Searching for Selves in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*

Toward an Understanding of the Interplay Between Character(ization) and Identity

Andrea Dale Wefring

A Thesis Submitted to The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo

In Partial Fulfillments of the Requirements for the MA Degree in Literature in English

60 ECTS

Supervisor: Nils Axel Nissen

Spring 2020

Searching for Selves in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*

Toward an Understanding of the Interplay Between Character(ization) and Identity

Andrea Dale Wefring

University of Oslo

2020

2020

Searching for Selves in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*: Toward an Understanding of the Interplay Between Character(ization) and Identity

Andrea Dale Wefring

http://www.duo.uio.no

Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

Abstract

The study of character and characterization has largely neglected the role of identity in the construction and interpretation of literary characters. Building on insights from classical, rhetorical, and cognitive narratology, as well as narrative psychology, this thesis attempts to establish a relationship between identity and character(ization). The basic claim is that the narrative rendition of identity development functions as a means of characterization, and reversely, that characterization results in identity attribution. Identity development as characterization is explored in a reading of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, while Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* serves as the case study of characterization as identity attribution. Both readings demonstrate that by bringing identity into the equation it is possible to achieve a richer analysis of character and characterization. Consideration is also given to the fact that while the relationship between identity and character(ization) can be broken down into two main components, identity development as characterization and characterization as identity attribution, both processes in fact happen simultaneously.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I want to thank my supervisor, Nils Axel Nissen. Although a fair amount of our time has been spent chatting about matters unrelated to my thesis, I have always been able to count on you to give valuable feedback without pulling any punches. Thank you for pointing out my cake-and-eat-it-too sentences, for giving me deadlines, and for having high expectations of me. Thank you for introducing me to Chopin and Wharton, for giving me all those books, and for the inspiring lectures and seminars over the years.

A huge thank you to my parents, for raising me in a home full of books.

I am forever grateful to Nick Allott, for making me believe I can take the leap from student to scholar, and for reminding me that although literature has taken a front seat, I am still and always will be a linguist, too.

Thanks are also due to the other amazing teachers who have inspired and challenged me during my years at UiO, especially Kevin Steinman, Cameron Sharp, Bruce Barnhart, Matt Williamson, and Tore Rem, and to Alexandra Effe for discussing identity in fiction with me and helping me put my core idea into words.

Above all, I want to thank my bonus-grandmother, Jofrid, who is equal parts inspiration and support system. Thank you for helping me decide on a topic for this thesis, for introducing me to Bakhtin, and for always offering guidance and encouragement when I need it. No one gives better advice.

The concept of character is perhaps the most problematic and the most undertheorized of the basic categories of narrative theory. It is also perhaps the most widely-used of all critical tools, at all levels of analysis; and its sheer obviousness disguises the conceptual difficulties it presents.

John Frow, "Spectacle Binding: On Character"

Contents

1. Introduction

Henry James' famous questions "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" are followed by the less frequently cited "What is either a picture or a novel that is *not* of character?" (58, emphasis in original). To me, that last question, with its implication that literature without character is nothing, touches on something absolutely essential. Character has always fascinated me above any other topic in literary studies. Moreover, I have often felt frustrated with the work done both on the concept of character *qua* character, and on specific characters from specific works of fiction. Not because the existing work is subpar scholarship, but because there is always a sense that something is missing. I do not believe that this thesis will alleviate that sense completely or even significantly, but I hope to be able to color in another small part of this vast and complicated picture. I have chosen to focus on fictional characters' identity because identity is a concept that attempts to explain what it is to be a person, and I believe that fictional characters have such an irresistible appeal because they, too, say something profound about the nature of personhood. Leaving aside the philosophical debate over whether or not the identities of fictional characters exist, I ask instead why and especially how they appear to have identities.

1.1. Identifying Identity

John Hawthorne suggests that "the concept of identity is so basic to our conceptual scheme that it is hopeless to attempt to analyse it in terms of more basic concepts" (100). Identity is the opposite of difference, it is what makes a thing that thing and not another thing. An intuitive understanding of this concept is what allows us to process sentences such as "After John finished work, he went home," because in order to understand the pronoun in the second clause the reader or hearer needs to conceptualize John as an entity and recognize that the referring expressions "John" and "he" point to identical entities, i.e. to the same person, the same *identity*. This form of comprehension hinges on language users having a basic concept of identity, as does our ability to understand pictorial representations, formal logic, equations, and any other artificial sign system, as well as more organic, social concepts like types of

relationships, or even the existence of relationships at all. We all understand and accept, at a level so fundamental that it is difficult to explain how we understand it, the truthfulness of the proposition "a thing is the same as itself." This sense of *identity* is the one used in metaphysics, and while it is different from the way the term is used in psychology, sociology, and everyday speech, the notion of identity as one of our most basic concepts is helpful in understanding why it is so hard to explain what we mean when we use the word in less technical contexts. Our problem is not that we do not know what the word *identity* means, it is that our understanding of it is so intuitive that we struggle to put it into words. Answering the question "what is identity?" with "well, it's who a person is" is like answering the question "why does your leg hurt?" with "because I feel pain there." All the same, when setting out to examine how fictional portrayals of identity and identity development work, it is necessary to explain what is meant by the term itself. Specific psychological theories on how identity is developed and understood will be explored in Chapter 2, for now the focus is on what is meant by the word *identity*, and its sibling *self*, in the context of this thesis.

While the notion of identity, or more accurately human identity, as unique instance of personhood might be so basic as to be practically unexplainable, the word also conveys meanings related to the substance of those unique instances of personhood, the perception of them, and the knowledge, experience, and awareness of being such an instance or observing and interacting with such an instance. Soundbite definitions of the word *identity* that cover the necessary and sufficient conditions of the meaning I intend it to convey have proven hard to come by. Most dictionaries list multiple meanings, some that cover various aspects of what I will be examining in the thesis, some that convey the metaphysical sense explained above, some to do with legal matters, and some pertaining to false personas that individuals might chose to present to the world under certain circumstances ("Identity" [Merriam-Webster]; "Identity" [OED]; "Identity" [Wiktionary]). According to Phillip L. Hammack Jr., identity is "concerned with sameness and difference at the level of social categorization, group affiliation, and inter-group relations, as well as at the level of individual consciousness or subjectivity" (13). This is more or less as specific as it is possible to get before things are excluded that ought to be included. Philosophers, who use "personal identity" in the sense of "the identity of persons" rather than the personal/social binary sometimes found in psychology and sociology, sometimes distinguish between two main problems of personal identity: the reidentification question, and the "Who am I?" question. The former deals with how or whether persons remain the same as themselves over time, while the second deals with the substance of the self. It is this "kind of identity that is at issue in an 'identity crisis'"

(Schechtman 74), and it is this kind of identity that this thesis is concerned with. In this thesis, the word *self* is used frequently, and should be seen as synonymous with *identity* in the "Who am I?" sense. While some assign different meanings to the two words, for instance Hammack states that "*identity* deals explicitly with properties of sameness and distinction that link the interior world of psychological experience and the exterior world of language and categorization. *Self* deals chiefly with the interior world and one's perception of it (or 'consciousness')" (13, emphasis in original), others use them interchangeably, and among those who consider them to have different meanings there is no consensus on exactly how to delineate them. For example, Marya Schechtman's *The Constitution of Selves*, despite the *selves* of the title, mainly uses the word *identity*. Some prefer to use only one of the terms, for instance the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on "Personal identity" avoids the term *self* because it "is often used without any clear meaning" (Olson). However, since both terms occur in the psychological and philosophical literature that informs this thesis, and in existing literary scholarship on the primary texts I am studying, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, I have chosen to use both and to use them interchangeably. This thesis frequently discusses identity *formation* or *development*, which refers to any and all processes involved in constituting and changing identity, while identity *construction* refers to the active and subjective side of development. The phrase *sense of self* is used here to indicate the subjective perception or understanding of the phenomena subsumed under *self*, *identity*, *selfhood*, and *personhood*. While it probably goes without saying, a central premise for this thesis is the presupposition that self, identity and sense of self are dynamic phenomena.

1.2. Primary Texts

The goal of this thesis is to examine the narrative portrayal of identity as both private and social phenomenon, by establishing a theoretical concept and using this concept to explore how two novels with psychologically complex protagonists depict, construct, and attribute identity. The two novels that serve as case studies for the theoretical concept suggested by this thesis, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, were published only six years apart, in 1899 and 1905, respectively. They were written in a period of transition from the plot-centric novel of the nineteenth century to the character-centric

novel of the twentieth, from the social commentary of realism to the psychological explorations of modernism, from the Victorian bildungsroman to the modernist deconstruction of the self. Additionally, they are more or less contemporary with William James' seminal work in psychology, which has been fundamental to, and still influences, the study of identity, and they anticipate by just a few years George Herbert Mead's work on the self as social construct. The novels both capture the conflict between social and personal identity, and their position relative to literary history and the development of psychological and sociological theories make them particularly interesting case studies. Furthermore, the novels both feature hetero- and extradiegetic narrators, which facilitates the analysis of the characters' awareness and perception of the identity formation they undergo, as this kind of narrator is able to give a variety of access to the characters' minds in the form of both psycho-narration, quoted inner monologue and narrated inner monologue, as well as offer external perspectives on the characters. A hetero- and extradiegetic narrator with access to a character's mind is also able to comment on the level of accuracy with which that character analyzes their own inner life, and inform the reader of things that the character is unaware of. The bulk of each novel is focalized by the protagonist, but the reader is also privy to outside views of the main characters through variation in focalization, more so in *The House of Mirth* where Lawrence Selden is a significant focalizer, but also occasionally in *The Awakening*.

A possible objection to my choice of primary texts might be that the novels are too similar to provide a productive comparison, and I feel I must anticipate that criticism and justify my choice. It is true that the novels share many similarities. Both feature female protagonists, Edna Pontellier and Lily Bart, of roughly the same age, in an upper-class setting, and the protagonists both struggle to reconcile their personal and social identities, and with identity development more broadly. Both heroines also die by their own hand (although perhaps accidentally in Lily's case). Moreover, the novels were written in the same time period, and both authors were American. C. J. Wershoven's succinct summary of the novels' commonalities also illustrates why they are apt case studies for a project such as this: "Both books recount a woman's steps as she moves to identity, through a process of rebellion, renunciation and isolation. And both break the chain of human growth before the final link: human connection of self to others" (27). Although I believe my fundamental claim about the relationship between identity and characterization holds true for most, if not all, narratives, novels that depict a complex and partially unsuccessful process of identity development will of course engender especially rich analyses. We will see that there are significant differences in the way in which Lily and Edna "move to identity," and in the narration of identity

development. These differences facilitate the exploration of a greater number of aspects of both identity development as characterization and characterization as identity attribution. At the same time, the novels' similarities allow for a comparison where it can easily be demonstrated that both of these processes occur simultaneously. In short, the similarities between the two novels form a uniform backdrop against which the differences in how they approach the topic of identity become all the more apparent.

Moreover, I will use the novels to illuminate two different sides of the relationship between identity and characterization. In my reading of *The Awakening* the primary focus is on identity development as characterization, whereas my reading of *The House of Mirth* focuses on characterization as identity attribution. This is an artificial divide, but it is sometimes necessary to break down a complex process into its constituents and examine them separately, before bringing them back together. The differences between the novels streamlines the division of a complex process into two major components. *The Awakening* thematizes identity development, so it is natural to consider how this process is told and what it reveals about Edna as a character. In *The House of Mirth*, the protagonist's identity is elusive and the characterization is composite, which makes for a fascinating example of identity attribution is a result of characterization. The novels' similarities make the comparison, and the resulting argument that the interaction between identity and characterization happens in both direction at once, more convincing.

Any portrayal of identity development is likely to be an instance of characterization. It is unimaginable that a narrative could present a character's self-discovery or self-construction without also revealing who that character is and what they are like. On the flipside, characterization – direct and indirect – will inevitably shape the reader's understanding of the character's identity. The characterization might be accurate or inaccurate, vague or unequivocal, subtle or obvious, but either way it attributes an identity or aspects of an identity to the character in questions. Character narration will always consist of both these processes.

