because she decides to divorce the husband who ill-treats her. Irigaray (1985a) argues that patriarchal discourse creates the position of the "other" where the woman retains the position of the muted Other, with Other referring to the man. The attempt by Freud to postulate sexual sameness before symbolisation is merely as a point of comparison to show the limitations of the female sex. Language creates the woman that the social order wants to see, and the woman responds correspondingly to the appellation accorded her. According to Anna, "[t]hey still define us in terms of relationships with men, even the best of them" (GN, 26). However, *The golden notebook* seems to go beyond the accepted definition of "free women" as libidinal women to insert another meaning to "free," which can be interpreted as - allow the repressed or caged women their freedom -.

Resembling the ambivalence present in "free," *The awakening* (A) presents the underlying irony evident in the phrase "mother-woman." Edna does not qualify as a "mother-woman" because she lacks the attributes of the mother-women "who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (A, 51). Obvious from the description of the "mother-women" is Freud's Electra complex where the female child shifts her gaze from the mother who reminds her of her deformity to a male figure. The woman develops a desire for a baby, a phallic gift from the father, to help assuage her deficiency (Freud, 1968). Based on this, *The awakening* presents the wonderful attributes of the "mother-women" who subscribe to the normative ideals of their society concerning women.

However, the qualifiers used to highlight "mother-women" introduce some form of subtexts. The novel seems to criticise these women for "effacing" themselves and trying to be like "angels" while extolling their devotion to their husbands and children. The irony extends to the women's obsessive care of their children and husbands, which captures the irrationality attributed to the female deviants. The «mother-women» circumscribe their lives to others; yet the logocentric society privileges them. Probably, motherhood, which should salvage the "castrated" female from hysteria has never been free from hysteria, implying that the Freudian theory of femininity is fundamentally problematic. The text emphatically attests that Edna, who has two male children, is not a "mother-woman." Moreover, Edna trained her children to defend themselves in children's tussles rather than running to their mother or nurse for help. *The awakening seems to* intimate the need for a review of the existing understanding of motherhood.

The extradiegetic voice that intrudes into the accepted definition of "mother-women" compromises itself in the representation of Edna as not a "mother-woman," but a woman who begins "to recognize her relations as an individual ..." (A, 57). Mr. Pontellier, Edna's husband, replaces "mother-woman" with "capricious" (A, 74) because Edna refuses to efface herself and flutter like the "mother-women," and to her father, she lacks "filial kindness and respect, ... sisterly affection and womanly consideration" (A, 124). *The awakening* presents divergent voices acknowledging the women's relationships with the norms associated with motherhood and wifehood while parodying these women for unquestioningly living up to the expectations of society.

The ideology of "mother-woman" extends to *The golden notebook* to describe the relationships between Anna and her daughter, Molly and her son, Marion and her children as well as the male-female relationships. The children and the men, at some stage, cut off the women from the central roles they maintain in their lives. Janet informs the mother that she prefers ordinary life rather than living like the mother, Tommy shoots himself to confirm with the father that the mother is a bad role model, Marion's husband discards her, and ad infinitum. *The golden notebook* replays Lacan's "mirror" stage. The mother is an obstacle to the child's subjectivity. This negative image of the mother abounds in *The golden notebook* and the text maintains a rigid hold on the mother's function as either a caretaker or a sex provider. However, the same text that limits the woman to the position of a caregiver derides the males as incompetent husbands, fathers, and lovers. For instance, George Hounslow from Anna's black notebook with all his sex appeal and ability to make a woman "be under his spell physically" (GN, 126) leaves his wife to handle both their invalid parents, three children and her secretarial work while he fools around with African women. *The golden notebook* uses parody to expose the incongruity between the masculinist belief that power resides on the male and the male characters' infantile attitudes.

The awakening and *The golden notebook* indicate that language creates a different semantic register for women; yet, they present dissimilar voices that seem to question and

parody the authenticity of language to make such divisions. Both texts insist on creating their meaning outside the familiar system of signification. The subsequent sections explore the various ways the women have subscribed to being limited to the body as objects, commodities.