1.3. Approach

I am writing in a tradition that stands on the shoulders of many of the greats of narratology, but Dorrit Cohn's groundbreaking study *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting*

Consciousness in Fiction deserves special mention. While I make only a few explicit references to this seminal work, writing this thesis would probably not have been possible had she not written what remains to this day the most well-rounded study of fictional consciousness. Every subsequent work on the study of minds, cognition, and inner lives in fictional narrative, some of which have been instrumental to the present study, owes Cohn a debt of gratitude. Another theorist whose ideas inform this thesis as a whole is M. M. Bakhtin. His work on speech genres, heteroglossia, and dialogism have been especially important to my reading of *The House of Mirth*, but these theories have also fundamentally influenced how I approach literature in general. More recent developments in cognitive literary studies have inspired me greatly, as well. Alan Palmer's *Fictional Minds* has been essential to my understanding of portrayals of fictional consciousness and cognition, and is in large part responsible for sparking my interest in studying literature through the lens of cognitive science. Another important influence is Melba Cuddy-Keane's article "Narration, Navigation and Non-Conscious Thought: Neuroscientific and Literary Approaches to the Thinking Body," which shows that examining cognitive processes in literature has value that extends far beyond just our understanding of the literary text at hand. Cuddy-Keane suggests, and demonstrates, "that narrative representations of inner states may offer intuitive evidence of bodily cognition" (683), and this, of course, goes for other kinds of cognition as well. She emphasizes that this connection between literary studies and the cognitive sciences is a two-way street where literature provides useful illustrations of how cognitive processes work, and that understanding more about cognition makes us better analytical readers. I consider literary texts to be a valuable way of understanding lay theories of human psychology, because they showcase how an author who is not a psychologist, neuroscientist, or sociologist perceives, understands, and presents the cognitive and social processes involved in, in this case, identity formation. I also believe that a fictional character is not so different from an abstract idea of identity, and therefore works of fiction can teach us much about how we understand ourselves and others. Another scholar whose work has been an important influence on my approach to literature, David Herman, suggests that "characters in novels . . . are at once shaped by and have the power to reshape broader conceptions of what a person is" (Herman, Phelan, et al. 127), which points to how literary and scientific conceptions of identity might enter into a reciprocal relationship. Additionally, approaching a text and fictional character with knowledge about identity formation processes from psychology, philosophy of mind, and other cognitive sciences, is an interesting way to clarify and illuminate what is happening in

the text, to make connections that might otherwise be missed, and to go deeper into narrative analysis.

Real-world understandings of how the human mind works rely on subjects' self-reporting, on observations in natural and experimental settings, and on various types of brain scans. These approaches of course lead to great discoveries and are productive methods of research, but they are complicated and frustrated by factors such as self-deception, the observer's paradox, confirmation bias, the impossibility of accurately translating thoughts and other cognitive processes into words, and technological limitations. At present, there is no way to actually see inside another person's mind, to experience their cognitive processes from the inside. Fiction might in fact be the closest it is possible to get to an inside view of another's consciousness. The entry on "Thought and Consciousness Representation" in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* opens with the observation that "When the narrators of novels present direct to readers the contents of characters' minds, they are doing what cannot be done in real life. We cannot look into the minds of other people in the actual world in the way that, as readers, we look into the minds of people in a fictional storyworld" (Palmer, "Thought and Consciousness" 602), which illustrates the point that fiction offers a unique kind of access to a mind, albeit a mind that does not exist in the real world. In *Fictional Minds*, Palmer notes that "the reader uses existing or prestored knowledge of other minds in the actual world in order to process the emergent knowledge that is supplied by fictional-mind representation" (175), which supports the argument that increasing our knowledge of how actual minds work makes us better able to understand and analyze specific fictional characters, the mechanisms of characterization, and the entire concept of character. An understanding of actual cognitive processes helps us understand fictional minds, and the inside view of the mind provided by fictional narratives can teach us something about how we as humans understand and engage with our own and others' existence. Just as we bring real-world knowledge to fictional text in order to understand the characters we are reading about, so may we bring insights from fiction into the real world and deepen our understanding of ourselves and the people we interact with. To me, this is what makes the study of character so immensely fascinating.

Identity in fiction is usually discussed in one of the following ways: a) using the metaphysical concept of identity in discussions about the ontological status of fictional characters, b) debating whether fictional character do or do not have identities, or c) studying cultural identity through lenses of post-colonial, queer and/or feminist theory. These are all fascinating topics, but they are not the only ways to study literary identity. I wish to establish

an explicit link between identity and character/characterization. The study of fictional minds has often been restricted to stylistic analyses of free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness. The latter term, curiously, was first used by William James, whose groundbreaking work *The Principles of Psychology* laid the foundation for much subsequent work on identity in psychology and other disciplines. Even those studies that give psycho-narration its proper due, like Cohn's *Transparent Minds* and Palmer's *Fictional Minds* and *Social Minds in the Novel*, all but ignore the question of identity. Identity is not, of course, synonymous with mind, but the study of fictional consciousness has rarely been properly linked with the study of characterization, and I believe identity is a useful framework for bringing these topics closer together.

The ontology of fictional character has been extensively debated, with significant contributions from for instance Uri Margolin and John Frow. For the present purposes, I believe the best approach is to treat characters as possible persons that exist in non-actual possible worlds. This approach has roots in possible worlds semantics, a topic from philosophy and modal logic which has been fruitfully adapted to literary studies by Lubomir Doležel, Thomas Pavel, Marie-Laure Ryan and others. In this tradition, Uri Margolin has written extensively on character as *non-actual individual*, arguing that fictional characters are complete and coherent entities that exist in a possible world created by the text. The aforementioned Alan Palmer follows this tradition, and goes as far as to say that "Discussions on how fictional minds are constructed *have to* be put in the context of possible-worlds theory" (*Fictional Minds* 33, emphasis mine). I agree with Palmer, and believe this is also the most fruitful way of approaching fictional identity formation. Seeing characters merely as, for instance, actants or speech positions would limit the extent to which it is possible to analyze the social and cognitive processes portrayed in the text. Palmer points out that "Dispositions play an especially important role in the workings of the fictional mind because they are the primary link between the study of characters' immediate consciousness and the area of characterization" (*Fictional Minds* 108). As pointed out above, I believe that by studying fictional identity we can bring consciousness representation and characterization closer together, and dispositions are of course an important identity component. In order to fully appreciate what fictional representations of consciousness (and, I would argue, any other aspect of cognition, emotion, inner life, or identity) can contribute to characterization, it is necessary to perceive of the character as something person-like which can have dispositions.

Palmer finds it "odd that narrative discourse analysis has neglected phenomena such as dispositions" (*Fictional Minds* 108). I, on the other hand, do not find this odd or surprising.

As any student of literature can attest, attributing dispositions, not to mention emotions or desires, to characters is still something of a taboo, even anathema, in many classrooms. While I doubt that claiming that a typical narrative describes "*who* did something, *what* they did, and *how* and *why* they did it" would be met with much resistance, consideration of the *who* and the *why* is often underemphasized or outright discouraged. While positions such as those presented in L. C. Knights' infamous "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" which presents a savage attack on character-oriented Shakespeare criticism, or Joel Weinsheimer's "Theory of Character: Emma," wherein Emma Woodhouse is consistently referred to as *it* rather than *she*, might be considered extreme, acceptance of their central thesis that characters are not persons is commonplace. Students of literature are continuously reminded that characters are nothing more than words on a page, and making a claim such as "Holden Caulfield is cynical" is often met with resistance from the teacher, not because they wish to nuance the interpretation of Holden and suggest that he might not be as cynical as he appears at first glance, but because "we need to remember that Holden is a fictional character, and as such he cannot *be* anything at all." This attitude frustrates the task of combining textual evidence into coherent characterization. If we cannot, say, ascribe to Hamlet a *disposition* toward delay and indecision, we do not fully appreciate the way in which the character's personality is closely tied to the causality of the plot. Or, turning to one of this thesis' case studies, if we read the numerous references to Lily Bart's interest in introspection as isolated from each other and, more importantly, as isolated from the references to her self-deception and avoidance of her own company, they are meaningless. Taken together and synthesized into dispositions and traits, however, a coherent character emerges, and we can appreciate that the narrator presents Lily as inconsistent, lacking in metacognitive awareness, and interested in her own inner life only insofar as she finds confirmation of what she wants to believe. Put differently, in order to consider the narration of fictional personhood, i.e. characterization, it is crucial to accept all aspects of personhood as possible in the fictional world. Refusing to consider characters as person-like is to refuse to consider character.

A possible worlds approach to character is further justified by the common and well-founded assumption that conceptualizing fictional characters as complete, albeit non-real, persons is how real readers actually read. In *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, Monika Fludernik argues that "readers' visualization of experientiality are necessarily linked to the existence of a human subject," that "personhood, and particularly *identity*, is a fundamental presupposition about the real world," and that "the narratological category of *person* [is] firmly wed … to the cognitive concept of *personhood*" (245, 248, 249, emphases in original).

In other words, readers need to and do relate to fictional characters as something akin to real persons. Not every literary scholar needs to study character, of course, and not all those who do need to study character in the same way. But at least some of us ought to take a possible worlds approach, because otherwise we are not studying how character is read. As Baruch Hochman puts it: "we must deal with the fact that the canonical texts of the Western literary tradition have seemed to readers to deal with people and to project powerful images of discrete human beings" (28).

All of this being said, I recognize the need to take a nuanced view of what fictional character might be, and will not ignore the importance of acknowledging that fictional characters are textual entities. This thesis is, after all, primarily a study of characterization, and as such rests on an explicit acknowledgment of the constructedness of literary character. This is not incompatible with a non-actual individual view. Margolin emphasizes that character is conceived both "as text-embedded and as lifelike," and proposes that "the two conceptions of character are complementary and . . . the whole story of character in narrative can be told if and only if both are born in mind and related to each other" ("The What, the When" 453-54). While I believe that to tell "the whole story of character" is an impossible endeavor, I agree whole-heartedly that character needs to be seen both as construct and as almost-person. This question will be illuminated further in Chapter 2 when I discuss James Phelan's model of character as thematic, synthetic, and mimetic.

The entry on "Identity and Narrative" in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* focuses exclusively on the role of narrative in real-world identity formation (Ritivoi). *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* includes a chapter entitled "Identity/Alterity," but that chapter makes no attempt to link questions of identity to the nature of fictional character or characterization, and the list of suggested further reading on the topic consists entirely of philosophical works and works on post-colonial or racial issues. Palmer's *Fictional Minds* occasionally mentions *identity,* but does not examine how it is constructed or interpreted in narrative (although the socially distributed self, which he terms *situated identity,* is discussed, and this concept will be explored in Chapter 2), and almost none of the works listed in the bibliography of that book seem to thematize identity or selfhood. Moreover, most of the work I have found on identity in specific literary texts list no theoretical works on the topic of identity *in fiction* in their bibliographies. If they include theoretical works at all it is from philosophy, not literary studies, and what little I have found that deals more broadly and conceptually with the topic of identity in fiction is primarily concerned with the ontological status of fictional characters, or with specific forms of cultural identity. Much has been done

in cognitive and other poststructuralist branches of narratology on the representation of fictional consciousness, and on how readers relate to characters. This work forms an invaluable basis for this thesis. Other topics that have been studied extensively are the function of narrative in real-world identity formation, identity construction in autobiography, the ontology of fictional characters, and cultural identity in fiction, particularly from queer, post-colonial and feminist points of view. All of these approaches inform my study, but none of them, as far as I have found, have considered explicitly the process of fictional identity formation nor its relationship with characterization. It is my hope that this study can draw on the existing research and add some new perspectives, in order to shed light on how dynamic identity formation is presented in literature, how it interacts with other elements of narrative, and how readers engage with this aspect of characterization.

1.4. Organization of This Thesis

In addition to this introduction, the present thesis consists of three main chapters. One chapter is dedicated to the theory of character(ization) and identity, and the other two chapters examine identity and characterization in the primary texts, first *The Awakening* and then *The House of Mirth*. Chapter 2 provides an overview of some of the most important existing accounts of literary character and characterization, and discusses their advantages and shortcomings. I consider the prototypical structuralist account of character as function, the story/discourse distinction, the thematic, synthetic, and mimetic character dimensions of rhetorical narratology, and cognitive narratology's orientation toward the reader's mental construction of character. I discuss some existing frameworks for studying characterization, and argue that the tradition has had an unfortunate tendency toward excessive use of taxonomies and formulae. The most important psychological theory for this thesis, narrative identity, is explained, and the question of what identity means in the specific context of fiction is addressed. Finally, I present my claim that identity development is characterization, and characterization is identity attribution. Chapter 3 examines identity development in *The Awakening*, and considers how it functions as characterization. A three-way division of the self is suggested by the text, and these components are discussed separately, before consideration is given to the novel's overall presentation of identity development and how this functions as characterization. Chapter 4 explores characterization as identity attribution in

The House of Mirth through an survey of some of the diverse and seemingly contradictory ways in which the protagonist is depicted, and argues that the fragmented characterization attributes a fragmented identity. My readings of the novels do not, regretfully, consider every element of identity development or of characterization. I say regretfully, but it is of course a privilege to study novels rich enough that an exhaustive analysis of just one character would fill several volumes. I have attempted to strike a balance between variety and depth that allows for a fair discussion of the overarching processes of identity development and characterization, while still examining the narrative technique in sufficient detail to see how the components that make up character narration function. Chapter 5, the conclusion, reviews the findings from chapters 3 and 4, and connect them with the theoretical construct proposed in chapter 2, before making some suggestions for further study of this topic.

Finally, a brief note on pronouns: when referring to persons or entities whose gender is irrelevant or unknowable, such as a narrator or a hypothetical reader, I use the generic singular *they*. This usage is consistent with standard practice in spoken English ("Oh, look, someone left *their* wallet"), and has also been used in written English for several centuries ("They," def. 2 a and b). Although traditionally discouraged in academic writing, in recent years the use of generic singular *they* has been deemed acceptable by most style guides, and some now actively recommend it ("Singular 'They'"; "How Do I").

2. Character and Identity

This chapter sketches a theory for the relationship between character, characterization and identity. The theory will then be broken down into two main components which will be explored separately in the follow chapters, using first Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and then Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* as case studies. I begin by briefly outlining three of the major approaches to character within narratology and its predecessor structuralism. I point to some of the shortcomings of the existing accounts, and identify several obstacles to a cohesive theory of character and characterization. I also consider how the different approaches relate to one another. I then turn to identity, discussing the central psychological theory I use in this thesis, narrative identity, and ask what identity means in the specific context of narrative fiction. Then follows the combination of these concepts, where I consider how identity and character intersect and intertwine. The central claim of this chapter, which will be supported by the readings of *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* in the following chapters, is that the depiction of identity development functions as characterization, and that characterization is a form of identity attribution.

Character is one of the fundamental building blocks of narrative fiction, and identity is a concept that goes to the very heart of what it is to be a person. It is only natural, then, that there are countless theories and accounts of both these concepts within literary studies and psychology respectively. I have chosen the limited selection of existing accounts presented here for the following reasons: it seems natural to start with structuralism and classical narratology, because this is the foundation for all later incarnations of narratology. Rhetorical narratology is included because it has perhaps done the most extensive and coherent work on character. In a study that combines narratological and psychological approaches, it would be downright unseemly not to include cognitive narratology. In fact, I consider this study to belong in the landscape of cognitive narratology, although I take a less reader-oriented approach to character than most of the work in that tradition. Narrative psychology is used because it is a framework that sees identity as story-like, and as such is a natural fit for literary studies. Moreover, the narrative view reduces the gap between identity development and identity proper, just as this study suggests a reduction of the gap between characterization and character.

Naturally, it is impossible to separate character and plot. In Henry James' legendary words: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the

illustration of character?" (58). Moreover, I do not believe it is desirable to attempt this separation. However, while this is not a study of character detached from plot, it is also not a study of the relationship between character and plot. It is above all a study of characterization, which is not easily disentangled from character proper. Various ways in which plot and character action can function as characterization are naturally taken into account as they become relevant in the specific novels at hand. However, this chapter does not explicitly discuss the way in which plot and character interact.

2.1. Existing Accounts of Character and Characterization

That character is the most neglected and undertheorized concept in narratology, and in literary studies in general, has become something of a truism. However, as Ralf Schneider points out "Although character has never been at the forefront of scholarly interest in literature, the study of character has never really run out of steam either" ("Updated Proposal" 117). These statements may be less contradictory than they appear at first glance. Perhaps the study of character has never run out of steam precisely because the concept has never been adequately theorized. This section outlines some of the existing accounts, which are disparate but nevertheless belong to a common tradition. The range and partial incompatibility of these accounts goes some way toward explaining why it is so difficult to establish an all-encompassing theory of character. This thesis has no pretension to provide a complete and superior account, but rather aims to illuminate some aspects of character that have been especially neglected.

2.1.1. Structuralism(s) and Classical Narratology

To speak of a single structuralist approach to, or conceptualization of, character would be a gross oversimplification (see Margolin, "Structuralist Approaches" for an overview). Moreover, character has traditionally been an underemphasized concept in structuralism, indeed it is "the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention" (Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* 269). However, some generalizations can be made, and while these may not cover all of structuralism, they indicate central tendencies within structuralism,

and its descendant classical narratology, which illuminate why these areas of study have failed to produce a cohesive theory of character and characterization, and reveal some of the obstacles facing those who endeavor to rectify this. Jonathan Culler explains structuralism's devaluation of character partly as a consequence of "the general ethos of structuralism [which] runs counter to the notions of individuality and rich psychological coherence which are often applied to the novel," and adds that structuralism sees character as "a space in which forces and events meet rather than individuated essence" (*Structuralist Poetics* 269).

Perhaps the most prototypical structuralist approach to character is the character-as-function approach exemplified by Vladimir Propp's roles or A.J. Greimas' actants. Here, narrative is seen as primarily a representation of action sequences. Characters are essentially reduced to the actions they perform, and categorized according to their effect on the unfolding of events. The character-as-function approach leaves no room for characters' personalities or other "human" attributes – as Suzanne Keen bluntly puts it: "This kind of analysis ultimately privileges story over character" (68) – or perhaps it is more accurate to say that things like personalities are simply irrelevant. After all, this approach aims to establish where characters fit in the structure of narrative, not to investigate what a character is or how it is portrayed (see Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* 271-74; Rimmon-Kenan 34-35; Margolin, "Structuralist Approaches" 4, 6-7).

According to Culler, structuralism aims to "study the inevitable artifice in the construction of characters" (*Structuralist Poetics* 271). This goal, combined with the notion that "we must read a novel on the assumption that we have been told all that we need to know" (271), leads to an approach wherein to study a character's degree of psychological realism, or to consider the character's mind or identity, becomes not just infelicitous, but entirely non-sensical. However, this approach also goes to the extreme of disregarding both author and reader. Considering for instance Marie-Laure Ryan's *principle of minimal departure,* which states that as readers we construct storyworlds with the assumption that what we know about reality holds true for the fictional world as well unless otherwise specified (51-52), and Alan Palmer's comparison of how we read/"read" fictional and real minds in *Fictional Minds,* it becomes evident that real readers do not in fact assume that "we have been told all that we need to know," but use their real-world knowledge to make inferences and fill narrative gaps. And although looking for authorial intent is treacherous territory, as well as unproductive in many cases, the reader will always search for the intended message. Being on the receiving end of an instance of communication (an utterance), involves more than a search for meaning, but a search for *intended* meaning. This is essential to

communication. The addressee of an utterance needs to be able to distinguish between intended and literal meaning, otherwise hyperbolic and figurative utterances like "I could eat a horse" or "she's an absolute angel" would not make sense. One model for how communication works is relevance theory's "ostensive-inferential communication," which at its core states that a communicative act consists of "an 'informative intention' (to make manifest a set of assumptions) and a 'communicative intention' to make the informative intention manifest" (B. Clark 113). The interpreter recognizes an act (e.g. an utterance) as "ostensively communicative" (113) and will then "proceed by looking for the *intended* meaning" (120, emphasis mine). Of course, this does not mean that it is possible to accurately determine the author's intent, or that this is what readers attempt to do. We can accept that literature is an act of communication while still steering clear of the dreaded Intentional Fallacy. Relevance theory acknowledges that "the communicator's informative and communicative intentions cannot be decoded, but only non-demonstratively inferred, so that comprehension necessarily takes place at a risk" (Wilson 72). This communicative model is one way to account for what Suzanne Keen calls "the reader's complicity in responding to cues in order to participate in fictional worldmaking" (10).[1] So far, then, it is clear that while structuralism might have much to say about how text works, it has very little to say about how reading works. While this thesis is not purely or even predominantly reader-response oriented, the fact remains that part of the rationale for choosing a possible worlds/non-actual individual approach to character is the belief that this is how real readers read. Cognitive narratology, as will be discussed below, has shifted the focus of the study of character to how the reader's mental construction of character works for this very reason.

However, the disregard for extra-textual elements in general and the reader in particular is not the only reason that structuralism's approach to character is limiting, nor does the anti-mimetic attitude of the character-as-function view complete the list. It might even be unfair to call it limiting, because structuralism's approach is of course aligned with structuralism's goals. Potentially a much greater obstacle, and a more influential one, is the story/discourse distinction. The distinction between *story* and *discourse* – also called *fabula* and *sjuzhet* or *histoire* and *récit*, among other terms – represents the breaking down of

[1] Relevance theory posits that our cognition is geared toward optimal relevance. For the interpreter that involves a balance of finding the most relevant interpretation for the least amount of cognitive effort. This search for relevance can be seen as analogous with Culler's "rule of significance: read the poem as expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and/or his relation to the universe" (*Structuralist Poetics* 134). In other words, the search for optimal relevance in the specific context of reading literature is a search of this "significant attitude."

narrative into *what* is told (story) and *how* it is told (discourse) (Shen). It is a central idea in Russian formalism, structuralism, and classical narratology, which lives on in more recent incarnations of narratology as well. Indeed, the need to distinguish between story and discourse might traditionally be one of the less contentious issues in narratology (Culler, *Signs* 188-89). However, while the story/discourse distinction survives in every incarnation of narratology, albeit sometimes in a modified form, it is an essentially structuralist concept, and it is at the core of structuralism. For instance, James Phelan refers to "the *structuralist* definition of narrative as a synthesis of story and discourse" ("Authors, Resources, Audiences" 1, emphasis mine). And structuralism, as we have seen, tends to underemphasize character. This separation of narrative planes can be constructive and necessary. When discussing for instance an achronological narrative, it is obviously essential to recognize that the sequence of events is different in the story and in the discourse. However, character and characterization are less easily contrasted in this way. Characterization can be incomplete, illogical, unreliable, and confusing, but it cannot contradict its character the way discourse chronology can contradict story chronology, because the character comes into being as a direct result of characterization. The story/discourse distinction causes the two to be relegated to different realms – characters exist in the story and characterization happens in the discourse. To facilitate a constructive study of character, it must be acknowledged that character and characterization are two parts of a whole that must be joined together. Forcing them into separate domains hinders both complete analysis of specific characters, and a cohesive theory of character in general. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan employs a three-way distinction, *story*, *text*, and *narration*, but it is nevertheless extremely telling that her book *Narrative Poetics* includes two separate chapters called respectively "Story: characters" and "Text: characterization." Phelan sums up the distinction's influence by observing that it has a "powerful effect on the perception of those who buy into it – which is to say the majority of narrative theorists. Because it has been *bred in our bones*, we have come to accept it as capturing something essential about the nature of narrative" ("Authors, Resources, Audiences" 5, emphasis mine). It does not seem much of a stretch, then, to place at least some of the blame for the undertheorizing of character on the division of narrative into story and discourse.

The story/discourse distinction has been widely debated in recent years, but few have tied its problems to the question of character(ization). Phelan, in the article quoted above, advocates expanding Seymour Chatman's hugely influential model of narrative communication to include, among other things, character-character dialogue. He reasons that

"since characters fall on the story side of the binary distinction, and since the communication model is about discourse, we find it natural that characters are not part of it," but suggest that it would be fruitful to "reconfigure[e] the story/discourse distinction as a heuristic rather than a truth" ("Authors, Resources, Audiences" 5). His observation that "scenes of character-character dialogue often function simultaneously as events and as narration by other means, that is, as story and as discourse" (5) implies a more radical reconfiguration as well: that characters transcend the story/discourse boundary.