Commodification of woman: lived experiences

Irigaray's essay, "The blind spot of an old dream of symmetry" (1985a), implicates the centrality of the gaze in Freud's sex differentiation. While the sex organ of the man is physically obvious, that of the woman is manifestly blank. Both sexes have to "look" to confirm the obvious loss, visually acceding to the female sex as nothing, hence, affirming that the "gaze has always been involved" (Irigaray 1985a, 47). The visibility of the penis, in Freud's view, privileges the man and gives him the right to see the "supposed" lack in the woman who remains the object of his gaze.

Consequently, culture creates a link between the woman's biological peculiarity and her representations. The "supposed" obvious absence of a sexual organ confirms her deformity and gives the man the privilege to define her since his symbolisation does not need any outside reference. The body becomes a textual referent, "... a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control" (Bordo 1993, 2). The human body is a location for power relations, "the inscribed surface of events" (Foucault 1984, 83) where the power dynamics between the man and the woman occur. The subsequent section analyses the woman's body as a site of her objectification concomitant with the voices intruding from the texts to question the validity of representations based on the Phallus as the master signifier.

The awakening begins by introducing its first human character, Mr. Lebrun Pontellier, probably as a means of establishing his centrality to the signification process, especially as the text introduces him trying to read a day-old newspaper. The "day old" deictically positions the newspaper as an established norm. Mr. Pontellier represents the established means of understanding the unfolding events. However, antithetical to the privileging of Mr. Pontellier is the intrusion from the caged birds with "fluty" notes and "a language which nobody understood..." (A, 43), implicating other voices in the text. While the caged birds indicate the restricted position apportioned to women, metaphorically, the novel draws attention to the voices intruding into Mr. Pontellier's concentration. The notes from the birds seem to link *The awakening's* extradiegetic narration with many other voices including the patriarchal order that Mr. Pontellier represents. *The awakening* introduces its heteroglossia, foreshadowing defiance to a linear reading and a unitary meaning, from the onset.

Additional to the birds' disturbances are those from the house of Madame Lebrun. They seem bent on destabilising the equanimity of Mr. Pontellier to intimate the presence of a threat to his exalted position. It takes the entrance of his wife to restore his privilege. If the birds and the household of Madame Lebrun are allowed to destabilise his pride of place, his wife, "the sole object of his existence" (A, 48)

whom he had placed "among his household gods" (A, 99) has no other injunction but to restore her husband's view of himself as her owner. *The awakening* chooses and carefully manipulates words to orchestrate a disruption in the reader's frame of reference. Evident in the statement that Edna is "the sole object of" Mr. Pontellier's "existence" is Irigaray's assumption "... that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine"" (1985a, 133). Irigaray relates her statement to the psychoanalytic view of the woman as an object of the man's gaze rather than retaining her specific image. Consequently, Edna's presence restores Mr. Pontellier to what he considers himself to be - a subject - with Edna as his specular prop. *The awakening* intensifies this view by later reminding the reader that Mr. Pontellier has placed Edna among his "household gods," and denies Edna's corporeality as a presence. The epistemic device of patriarchy with Mr. Pontellier as its representative constitutes Edna in abstraction. The same device that activates Edna labels Adele Ratignolle a "mother-woman" and "the fair lady of our dreams" (A, 49). Ambivalently, the language that establishes these women as objects seems to be questioning the underlying principles of meaning-making which constitute a category of the human set as nothing while the other category retains full subjectivity.