Uri Margolin suggests that character be considered as a non-actual individual that exists as a person in a non-actual possible world. He initially identified this as a structuralist approach, although he has since been adopted by cognitive narratology. "The Greimasian and generally folkloristic understanding of character as actant or role assumes the classical view of narrative as the verbal representation of an action sequence" (Margolin, "Structuralist Approaches" 6), which initially might appear incompatible with a reader-oriented cognitive approach. After all, the cognitive approach assumes that fictional characters are non-actual individuals (or similar concepts), or at least that the typical reader understands them as such. Character as actant is far too simplistic, according to cognitive narratology. However, the assumption that readers tend to see narratives as action sequences seems reasonable. It might be possible, then, to combine "the classical view of narrative as the verbal representation of an action sequence" with character as non-actual individual instead of actant. However, the assumption that "there is a limited number of types of acts and action sequences, and hence a small number of corresponding actantial roles" (6) would seem to exemplify *structuralist* in the somewhat condescending way it is sometimes used today, carrying connotations of something overly rigid and reductionistic. However, the fact that some aspects of structuralist definitions of narrative and narrative elements are compatible with the cognitive approach while others are not indicates that it is a continuum. So, the possible worlds approach sees "narrative . . . not as primarily an action sequence, but rather as the temporal succession of states of affairs, mediated by events" (7), which is different from the classical view, but not *that* different.

2.1.2. Rhetorical Narratology

Rhetorical narratology might be where the most developed theory of character is found, mainly due to the work of one man, James Phelan. His detailed account, presented in *Reading*

People, Reading Plots, is habitually summarized as consisting of "three categories for the understanding of character: the *synthetic*, for artificial characters whose constructedness shows; the *mimetic*, for those who are most person-like; and the *thematic*, for those characters which exist the fulfill social roles or represent ideas" (Keen 69, emphasis in original). It is important to recognize that Phelan considers all characters to have mimetic, synthetic, and thematic dimensions, and the capacity to fill mimetic, synthetic, and thematic functions. Keen's choice of the word *categories* and the phrasing that suggests that specific characters can be neatly placed into one or another of these, is somewhat misleading, but her summary is otherwise accurate and succinct. Phelan's view, especially his account of the mimetic dimension, is generally compatible with a non-actual individual approach, and he is of the opinion that "characters are images of possible people" (*Reading* 2). However, an emphasis on the thematic dimension is closely related to the actantial view, and an emphasis on the synthetic dimension might move in the direction of stylistics. Indeed, the rhetorical approach is an attempt to bring together disparate views: the structuralist concern with the synthetic and thematic, and the focus on the mimetic found in for instance cognitive narratology and theories influenced by possible-worlds semantics. Phelan and fellow rhetorical narratologist Peter J. Rabinowitz explicitly state that "Our position is that we should eliminate the competition between these positions by recognizing that character has both mimetic and synthetic components – and thematic components as well" (Herman, Phelan, et al. 111).

Phelan, although he claims that he is "not yet in Gérard Genette's league as a coiner of appropriately high-sounding, scientific, and expensive terms" (*Reading* x), is prone to taxonomies and terminology-laden theories. While the synthetic, mimetic, and thematic components of character may be treated separately and can be seen to vie for dominance, they can also be seen as working together. My analyses rest on a view of these three components as not just linked but melted together. Phelan and Rabinowitz to some extent see the three components as fighting for the spotlight, especially the synthetic and the mimetic, which they claim are "often (though not always) on a seesaw" (Herman, Phelan, et al. 113), with the reader's interest usually directed toward one at the expense of the other. While this is true in many cases, the synthetic component can sometimes be seen to support and highlight the mimetic as well. Extreme foregrounding of the synthetic dimension is not terribly common, but certainly not entirely obscure. We might consider two fairly mainstream examples in order to understand how the synthetic and mimetic can work together. In Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, the way in which the narrator explicitly comments on the process of crafting a story sometimes adds to, rather than detracts from, the mimetic effect of

the narrative. When the main character, Tomas, is first introduced with the passage "I had been thinking about Tomas for many years. But only in the light of these reflections did I see him clearly. I saw him standing at the window" (5), the artificiality of the character is highlighted, but the narrator's move from thinking to seeing gives the scene a visceral impact, bringing Tomas alive. Ben Lerner's novel *10:04*, in many ways a study in metafiction which highlights the synthetic dimension throughout, includes a short story supposedly written by the narrator as a fictionalized version of his life. This foregrounding of the synthetic heightens the mimetic as well, because the short story in question was in fact published by Ben Lerner prior to the publication of *10:04*, so the narrator is aligned with the author, making him appear more real because of the implication that he shares an identity with a person known to exist in the actual world. A more subtle foregrounding of the synthetic can be found in the *tableaux vivants* scene in *The House of Mirth*, and again the synthetic is used to support the mimetic. Placing fictional characters in a role-playing situation risks pulling the reader out of the illusion that they are reading about real people by reminding them of how characters are sculpted and molded, but Lily Bart as Reynolds' Mrs. Lloyd in fact showcases the impact of Lily's beauty, the physicality of which enhances the mimetic effect of the character.

The rhetorical account also gives primacy to the relationship between character and plot. Phelan states that this was not his original intention when he set out to write *Reading People, Reading Plots*, but that he found it to be inevitable (ix). However, while many structuralist approaches subordinate character to plot (or "progression," Phelan's preferred term), the rhetorical account sees the relationship as more dynamic. Whether to privilege plot or character depends, according to Phelan and Rabinowitz, on the study's aims. Moreover, some narratives give greater prominence to plot, and some to character. It can certainly be argued that *The Awakening* privileges character, and perhaps that *The House of Mirth* does the same.

I also find it natural to link character with progression, and attention will be paid to this factor in the chapter on *The House of Mirth* especially. However, my project diverges from the rhetorical approach in one significant way. Phelan's "goal is to understand the principles upon which a narrative is constructed" (*Reading* 12). My goal is to understand the interplay between characterization and identity, and therefore the character-as-function element, which is approached differently by structuralism and rhetoric, but which remains important to both, is less central to my study. This is the difference, I believe, between studying character's role in the system of narrative, and studying character *qua* character. While I certainly accept that character is inseparable from plot, my focus is not explicitly on

the relationship between the two. Phelan also ties the mimetic dimension to the question of plausibility, which I will not do to a great extent. While the psychological realism of *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* could be analyzed in detail, and the plausibility of the protagonists is surely an important reason for the novels' enduring popularity, the question of whether these characters are convincing as possible people is irrelevant to the present study. However, it must be admitted that these novels were chosen partly due to the complex and realistic way in which they portray identity development. Since I use theories from the study of real persons in order to understand and explain fictional characters, it is of course useful to study characters with a certain degree of psychological depth and plausibility.

The rhetorical approach shares one of my main concerns about structuralism, the disregard for extra-textual participants: "the structuralist seeks an objective view of the text, one which foregrounds the text as construct, . . . [the] rhetorical view . . . foregrounds the text as communication between author and reader" (*Reading* 8). For a project such as this, which in essence aims to understand how characterization works, literature as communication is central. The question of characterization becomes interesting when we ask how the available information might be consolidated into a coherent portrait, and this is consolidation is achieved through the reader's interpretation. Seeing literature as communication acknowledges the reader's active role in meaning-making. Moreover, we must not forget that literary scholars are also readers, and we might even go so far as to say that an objective view of a text is impossible.

2.1.3. Cognitive Narratology

Rather than focus on what character is or how it functions within narrative, cognitive narratology focuses on the reader and their mental construction of what David Herman calls *model persons* (Herman, Phelan, et al. 125-7). This orientation toward the reader makes perfect sense considering that "Cognitive theory investigates the relations between perception, language, knowledge, memory, and the world; cognitive narratology is interested in the roles of stories within the ranges and intersections of these phenomena" (Jahn, "Cognitive Narratology" 67). Cognitive narratology is concerned with how "texts evoke fictional individuals who can be inferred to possess more or less extensive constellations of personal traits" (Herman, Phelan, et al. 127), but sees this question in conjunction with the reader's active role in "worldmaking," and examines the processes involved in the reader's mental

construction of a *model person*. Much of the work on character in cognitive narratology presupposes or necessitates that the character be conceived of as a kind person. Alan Palmer has done significant work on how fictional consciousness is presented, and how the reader uses knowledge of the real mind to understand fictional minds. Lisa Zunshine has argued that it is our innate Theory of Mind capabilities, i.e. the ability to attribute complex mental states to others, that allow us to understand and emotionally connect with fictional characters. These approaches would be non-sensical without the presumption that a fictional character is similar to a person.

The view of characters as human-like is not unique to cognitive narratology. Some of Margolin's work on character as non-actual individual predates the so-called cognitive turn in narrative studies, but Margolin has been whole-heartedly embraced by cognitive narratology. Baruch Hochman wrote, as early as in 1985, that what people and characters "have in common is the model, which we carry in our heads, of what a person is" (7). In rhetorical narratology, this resemblance to real people is studied as one of three components of character, the *mimetic* component. The more traditionally minded Rimmon-Kenan also admits that "Although these constructs [i.e. characters] are by no means human beings in the literal sense of the word, they are partly modelled on the reader's conception of people and in this they are person-like" (33), and Keen's chapter on character in *Narrative Form* bears the revealing title "People on Paper."

There are very detailed accounts of the mechanisms involved in creating mental representations of characters, such as Ralph Schneider's landmark article "Toward a Cognitive Theory of Literary Character: The Dynamics of Mental-Model Construction." I will not give a detailed account of the specifics of reader cognition in this chapter. However, in the following chapters I will make occasional references to specific processes of interpretation when it is relevant to do so. For now, suffice it to say that I accept cognitive narratology's position that the reader has an active role in meaning-making and that a character is co-constructed by the reader and the narrator. As argued above, I believe it is useful to bear in mind that a text is only imbued with its full meaning when it is read. As we explore character construction and identity in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*, I will make occasional references to the way in which a reader might interpret and conceptualize Edna and Lily. I have included this very brief discussion of the cognitive approach to character because this thesis in many ways belongs to the same tradition. Although it takes a more text-immanent and less reader-oriented approach than the dominant trend in cognitive narratology, it shares cognitive narratology's fundamental beliefs about the nature of character, and its

methodology of using insights from the various cognitive sciences to gain a better understanding of literary texts. Moreover, my readings of Palmer, Zunshine, Schneider, Herman, Jahn, and other cognitive narratologists have so fundamentally informed the way I interpret literature, and as such indirectly influenced this thesis, that it would be disingenuous to leave cognitive narratology out of this chapter.

2.1.4. But What Is Characterization?

Thus far the word *characterization* has been thrown about without proper exposition, as if it were just character's diminutive sidekick without much substance of its own. This is unfortunate, but not without reason. Character may be undertheorized, but it is leaps and bounds ahead of characterization. Those who doubt the truthfulness of this statement need only consider the following observations: Rimmon-Kenan's chapter on "Characterization" cites a single scholar,[2] Joseph Ewen, whose work is only available in Hebrew; none of the chapters in *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* focus on characterization, nor is the word listen in the book's index, and the same is true for *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*; the *Cambridge Companions* to *Narrative* and *Narrative Theory* respectively do not have dedicated chapters on characterization, and only Margolin's chapter "Character" in *Narrative* discusses the topic, the word is not mentioned once in John Frow's chapter "Character" in *Narrative Theory*; even the formidable *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* lacks a dedicated entry for characterization.

However, this is not to say there is no existing work on the topic, and it is certainly possible to answer the question "what *is* characterization?" – although the answer might differ depending on who is asked. Characterization can be defined as the sum of all those elements in a text which indicate, demonstrate, and reveal a character's traits. Alternatively, taking a cognitive reader-oriented approach, it might be defined as everything the reader uses to construct their mental model of the character. Rimmon-Kenan notes that "Character . . . can be described in terms of a network of character-traits," and explains that the traits may not be explicit in the text, but rather indicated in various ways. These indicators make up characterization. She points out that "any element in the text may serve as an indicator of character" (59). James Garvey notes that characterization must be differentiated from

[2] With one exception: on p. 65 she references Seymour Chatman's definition of "character trait."

character identification. While the latter is simply the naming of a fictional entity, the former "invests an identified character with an attribute or set of attributes (also called 'traits', 'qualities', or 'characteristics') which add descriptive material of a particular sort to the argument node" (63). Curiously, Garvey appears here to restrict characterization to only be applicable to named ("identified") characters.

Following Ewen, Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between "direct definition," which explicitly attributes a trait to a character, and "indirect presentation," which demonstrates the trait without naming it (59-60). She points out that direct definition is only to be trusted as characterization "if it proceeds from the most authoritative voice in the text" (60). This ought to be qualified further, because even the "most authoritative voice in the text" might not be entirely trustworthy in their characterizations. Margolin phrases this point with more nuance, narrowing the authoritative position to "omniscient impersonal narrating voice[s]" and adding the caveat that the truthfulness of their characterization is assumed by convention ("Character" 56). When the "the most authoritative voice" is a homodiegetic narrator, or a limited heterodiegetic narrator, this voice is certainly not well-informed enough to make "true" statements about all the characters' traits. Nor is an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator necessarily unbiased. In the next chapter, the consonance between narrator and protagonist in *The Awakening* will be examined, and we will see that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between Edna's and the narrator's perceptions and opinions. *The House of Mirth*, on the other hand, features a narrator who more frequently takes a vocal authorial stance, and whose consciousness is less closely tied to the protagonist's, and as such their direct definitions would appear to be more trustworthy. The question of characters' characterizations of each other, which Rimmon-Kenan stresses might reveal more about the character doing the characterizing than the one being characterized, will be central to the analysis of *The House of Mirth*.

Margolin lists three universal dimensions for characterization: the physical, the mental, and the behavioral ("Character" 53). These dimensions, of course, bleed into one another.[3] As recent years' growing interest in 4E cognition has revealed, the mental and the physical are intimately entwined, and behavioral characterization can naturally indicate both mental and physical traits. Edna Pontellier learning to swim is obviously behavioral characterization in both senses of that term (characterization *of* behavior, characterization

[3] Margolin does not explicitly acknowledge this, but as his reference to these dimensions is made in passing as a contrast to all those things that are *not* universal, and not expounded, I will not make assumptions as to whether or not he agrees with my claim.

through behavior), but it is also physical and mental characterization. It shows her to be someone who engages in physical activity, at least on occasion (behavioral), it indicates that she is able-bodied (physical), and it reveals that Edna is keen to acquire new skills, perhaps that she dislikes sitting still, and perhaps that she is unafraid and enjoys a challenge (mental). As with rhetorical narratology's three character dimensions, these labels can be useful, but seeing them as sharply delineated categories would turn them into a counter-productive and reductive analytical tool. Keen considers the matter from a different angle and states that "The most revealing things about characters, of course, are their actions, speeches and thoughts (if these are represented)" (67). This illustrates that the behavioral, physical, and mental dimensions overlap. While thoughts can clearly be labelled mental characterization, actions and speeches are harder to pin down. Action surely is always behavioral, and often physical, but it can also be mental, such as in the portrayal of a nervous tick. Speeches are perhaps not physical, but they can be both behavioral and mental.

As for the rhetorical approach, some characterization is obviously necessary for the character to have a mimetic dimension. Phelan says that "Mimetic dimensions . . . are a character's attributes considered as traits" and adds that "Mimetic functions result from the way these traits are used together in creating the illusion of a possible person" (*Reading* 11), which can somewhat loosely be paraphrased as "mimetic functions result from characterization." Here, it seems prudent to return to the problem of the story/discourse distinction, because too strict a separation of character as story-element from characterization as discourse-element would indicate that characterization tends to highlight the synthetic dimension, but clearly there would be no mimetic dimension without characterization. This conundrum has three possible solutions: a) disregard the story/discourse distinction; b) disregard the distinctions between the synthetic, mimetic and thematic dimensions; or c) assume that the boundaries between the narrative planes and the character components are permeable. As I find the terminology useful, but am hesitant to accept either structure in a rigid form, I will take position c.

While characterization is often summed up as "anything that indicates character traits" and followed by a few examples (Keen and Rimmon-Kenan both do this), there are also comprehensive studies of the processes involved, particularly in stylistics. Much of the existing work on characterization is marked by the structuralist predilection for grammars and taxonomies, which engenders the problems associated with rigid structures that have already been indicated. In addition to being reductionist, the analyses arrived at by means of some of these grammar-like accounts may get more complicated and confusing than simply using

descriptive statements. To illustrate with an example based on James Garvey's account, let us say that Lawrence Selden is [+ Reliable] when characterizing Gerty Farish, but [- Reliable] when characterizing Lily Bart. This makes it difficult to classify Selden himself, although this can be solved by adding the modalizer "sometimes" to the attributive proposition regarding Selden's reliability. As Selden is not a narrator, the word "reliable" could cause confusion, and the attribute in question might better be described as e.g. [± Good judge of character], but this leads to yet another complication because being a good judge of character is not equal to making true statements about others. Perhaps a combination of the attribute [+ Good judge of character] with the modalizer "sometimes," and the attribute [+ Truthful] with the modalizer "usually" would be sufficient to account for this one small aspect of Selden's characterization. However, this does not indicate *why* his descriptions of Gerty are accurate, but not those of Lily, completely missing the fact that Selden's romanticized view of Lily functions to characterize him as much as her. Moreover, the if-then propositions which Garvey suggests can be derived from reliable characters' or narrators' characterizations would be true for Selden's statements about Gerty, but false for his statements about Lily. [4] This would of course have to be specified somewhere, perhaps a modalizer to the modalizer in the description of Selden's attributes. Endless cross-referencing of ever more complicated formulae and diagrams will undoubtedly ensue. (Garvey, see especially pp. 72-74)

Surely it is both simpler and more informative to use the following descriptive statements: Selden is an inconsistent observer of Lily. He appears to idealize her largely based on her physical appearance, and sees her beauty as reflective of her substance "for a coarse texture will not take a high finish" (7). This view of Lily, in combination with Selden's statements about his views on life in general, and a brief passage describing his upbringing, leads to the characterization of Selden as something of a romantic and an idealist, and someone who gives great primacy to aesthetic beauty. This entails that his perception of Lily cannot be trusted as objective characterization. However, in his perception of his cousin Gerty Farish he is not clouded by romance and aesthetics, and his characterization of her is more likely to be trustworthy.

[4] To be precise, it is not entirely clear whether Garvey is using set theory or propositional logic. His notation suggests the subset/superset relation, but this is widely accepted to be similar, if not identical, to the material conditional (if p, then q). As Bertrand Russell phrased it, "In any symbolic expression, the letters may be interpreted as classes or as propositions, and the relation of inclusion in the one case may be replaced by that of formal implication in the other" (11–12). I believe propositional logic makes more intuitive sense in this case, so in order to make my argument clearer and easier to grasp I have chosen to describe Garvey's formulae as if-then propositions.

A notable example of a book-length study on characterization is Charles Child Walcutt's *Man's Changing Mask*. Walcutt, like Phelan and many others, believes that "characterization depends upon plot" (Walcutt vii). In fact, he is adamant about this. According to Walcutt, "character is like the quantum of the physicists. This ultimate particle cannot be located except when it jumps, and it jumps so quick that it cannot be arrested in flight" (5). Posing the question of whether character manifests itself *exclusively* in action, Walcutt ventures that "most of us would accept this too, provided that speech were considered as real an action as any physical movement" (5). *Man's Changing Mask* is a diachronic study of one manner of characterization. While it provides many valuable insights, its aims differ significantly from those of this thesis. I do not by any means deny that action reveals much about character, but nor do I see it as the only means of characterization. Moreover, it is far beyond the scope of this thesis to undertake the kind of historical survey that Walcutt so admirably performs.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the existing work specifically dedicated to character*ization*, aside from Garvey's and Walcutt's studies, centers on mythological and religious texts, or on drama. These genres provide less in the way of direct definition and extensive descriptive passages than does prose fiction, and as such the question becomes not simply "how does characterization work?" but "how is characterization possible without description?" The latter question is of course important to any study of characterization, as exemplified by the focus on characterization through action, but it is essential to studies of myths, religious texts, and drama in a way that goes far beyond its general significance.

We have seen then that rigid categories and taxonomies can get in the way of effectively studying characterization. On this note, the last point that must be considered is that characterization is very clearly not limited to the discourse plane. Even those who ostensibly separate character and characterization strictly into separate realms, like Rimmon-Kenan, do not in practice limit characterization to discourse. None of the accounts discussed above deny that events and actions contribute significantly to characterization, and events and actions are unanimously considered story elements. It follows, then, that characterization happens in the story as much as, if not more than, it does in the discourse. In summary, there are few existing accounts of characterization, and they often suggest rigid classification or break the process down to such an extent that it is difficult to see the forest for the trees. This thesis attempts to account for the forest by taking a less rigid approach and by bringing identity into the equation.

2.1.5. A Spectrum

Margolin originally presented his theory of non-actual individual within a structuralist framework. The concept has been happily adopted by cognitive narratologists, who find it superior because of the assumption that it is the closest to how actual readers conceive of fictional characters. This cross-over serves as a partial illustration of the nature of the study of character. Some theories on character belong exclusively within e.g. structuralism, because they attempt to address issues specific to that tradition. Greimas' actantial model is an explanation of characters' part in the overall structure of narrative, in narrative grammar. Margolin's work is more easily adopted by theorists of different persuasions because it focuses on the ontology of fictional character, a philosophical question that can be separated from overall convictions about how to study literary texts. Existing work on character ranges from definitions of their place in the system of narrative grammar (Propp, Greimas), to commentary on their ontology (Margolin, Frow), to frameworks for text-immanent analysis of the construction of character (Ewen (via Rimmon-Kenan), Garvey, Culpeper), to theories on how readers perceive and construct characters (Palmer, Zunshine, Schneider, Herman). These are not sharply delineated categories. Instead, they exist on a spectrum. The rhetorical approach described in section 2.1.2 is an example of a theory that is located somewhere toward the center of the spectrum. This thesis includes text-immanent and reader-oriented considerations, while the ontological question will be left in peace – as explained in the introduction, I take a non-actual individual approach due to the simple reasons that this best represents readers' experience, and that it allows for a deeper character analysis. In the following section, identity and what identity means in the context of fictional narrative will be explored. I will not go into the debate on whether or not fictional characters actually have identities. They *appear to*, and this is what matters for the present purposes.

2.2. Identity

This thesis draws on several different identity theories from philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Various definitions, concepts, and models are used to illuminate aspects of the texts, to demonstrate how the novels' depictions parallel or diverge from contemporaneous

and current scientific theories, and to investigate connections between how humans understand their own and others' identities and how they might interpret the identities of fictional characters. Moreover, these theories and concepts always take a backseat to the novels' own "theories" of identity. Chopin and Wharton were not psychologists, they were fiction writers. It would be naïve to expect them to conform to any specific theory or approach, as well as unfair to judge their novels on the scientific plausibility of their psychological portraits. Moreover, reading *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* in the 21st century naturally entails reading them through a lens of knowledge that has been discovered in the more than hundred years that separate us from these novels' publications in 1899 and 1905 respectively.

Theories of and research on identity is for the present study a means to understand and explain not what identity is in and of itself, but how it may be conceptualized and discussed. It makes no difference whether Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, or James was *right*. What matters is that humans have a preoccupation with questions of selfhood and identity, and that novels deal with those questions. This section outlines how identity is understood in the context of this thesis. First, I explain what is meant by narrative identity, a concept used in both psychology and philosophy to explain how we make sense of our own and others' identities. Then I discuss what identity might mean in fictional narratives in particular.