The text, however, protests. Mr. Pontellier keeps Edna, provides her with a home, children, and his presence when it pleases him. As Irigaray posits, even though "the paths marked out for the two sexes" are dissimilar, the woman refutes her relations in obedience to social and cultural laws of marriage "so that she can be inscribed into those of men which will become the "origin" of her desire" (1985a, 33). Hence, the man positions himself as the only available source of origin to the woman. Without the man, the woman flounders, "insecure and uprooted" as *The golden notebook* labels them. Based on this, *The awakening* heightens Mr. Pontellier's act of possession through the panoptic survey of his wife: "You are burnt beyond recognition," he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (A, 44). Edna appropriates the husband's gaze by noticing the absence of her wedding ring when she participates with her husband to survey her hands "critically" (A, 44). Implicated in this display is the comment that the woman appropriates the gaze because she fails to realise her specificity "to the imaginary" (Irigaray 1985a, 133), which should provide the woman with a rightful identity and connect her to the source of all life, the mother. Conversely, as Irigaray contends, a return to "the imaginary" would deprive the man of what he considers his coveted position as the subject of the gaze and master of discourse, and this will cause patriarchy to flounder. Consequently, Edna succumbs to her husband's observation by critically assessing the damage she might have done to her body, Mr. Pontellier's property. She compensates for the dalliance with Richard by accepting her wedding rings, a re-enactment of the marriage ceremony.

Mr. Pontellier does not accept his father-in-law's view that the best way to manage a wife is through "[a]uthority, coercion" and putting his "foot down good and hard ..."

(A, 125), he rather expects “certain tacit submissiveness in his wife” (A, 108). The “submissiveness” includes Edna forfeiting her night’s sleep to listen to Pontellier’s story from Klein’s hotel, caring for a purportedly sick child because it is the mother’s duty, entertaining Pontellier’s potential business partners, ensuring that she complies with his expectations, and absorbing his anger when he is dissatisfied. She must also keep constant watch over her actions. As a system of subject-object relationship, Robert observes the re-enactment of the marriage law establishing Edna as Mr. Pontellier’s possession, hence Robert’s inability to court Edna on his return from Mexico. He could not allow his love for Edna to deprive him of his phallic status, which he made obvious in his rebuttal to Adele for advising him on his relationship with Edna. Robert categorically made his views clear in his response: “It isn’t pleasant to have a woman tell you” (A, 65), and this statement foreshadows the ending of his dalliance with Edna. A woman, even when older than Robert, is far beneath his dignity to warn him about his actions.

Similar to Mr. Pontellier’s view that Edna stays home to take care of his possessions while he goes out to make money, Cy Maitland in *The golden notebook* posits that his wife is happy because:

‘She’s got the best house in the town. She’s got everything she ever asks for, for the house. She’s got five boys, I know she wants a girl, but perhaps next time ... She has a fine time with me - we go out dancing once or twice a week... And she’s got me - and I’m telling you Ella, I don’t mean to boast,... but she’s got a man who’s doing pretty well.’ (GN, 292-293).

Cy Maitland intimates that his wife does not need anything outside himself and the children once he meets her material needs. Ironically, he surmises the constituents of his wife’s happiness while assuaging his sexual needs in a hotel room with another woman. His wife has everything for the house and CY, a successful medical doctor, but none of these “benefits” was from her perspective. Additionally, *The golden notebook* positions the hierarchical binary opposition that Cixous (1976) strongly castigates, intending to demonstrate the mental calculation that a man employs whenever a woman arouses his interest, especially an unattached woman. Anna relates an incident on her first encounter with Green:

I had made coffee, and he came into the kitchen on his way out so I offered him a cup. He hesitated. He was examining me. I have never in my life been subjected to as brutal a sexual inspection as that one. There was no humour in it, no warmth, just the stockman’s comparison making. It was so frank that I said: ‘I hope I pass...’ (GN, 482).

Saul Green subjects Anna to scrutiny as if she were a specimen under a microscopic examination. However, this form of examination ascertains her worth as a sexual object. In such an examination, she is metaphorically non-existent as a subject even when she is to become Green’s renter. Probably, Green’s abstracted gaze is a means to conjure what he expects her to be, which coincides with Irigaray’s valuation

that the women are “products,” “commodities” with their sexualised bodies as the “object of transaction”(1985b, 85). The women appropriate their representations to survive in the Symbolic order.