2.2.1. Narrative Identity

While I believe an exclusive commitment to one theory over every other would be severely limiting because every novel has its own "theory," one approach does inform this work on a more fundamental level than others, and that is narrative identity. While various theories, approaches and concepts are used in the following chapters to help make certain interpretations more salient, or to illuminate specific aspects of the characters' identity development or their characterization, narrative identity is, if not the foundation for this thesis, at least the wall-to-wall carpet. The theory of narrative identity emerged in psychology in the mid-1980s, spearheaded by Dan P. McAdams. There is a corresponding view in philosophy, exemplified by among others Marya Schechtman's "narrative self-constitution view." It denotes "an internalized and evolving story of the self that provides a person's life with some semblance of unity, purpose, and meaning" (McAdams, "Narrative Identity" 100). Conceiving of identity as a story helps account for the problem of continuity of selfhood

across time – how am *I* today the same person as *I* ten years ago, despite having undergone any number of changes? Not only do we understand ourselves in terms of narrative, but "People . . . make sense of their own lives, *and the lives of others*, through narrative" (100, emphasis mine). How we make sense of others is, of course, a significant component to reading fiction (cf. Palmer).

Different aspects of the self contribute different parts of our story. As "persisting subject[s]" we inhabit a present affected and shaped by our past, and geared toward an anticipated future, and as agents we "integrat[e] our diverse and sometimes conflicting values, desires, experiences, goals, and character traits into some kind of unified identity" (Mackenzie 105). Simply put, we see ourselves as coming from somewhere and going to somewhere, and we construct systems – narratives – that let us integrate the different aspects of our personalities and life stories into a coherent whole. Seeing identity as a "story of the self" does not necessarily indicate that it is textual, literary, verbal, or even tellable. Rather, narrative is "an implicit organizing principle" (105-06). Different episodes in our lives, different characteristics we possess or lack, different experiences and perceptions, form a whole in which all the parts relate to one or more of the other parts, just like plot events, characters, linguistic devices, ellipses, and other elements in fictional narratives form a whole of interrelated parts.

McAdams presents a slightly different model than Mackenzie and Schechtman. Bringing William James' famous I/Me distinction into the question of how we form identities, he distinguishes three different manners that the I observes and understands the Me, instead of the two-way division into subject and agent. As small children, we are *social actors*, before also becoming *motivated agents* in middle to late childhood, and finally developing the ability to be *autobiographical authors* in early adulthood. The social actor "encompass[es] semantic representation of traits, social roles, and other features of the self that result in and from repeated performances on the social stage of life" (McAdams, "Psychological Self" 273). It is on this layer that we find the most obviously social and performative aspects of identity, and as such it is the most easily recognizable layer of Lily Bart's self. On the other hand, it is this layer of self that Edna Pontellier to some extent attempts to escape from as she rejects her social roles and endeavors to reinvent her life as an autonomous subject. The self as motivated agent is responsible for "personal goals, motives, values, hopes, and fears" (273). This layer appears to be the least well-developed in both novels' protagonists. Neither is able to clearly envisage an ideal future or identify their goals and desires. Edna longs for freedom and subjectivity, but it is a vague and unspecified longing. Lily's goal is supposedly to find a

wealthy husband, but her consistent self-sabotage indicates that it might be true that "she despises what she's trying for" (Wharton 163). The autobiographical author, superimposed over the other two layers, "works to formulate a meaningful narrative for life, integrating the reconstructed episodic past and the imagined episodic future in such a way as to explain, for the self and for others, why the actor does what it does, why the agent wants what it wants, and who the self was, is, and will be as a developing person in time" (McAdams, "Psychological Self" 273). Much of Edna's journey involves approaching herself as an autobiographical author, while Lily makes only a few feeble attempts to do the same. Finally, while these three types or layers of self may be traced independently of each other in text, in reality "a psychologically fully formed adult exists at any given time and place as an actor, an agent, and an author" (274). This holds true for all the aspects of self investigated in the following chapters. When considering characterization and the narration of identity it is necessary to divide the whole into parts, but we must also bear in mind that this is an artificial division. Even Lily Bart who has an incredibly fragmented sense of self and is unable to integrate her identity, is not made up of components that can be sharply delineated. Not in the text, and not as a non-actual individual in the storyworld.

2.2.2. Identity in Fiction

As explained in the introduction, this thesis does not attempt to comment on the ontology of fictional characters. Therefore, I will also not be making any arguments for or against fictional characters actually having identities. They certainly appear to. For instance, Catriona Mackenzie uses the novel *March* by Geraldine Brooks to illustrate issues of integrating a fragmented narrative identity (103-05, 108-09), but as a philosopher, rather than a literary scholar, she is of course exempt from the dictum "do not talk about fictional characters as if they were real people." As the cognitive approach to fictional character emphasizes, readers tend to conceive of characters as person-like, and surely that includes ascribing to them an identity of sorts. My concern is not so much the (un-)realness or the (lack of) substantiality of characters' identities, but rather the way in which characterization gives rise to an identity, and how depictions of identity and identity development help construct a character. The question, then, is not about the possible existence of an identity, but how we conceptualize this hypothetical identity.

Every novel will have its own "theory" of identity. These might align closely with a specific philosophical or psychological approach, or they might be composite or idiosyncratic. It would be counterproductive, then, to adopt too rigid an approach to fictional identity. It is necessary to approach each novel in a flexible and open manner. What is needed for a theory of identity in fiction is not a detailed conception of what identity is, but rather a framework within which to describe whatever identity is presented by the narrative. When I lean heavily on narrative identity, it is not because I believe that it describes what fictional identity *is*, but rather because when used as a descriptive model it has room for identity to be made up of any number of components, and to be shaped by more or less any factor. As we will see, *The Awakening* presents identity as consisting of three major components (although much of the existing work on the novel see it as two), while *The House of Mirth* depicts various influences on and aspects of identity, without clearly demonstrating a view on what identity consists of. Both of these depictions can easily be analyzed within a framework based on narrative identity.

Narrative identity is a natural fit for literary studies for obvious reasons. Narrative identity, along with the narrative turn in psychology more broadly, assumes that we understand ourselves and the world as structured unities, i.e. as narrative. This may or may not be correct where human psychology is concerned, but there can be no doubt that this is how we understand actual narrative texts. Moreover, it allows us to circumvent the question of whether or not fictional characters actually have identities. Fictional characters, whatever their ontological status may be, can certainly have life stories. They are undoubtedly made up of a number of traits, events, and "experiences" (on experientiality, see Fludernik, *Towards*). The narrative of who a character is and how they became that person is no less tellable just because the person is not real. We must remember McAdams' observation, cited above, that narrative identity is not just how we make sense of ourselves, but also how we make sense of other people. We can conclude, then, that while fictional characters may not have identities as such, they give the impression of having *narrative* identities.

Presupposing a narrative identity for fictional characters also facilitates drawing connections between what happens in the "present" of the story, and what characters and narrator reveal to have happened in the "past." When the narrator of *The House of Mirth* digresses for several pages in order to tell the reader about Lily Bart's family and upbringing, part of her identity is revealed. When the narrator of *The Awakening* offers only the briefest of glimpses into Edna Pontellier's past, the impression given is that the pre-awakened Edna lacked a clear identity and that most of the experiences of the first 28 years of her life made

little impact on who she is. While the strict structuralist approach would discourage the search for information that is not explicit in the text, this is impractical for any study that is interested in how narrative as communication is interpreted, because "many narratives demand that the reader work to figure out what has happened to a character during a gap, a skip in the discourse in which plot events are implied, though not narrated" (Keen 57). Narrative identity does not always fill these gaps, but it helps structure a character's life story so that the gaps can be localized and their significance evaluated.

Narrative identity is not without its adversaries, notably Galen Strawson. Strawson makes no outright claim that the theory is wrong, but he opposes the notion that everyone experiences life as narrative and the idea that this "Narrative outlook" is the ideal way of conceptualizing one's life and the world. He argues that "there are deeply non-Narrative people and there are good ways to live that are deeply non-Narrative" (429). Strawson's opposition is not to narrativity as such, but to claims for its universality and moral superiority. Another argument against narrative identity is that we use narrative to make sense of our experiences and selves only in retrospect, and that narrative is not fundamental to our understanding of life. Samantha Vice holds this view, and like Strawson she questions the universality and normativity of the narrative view. She claims that the narrative view rests on "a fundamental confusion between life and art" (94). It should be noted, however, that Vice has been accused of basing her argumentation on a misconception of narrativity (Mackenzie 106n14). These counterarguments carry less weight when the object of study is literary characters instead of real persons. Firstly, there is no need to fear confusion between life and art since this is in fact art. Moreover, if a character's identity is so fragmented and incoherent that it cannot be seen as a structural unity, the character will not seem to the reader like a single entity. Of course, it is possible to write a novel in which a character's identity is so fragmented that they actually come across as different characters at different points in the narrative, although this would be unorthodox. It would also lead to a different set of questions, relating to the limits of the unity of character, such as whether a name is sufficient to tie together these seemingly separate entities into one character. Indeed, the non-actual individual account championed by Margolin excludes these liminal cases: "the referring expressions by which such an individual is designated should be used referentially, to pick out an entity in a domain, not just played with as pure signifiers" ("Character" 53). The approach I propose is flexible, but it is limited to characters whose identities are cohesive enough that the reader does not have to struggle to accept them as unified fictional entities.

On the subject of literature, McAdams says "I have often thought that a person's narrative identity is like a novel, or perhaps like a thematically coherent anthology, and the different literary characters in the novel are personified features of the self, each playing his or her own role. For the person, then, the novel is the identity, and the characters in the novel are merely parts of the self, as it were" (personal correspondence). For McAdams, of course, the novel is a metaphor for real-world identity, but the same basic idea can also be found in literary studies. In *Narrative Structures and the Language of the Self*, Matthew Clark claims that "characters brought together in a narrative . . . are not random collections but structured sets, and these sets correspond to various manifestations of the self" (1). In its absolute form, the idea that every character in a novel is a representation of the same self is too radical to be useful for the purposes of the present study, but it is highly relevant in a softer form. Firstly, the claim, even in its strongest form, is an important reminder that although we might read characters in a novel as separate entities, they are in fact part of the same utterance, undeniably made from the same "fabric," i.e. language, and thus quite inseparable. Secondly, this view underlines the importance of the interplay of voices and characters found in a novel (cf. Bakhtin). While it might seem odd to claim that Lawrence Selden is a part of Lily Bart's self, it is impossible to remove their interactions or his focalization of her from a conception of who Lily (fictionally) is. Clark reminds us that "concepts of the self based on the binary opposition of subject and object are unable to account for the various kinds of subjectivity expressed in narrative" (1). Reading Lily purely as object in passages focalized by Selden, the narrator or others, and purely as subject in passages where she herself is the focalizer, would engender a reductive and limited interpretation of the character and her identity.

There is a connection to be made between the view of characters as parts of the same self, and Alan Palmer's notion of situated identity. Palmer suggests that identity, in the real world as well as in fiction, cannot be contained within the boundaries of a single person. He asks "where is [a person's] identity situated, in his own views about himself or in the views of others? . . . If you want to find out about an aspect of someone's mind, say whether or not they are selfish, who do you ask?" and concludes that "there is a strong sense in which our mind is distributed among those other people who have an image of us in their minds. . . . Surely then, *our identity is distributed among the minds of others*" (*Fictional Minds* 168, emphasis mine). Applying this idea to literature, he uses Dickens' *Great Expectations* as an example, and states that "Only a small part of [Pip's] whole identity is contained within the workings of his own mind. His identity is distributed among all the various Pips that exist in the minds of Biddy, Joe, Estella, Miss Havisham, and so on and that are based on their

judgment of his actions" (169). Palmer explains something that appears fairly self-evident, but which is easily overlooked, namely that when attempting to form a complete understanding of a person's or a fictional character's identity it is an absolute necessity to consider others' perceptions of them. Bearing in mind Rimmon-Kenan's caution, the fact that characters' descriptions of other characters might not be accurate must be taken into account, and consideration given to how characters' descriptive statements characterize the speaker as much as, or more than, the object of the description. Conspicuously absent from Palmer's list of the minds that Pip's identity is distributed among, are narrator, author, and reader. These must not be forgotten. The social and geographical environments of character, author, and reader must also be taken into account. James Wertsch, paraphrased by Palmer, claims that "action cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out" (158). The leap from action to person is a small one, we have already seen how closely connected character and plot are in various narratological traditions. Andy Clark and David Chalmers, in their groundbreaking paper "The Extended Mind," suggest that the self, just like the mind, extends beyond the boundaries of the skin. The article presents the case of the hypothetical amnesiac Otto, who carries a notebook that plays the role that memory does for cognitively unimpaired individuals. Clark and Chalmers argue that the notebook is part of Otto's cognition, and suggest that since "The information in Otto's notebook . . . is a central part of his identity as a cognitive agent. . . . Otto *himself* is best regarded as an extended system." They conclude that if we were to disregard the idea of an extended self "we would have to shrink the self into a mere bundle of occurrent states, severely threatening its deep psychological continuity. Far better to take the broader view, and see agents themselves as spread into the world" (18, emphasis in original).