Edna and Anna have started to question their positionality in the Symbolic order when the other female characters have succumbed to the representations from the masculine culture. Both belong to the group of a few women who believe that equality with men, characterised by attaining education, developing a career path, divorcing their husbands if incompatible, and being able to make life choices would yield the long-awaited liberation for women. They failed to understand that the language of equality only goes as far as the presiding masculine order over symbolization permits. Dialogically, Anna and Molly are treading a similar path to Edna, sixty-three years later. Edna’s efforts to make the husband see her as his equal by discarding her usual Tuesday hosting of her husband’s associates, going tramping on her own, and claiming the eternal rights of women only resulted in being classified by Dr. Mandelet as one of the “moody and whimsical” women passing through a phase (A, 118). Anna’s rhetoric, therefore, positions her as one who has arrived at the understanding that some of feminism’s ideas of equality exist only in women’s imagination. The reality is far from such dreams. Anna is ready to give up such ideals and starts to ask questions that go deeper than surface equality. She desires answers to her “- what stereotype am I? What anonymous whole am I part of?” (GN, 63). Anna’s desire to understand herself seems an outcome of a relationship with Edna, who also questioned her lived experiences as the Colonel’s daughter and Mr. Pontellier’s wife, and an “inner light,” which compelled her to search for a self within her besides the one expected by the society. Anna and Edna realise that equality with men could not resolve the unsavoury representations of women. They unite with the texts to question their positions in a society that lumps them as human beings without privileges, a society that creates semantics for women who fail to adhere to the rule of positionality.

CONCLUSIONS: REPOSITIONING THE FEMALE

An intricate relationship exists between *The awakening* and *The golden notebook* based on the functions that language assigns to the protagonists. Edna and Anna become aware that they cannot free themselves from their limitations as women by belonging to a group of “mother-women” or a sorority of women who claim they are “free.” Their freedom becomes a battle that requires an initial victory on the individual basis by each woman insinuating herself into the subject positions recurrently. This, however, does not imply that motherhood and woman-to-woman relationships are not beneficial to a woman aspiring to the subject position. They are of utmost importance, especially when Lacan’s “mirror stage” thrives on the hatred evident on the female child’s anger with the mother for her lack and the child’s desire to split from the mother to form its subjectivity. Nevertheless, the female needs to free herself mentally before she can carry oth-

ers along. There is a need for further studies highlighting the underlying voices questioning the representations of women to clarify the statements these texts are making, and to identify the most appropriate means of attaining female subjectivity.

Edna and Anna contested their positioning in a male-dominated society, confirming that gender is constructed and entrenched in the language. The other women encountered in the texts did not yet understand that their assigned language was the language of the subjugated and that they had a choice to insert themselves into language. Anna and Edna, among their peers, attempted to dissociate from their objectification in language and lived experiences and re-define themselves. However, social, and cultural practice and representations positioned the male subjects in the domain of creating meanings and values. The male, according to Irigaray, is the only "animal" assumed to be "endowed with language, as rational animal And his language appears to be the universal itself." She further posits that "[a] perpetually unrecognised law regulates all operations carried out in language(s), all production of discourse, and all constitution of language according to the necessities of one perspective, one point of view and one economy; that of men who supposedly represent the human race" (2002, 227). This paper showed that the male's ownership of language created the woman as a libertine and a metaphorically abhorrent Medusa when she tried to exist outside his jurisdiction. The men "feely" engaged in sexually licentious living without being encumbered with any derogatory linguistic metaphor or socio-cultural attitudes. Theirs' was the norm. *The awakening* and *The golden notebook* confirmed that patriarchal language constructed the woman based on masculine desire, but both texts questioned such constructions.

Finally, though the language is masculine and brings the woman into being as a base form of the male subject, the brief analysis of *The golden notebook* and *The awakening* in the light of language as masculine is never devoid of an underlying voice, questioning itself. Such questioning attests that language defers meaning, each meaning points to another in an endless flow, as the post-structuralists posit. If language responds to previous utterances and pre-existing patterns as well as intends to seek further meanings, then repositioning the woman to a point where both the man and the woman will recognise each other as "irreducible others" will deflect the blind spot apportioned to the woman in the existing symbolic system. A system where the man complements the woman and vice versa is yet unavailable, however, the underlying voices in *The awakening* and *The golden notebook* identify its absence and highlight the mendacities evident in the existing language system in its representations of the woman. The highlights attest to the need for a repositioning of the woman.

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