These ideas – Clark's and McAdams' notions that different characters represent versions of the same self, Palmer's situated identity, and Clark and Chalmers' extended self – highlight the interconnectedness of narrative elements. In doing this they all underline the importance of foils for any analysis of character and characterization. Both novels studied in this thesis feature important foils, most significantly in the form of Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz in *The Awakening*, and Gerty Farish and Bertha Dorset in *The House of Mirth*. These characters serve as contrasts for the reader and as possible selves for the characters. However, seeing them only is alternate selves limits the analysis, especially with regards to *The Awakening*, where Edna's relationships with Adèle and Mademoiselle Reisz have a substantial impact her identity development. On the absolute all-characters-form-one-self view, Adèle and Mademoiselle Reisz are simply parts of the superordinate self in *The*

Awakening, which has Edna at the epicenter. On the view that characters are separate, but interconnected entities, the question is whether Adèle and Mademoiselle Reisz as foils or alternative selves are separate from Adèle and Mademoiselle Reisz as Edna's interlocutors and confidants, and whether they contribute to the characterization of Edna in two distinct or connected ways. This question is incredibly difficult to answer, which serves as yet another reminder of the impossibility of establishing a dichotomous relationship between character and characterization.

2.3. The Interplay of Identity and Characterization

I commented above on how the story/discourse distinction relegates character and characterization to different levels, and why this might be unproductive. Characterization is not purely a matter of discourse, and this has been admitted (although not in so many words), when e.g. Rimmon-Kenan suggests that a character's actions serve as indicators of traits (61-63). In short, what becomes evident when these seemingly obvious claims are picked apart is the infeasibility of separating character from characterization, and of confining either to just one narrative level. When I still refer to character and characterization as different phenomena it is because they are, but only in some ways. Character may be seen as an entity, and characterization as process. However, when the sum total of textual elements that reveal traits, dispositions, hopes and desires, habits, beliefs, social roles, and so on is seen as a unity, that is when characterization is considered as a whole rather than broken down into its components, it becomes difficult to determine where characterization ends and character begins. They are not, then, *separable*, and neither can be confined to only one narrative plane.

What is missing from all of the above accounts of literary character is identity (with the exception of Palmer's situated identity). Identity, like character and characterization, supersedes the story/discourse boundary. It is clearly content, but it is also form. In the real world, it is content in that it is that inherent something that makes each person equal to themselves, and it is form in a metaphorical sense in the way various identity categories correlate to a person's position within a social system, just like the actantial model positions character types within a narrative system. It is also form in a somewhat more literal sense within the theory of narrative identity. A person's life story might not be a story in the sense that it is a sequence of words, but it is structured and made sense of through a narrative lens.

And just as with the content and form of character and characterization, it is difficult to say where the form of narrative identity ends and its content begins, and there is no clear break at the boundary between story and discourse. When I focus on characterization in this thesis, it is not because I am only interested in the *how* of character, and not the *what*, but because characterization has been overlooked in discussions of the *what* of character. The *what* of character is similar to, some might even say equal to, a character's (perceived) identity – again, "who a person is."

James Phelan points out, quite rightly, that "Part of being a fictional character . . . is being artificial . . . and part of knowing a character is knowing that he/she/(it?) is a construct" (*Reading* 2). It is worth pausing the consider the word *construct*. This word is often applied to fictional characters to underline their difference from real people, their non-personness. However, real people are constructs as well in some senses, or at least partly made up of constructs. In psychology, a *construct* is "a variable, not directly observable, that has been developed to explain behavior on the basis of some theory" (Bordens and Abbott 134). Moreover, "Constructs are hypothetical. They exist as concepts but not as tangible entities" (Binning). Examples of constructs include intelligence and self-esteem. Identity might also be considered a construct, or perhaps the sum of several constructs. Naturally, identity does more than "explain behavior," but on the common view that identity is the answer to the question "who am I?", that is indeed one of its purposes. After all, do we not frequently hear "it's just who they are" as an explanation of behavior?

While identity as or as similar to characterization and vice versa seems to have been all but ignored by literary scholars, it is occasionally taken for granted by scholars from other disciplines. Marya Schechtman identifies two sides of the philosophical problem of identity: the reidentification question, that is how to decide if a person at one time is numerically identical to that person at a different time; and the question of personal identity, or psychological unity, i.e. the "Who am I?" question. Schechtman calls the second question the *characterization* question, and explains it as follows: "Most simply put, this question asks which actions, experiences, beliefs, values, desires, character traits, and so on (hereafter abbreviated 'characteristics') are to be attributed to a given person" (73). The same definition could be given for characterization in literature without the slightest modification. It bears a resemblance to Keen's observation that "most fictional characters are rendered by a blend of information about their appearance, gender, age, social circumstances, and their states of mind" (66). This can be paraphrased as "most fictional characters are rendered [i.e.

characterized] by information about different components of who they are," in other words different components of their identity.

There are some literary scholars who consider identity to be the result of characterization. Mary Doyle Springer writes that "The identity of a character becomes known primarily from a continuity of his or her own choices, speeches, and acts . . . identity is reinforced by description, diction, and in incidents of apposition to other characters" (14). However, Springer does not thematize identity, nor does she specify precisely what she means by the "identity of character." Jonathan Culpeper's book *Language and Characterisation* is perhaps the one study that comes closest to properly accounting for the relationship between characterization and identity, but his angle is different than mine. He focuses on plays, not prose fiction, and is therefore concerned primarily with how what we say can reveal our identity, and relies on identity theories from e.g. sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. However, Culpeper's study supports my claim that characterization and identity are intimately connected.

I propose that in its basic form, the relationship between character and identity can be defined as follows: identity development is characterization, and characterization is identity attribution. What I mean by this is firstly that when identity development is depicted, as it so often is in those characters to whom we apply the label *dynamic*, the contents of the identity in question must necessarily be revealed. Moreover, the form and process of identity development can also function as a way to demonstrate character traits. This first part of my argument is, I believe, uncontroversial. It is not a matter of suggesting a radically new concept, but of putting into words something that has been assumed, but not examined. Secondly, when I say that characterization is identity attribution, I mean that all those elements in a text that reveal traits, habits, dispositions, and so on can by synthesized into an identity, which entails that assigning traits to characters is a means of assigning identity. The attribution is performed intratextually by the narrator, and repeated and modified extratextually by the reader as they construct their mental model of the character in question. In short, characterization answers the "who am I?" question. This two-way interaction cannot be conceptualized as a road with separate lanes, but must instead be thought of as for example a pedestrian streets with motion in both direction within the same area.

While characterization generally functions as identity attribution, it does not necessarily give rise to a *complete* identity. Sometimes the characterization of a major character, even a protagonist, engenders an incomplete identity. This is true for Lily Bart, but in that case the incompleteness itself is a central feature of her identity, not a consequence of

insufficient characterization. In many cases, minor characters will of course not be given a complete identity. Their self-narrative may not be indicated at all. A character such as the charwoman Mrs. Haffen in *The House of Mirth* remains incomplete, but all the same, the information conveyed about her class, gender, and marital status indicates some aspects of her identity. Characterization is still identity attribution in these cases, but only certain parts of an identity are included in the narrative. Whether the other parts of the identity of incompletely characterized characters exist (in an abstract sense) or not is a philosophical question of ontology, and a discussion for another time and place.

3. An Awakening to Selfhood

There is general consensus that Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is a novel about a woman who rejects her social identity in order to pursue the discovery and construction of her "true" self. In fact, "critics have generally acknowledged *The Awakening* as an effectively crafted narrative of Edna Pontellier's conflict between individual autonomy and social conformity" (Martin 7). The fundamental assumption posited by the narrative and accepted by critics as the novel's central claim, seems to be that true subjectivity is incompatible with the social identity imposed by marriage and motherhood, and that the authentic self is hidden behind and obstructed by social roles. Critics often see Edna's journey as a failed attempt to reconcile the personal and social parts of her identity, or read her as rejecting and attempting to discard social identity altogether. The narrative more overtly states that she is doing the latter, which might reflect Edna's own intentions, but not the reality of her development. In practice she cannot and does not reject her entire outward identity. She attempts to do away with those parts of herself that are tied to the roles of wife and mother, and defies expectations placed upon her on the basis of gender, age, class, and marital status. However, the remaining self, the personal identity she cultivates, is still shaped in part by external factors, both social and physical. The reading presented here challenges the prevailing notion that the social and private self are separate and in opposition, suggesting that they are more intertwined than Edna believes them to be. I also delineate three main identity components, in contrast with the two-way division the novel is usually seen to portray.

It is common in both academic literature and lay terminology to distinguish between *personal* and *social* identity, although these phenomena are not necessarily independent (Vignoles), nor is this the only way to delineate the concepts and processes that get lumped under the headings of *self* and *identity*. Chopin's novel acknowledges that various aspects of identity interact and blend together in a myriad of ways. This chapter will examine which aspects of identity and identity formation are portrayed in the novel, and how Edna pursues identity construction while also undergoing identity dissolution. I will consider which processes she is aware of and actively uses, such as introspection, and which she ignores or is unable to see, like the importance of her interpersonal relationships. I will also examine the way in which Edna's development is narrated, and consider the contrast between the ideal upheld by Edna, as well as arguably the narrator, of pursuing a true self at the expense of social identity, and the way in which the novel taken as a whole indicates that this form of

selfhood is potentially destructive and next to impossible to achieve. Throughout, I will comment on how the portrayal of Edna's identity development functions as characterization.

3.1. Edna's Selves

Identity, somewhat counterintuitively, is not necessarily singular or consistent. It is based on, made up of, and shaped by a number of different factors. In a frequently cited passage, Edna Pontellier tells her friend Adèle Ratignole that she "would give up the unessential; . . . I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give up myself," which begs the question: what is the self to Edna? She herself does not have the answer, the quote continues "I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (49). The novel, then, is not just about Edna's discovery or construction of a self, but also about her finding out what it means to be a self. Both the contents and the experience of having and being a self are made up of different layers and components, and this novel presents a complex depiction of identity development. As explained in the previous chapter, the primary framework for understanding identity in this thesis is narrative identity. All three layers of McAdams' narrative self, the social actor, the motivated agent, and the autobiographical author, are depicted in *The Awakening*, but Edna's attempt to act as autobiographical author is especially prominent. A different three-way division of the self can also be found in the novel: the soul, or essential self; the privately cultivated self; and the imposed social self that Edna attempts to abandon. The essential self is presented as unchangeable and uncontrollable. It is mostly inaccessible, but makes itself known in especially emotionally charged scenes. The private self is what Edna is attempting to develop throughout the novel. Whether it is found or constructed is difficult to determine. The phrase "to find oneself" is a familiar one, and it is tempting to say that this is Edna's goal. However, we also know that this phrase is deceiving. Selves do not spring into existence fully formed, hide away, and wait to be found. Moreover, as a literary character Edna is constructed, and as such the language of identity construction seems more appropriate than discovery. The final self, the social one, might in fact be two. Or perhaps it is one part of the self, and one process of identity development. There is the identity tied to marriage and motherhood that Edna rejects, but there are also undeniably social forces that influence her ongoing development. This chapter is structured along the lines of these three selves. The self as actor, agent, and

author is considered throughout, with particular emphasis on the self as autobiographical author.

3.1.1. The Essential Self

While the overt focus of the narrative is for the most part on social identity as an unwanted construct, and the active development of what Edna perceives as an authentic and fiercely individual personal identity, traces of what we might call an essential self can also be found in *The Awakening*. An essential self is not constructed, developed, found, or imposed, it simply is. It is that fundamental something at the core of each person, it is what makes a person different from everyone else and the same as themselves across time and contexts. The idea of this kind of self can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. Plato's solution to the problem of how human beings can undergo continuous changes while remaining the same individual was that there is a part of each person – the *psyche,* commonly translated as *soul* – which exists in a changeless realm separate from the material world. Aristotle placed the changeless dimension within the person instead of in a separate realm (Martin and Barresi 3-4). The Christian understanding of the soul as eternal and independent of the body is closely related to Plato's idea, while the common way to speak of the soul, or the true self, as residing within obviously resembles the Aristotelian view. In some of both Plato's and Aristotle's writings, the soul, or part of the soul, is responsible for rational thinking (17-24). In modern theories, as well, the self in its barest, most essential form is often closely tied to consciousness and the thinking mind (see e.g. Damasio). While the self is not the same as the mind, it is hard to entirely disentangle them. In *The Awakening*, however, the constructed personal identity is what is intertwined with cognition, while the soul, or essential self, is presented as something so deep and primal as to be beyond language and direct knowledge, only making its presence known as the locus of intense emotional reactions.

The words *soul* and *self* have often been used almost interchangeably. For instance, Rand B. Evans notes in his introduction to William James' *The Principles of Psychology*, which was first published just eight years before *The Awakening*, that "Self is crucial to James's antifaculty, naturalistic psychology, because in the mind of the American populace, self and soul are closely linked, if not identical" (l). While *soul* might sometimes seem to our modern ears to carry religious connotations, it does not necessarily denote the Christian idea

of an eternal spirit. The word *soul* is used frequently in *The Awakening* and seems to denote simply a fundamental part of the self rather than anything religious. Religion is kept in the background in the novel. Apart from several references to Edna leaving church services, Christianity's role in the novel is chiefly to identify characters as either Catholic or Presbyterian, which is used to indicate their culture and upbringing, rather than actual faith. Moreover, Edna never turns to prayer or seeks advice from clergymen. In fact, the one authority-like person with whom she discusses her longing for selfhood is Doctor Mandelet, a man of science who comes across as decidedly unspiritual when he identifies certain human tendencies as "provision[s] of Nature" and adds that "Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create" (112). In other words, there appears to be no reason to read the word *soul* as carrying any particularly religious meaning. Considering that the novel ends in Edna's suicide, it seems unwise and speculative to look for a meaning of *soul* connected to beliefs about the afterlife. This could easily lead to conclusions about Edna's final choice for which there is insufficient textual evidence, such as moral judgments based on religious values rather than on the novel's own ideology. It is also worth bearing in mind that Chopin's original title for the novel was *A Solitary Soul*, suggesting that *soul* means something more like *person*.

Evidence of an essential self can be found several places in the text, perhaps most prominently in Edna's interaction with Mademoiselle Reisz on pp. 80-84. Mademoiselle Reisz questions Edna about her decision to move to the "pigeon-house", and it becomes apparent that the reason is not "quite clear to Edna herself" (82). She sits in silence with her thoughts for a little while, before telling Mademoiselle Reisz that she will host a farewell dinner at the old house before she moves, after which she "uttered a sigh that came from the very depths of her being" (82). When Mademoiselle Reisz then proceeds to plays the piano, Edna feels like the music "penetrated her whole being . . . warming and brightening the dark places of her soul" (82). The progression from a sigh, i.e. an expression of exasperation, dejectedness, or even grief, from the "depths of her being" to the music "brightening the dark places of her soul" suggests firstly that the soul is located in the figurative depths of being, i.e. that the sigh came from her soul, and that this is the locus of emotions that are beyond description and understanding. The word *soul* and the phrase "the very depths of her being" also hint that these emotions are of the purest and truest kind. In addition to being indescribable, the way Mademoiselle Reisz's playing can touch this part of Edna suggests something primal and uncontrollable, especially when we recall how "the very passions

themselves were aroused within her soul" and that Edna "trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her" (28) when she heard Mademoiselle Reisz play at Grand Isle.

Later in the same scene, Edna gives an impassioned speech on the nature of love. She cannot explain why she loves Robert, she simply does because he is him, which indicates that there are emotions too fundamental and true to be explained in logical terms, i.e. emotions that come from this uncontrollable and inaccessible soul at the depths of her being. It also suggests that there is something about each person that is beyond explanation, even beyond conscious thought. It is this something that makes Robert himself, and it is because he is himself that she loves him. Later, when Robert and Edna reunite, he looks at her with "the same glance that had penetrated to the sleeping places of her soul and awakened them" (99). Robert then tells Edna that he spent his time in Mexico reminiscing about the summer at Grand Isle, working hard and "feeling like a lost soul," and Edna repeats his words almost verbatim when asked what she has been "seeing and doing and feeling" while they have been apart, identifying herself as a "lost soul" as well (101). Robert perceives this as mockery, but to the reader, who has been with Edna during their separation, it is an obvious truth. The two are telling each other that they are lost souls when separated, indicating that they perceive their connection to be at the level of the essential self.

Another example of the essential self becoming more prominent in emotionally intense and confusing situations comes at the very end of the novel. The word *soul* appears four times in the narration of Edna's walk to the beach and her final swim. Edna's thinking at this point has become vague and scattered. She "walked . . . rather mechanically, not noticing anything special except that the sun was hot. She was not dwelling upon any particular train of thought" (115). The narrator appears to describe both things that Edna has thought previously and that she is thinking as she walks toward the beach, but then adds that "she was not thinking of these things" (115). The one thing that appears to be foregrounded in her consciousness is her own selfhood: "She understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adèle Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children" (115). The men in her life – Mr. Pontellier, Alcée Arobin, her childhood infatuations, even Robert – are now completely unimportant; "tomorrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me" (115). Abandoning the children bothers her more, but in the end she sees them as "antagonists" who "sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days" (115). The central idea evoked is the longing for a selfhood that is completely independent and subjective. This is what Edna has longed for throughout the novel, but the impossibility of this endeavor seems to have become clear to her. The

interpretation that it is because she refuses to give up her selfhood that she gives in to "The voice of the sea . . . inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude" (116) is readily available. It has been claimed, for instance, that "The rebellious quality of *The Awakening* is that Edna would rather extinguish her life than edit her tale" (Urgo 23).

Before entering the water, Edna "stand[s] naked under the sky" (116) for the first time in her life. After shedding her clothes, symbolically shedding the external parts of her identity, she "felt like some new-born creature" (116), indicating that the personal identity that she has cultivated throughout the narrative is as artificial as the social self she rejected. All that remains in her final moments is the essential self, which has been inaccessible for large parts of the narrative. When she has been swimming for a while and has started to feel tired, she "thought of Léonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul" (116). This thinking illustrates Edna's understanding of identity, that a person's life and their self are not one and the same. While Edna does attempt to reconcile her life and her self by changing her habits, putting more effort into her art, and moving to the "pigeon-house," she falls short as an autobiographical author. She fails to "integrate the reconstructed past, experienced present, and imagined future" (McAdams, "Psychological Self" 279), because her insistence on complete autonomy makes it impossible to include the sides of her identity that have been shaped or imposed by social circumstances. This passage also points out the importance of bodily autonomy, which underlines the significance of learning to swim and discovering her sexuality to her pursuit of selfhood. Curiously, Edna has not previously been fully aware of the way in which her identity is intrinsically rooted in her body, this will be discussed below.

In her final moments she also thinks of Mademoiselle Reisz's proclamation that "the artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies" (116). It is unclear whether Edna's death is an act of capitulation upon realizing that the she does not have this kind of soul, or the ultimate act of defiance that proves that she does. Some critics read the suicide as rebellion or liberation (e.g Schweitzer; Urgo), and others see it as defeat or resignation (e.g. Goldman; McConnell). I will remain agnostic and instead accept that "Women's self-sought deaths are ambiguous. . . . They may affirm identity or erase it" (Higonnet 107). However, Edna's return to Mademoiselle Reisz's words in her final moment emphasizes yet again that there is a part of the self that simply is. The musician said these words to Edna after informing her that true artists have "absolute gifts – which have not been acquired by one's own effort" (65). The suggestion is that the essential self is uncultivated and unchangeable. There is no developing a "courageous soul," it is inherent.

The narration of the essential self makes few attempts to portray its contents or describe it directly. The closest thing to a description is the "courageous soul" that Edna may or may not possess, words spoken not by Edna or the narrator, but by Mademoiselle Reisz. What is narrated is for the most part what might be called the *qualia* of the core self. Qualia, in its broadest sense, refers to the "introspectively accessible, phenomenal aspects of our mental lives . . . There is *something it is like* for you subjectively to undergo [an] experience . . . [The] qualities . . . that together make up the phenomenal character of [an] experience are sometimes called 'qualia'" (Tye).[5] What is expressed in the text, perhaps the only thing that can be expressed in narrative, is not the essential self *qua* essential self, but the phenomenology of the experience of having one. The narrative indicates *what it is like* for Edna to perceive the existence of an essential self, but makes no attempt to portray what that essential self is. It may seem counter-intuitive that the qualia of the self should be more tellable than the self itself, as qualia are incredibly hard to describe with words. A common way to explain what qualia means is to use the example of seeing something of a specific color. There is a phenomenological dimension that makes the experience of seeing blue more than simply knowing what blue is and classifying a perceived color accordingly, there is *something it is like* to see blue. This is exceedingly vague, and a good illustration of the difficulty of describing qualia in precise and informative terms. However, while qualia are difficult to narrate, the essential self itself is, it seems, impossible to narrate. The inability of both Edna and narrator to describe the essential self mirrors Edna's "I can't make it more clear" (49) when she expresses a perceived distinction between her life and her self.

Examining the scene in Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment, it is evident that nothing about the essential self is told outright. It is referred to metaphorically as a place – "the depths of her being," "the dark places of her soul" (82) – and vaguely indicated as the source of strong and true, but indescribable, emotions. Edna talks in confused and noncommittal terms about her feelings and her sense of self. Examples include her aforementioned attempt to explain why she loves Robert, which includes trivial observations like "Because his hair is brown and grows away from his temples" (83). What she is really saying is of course "because he is him." Her speech is frequently characterized by excessive hedging, and sometimes incoherent. In a conversation with Alcée Arobin, she says "I feel *as if* I had been

[5] Philosophers disagree on which experiences have qualia, as well as what qualia means and even the existence of them, at least when used in various senses that are more narrow than the one explained above. I will not concern myself with this debate. I use qualia in a broad sense as a means to understand and comment on what the texts say about a certain aspect of identity.

wound up to *a certain* pitch – too tight – and *something inside of me* had snapped" (94, emphasis mine), and in her last conversation with Doctor Mandelet her speech is confused and unclear; "Nobody has any right – except children, perhaps – and even then, it seems to – or it did seem – . . . The years that are gone seem like dreams . . . Some way I don't feel moved to speak of things that trouble me. . . . Oh! I don't know what I am saying" (112). All the interactions quoted here occur when Edna is experiencing some form of emotional upheaval. Her conversations with Mademoiselle Reisz always bring out truths from deep within that Edna was perhaps unaware of; the conversation with Arobin takes place as Edna is leaving her old home to go live in the pigeon house; and the conversation with Doctor Mandelet happens after Edna and Robert have confessed their feelings, Edna has left him in order to be present at Adèle's delivery, and is on her way back, she thinks, to Robert. The vagueness and indirectness of Edna's speech in moments of emotional turmoil, i.e. moments when her essential self comes to the foreground, illustrate that the essential self is inaccessible, only its qualia can be experienced and described. The narrator, whose consciousness is closely aligned with Edna's, is no more able to describe the essential self directly, evoking it metonymically and metaphorically.

The presence of an essential self, and the circumstances under which it makes itself felt in the narrative, lead to a characterization of Edna as emotionally reactive, but unable to fully understand her feelings. Curiously, Doctor Mandelet describes Edna as "sensitive" but also "highly organized" (68), which seen in light of these scenes appears to be something of a contradiction. Of course, the doctor is a minor character whose textual presence is not sufficient to determine whether his perception of Edna is accurate. Moreover, the reader is privy to few indications of what Edna was like before the start of the narrative, and the Doctor's description could be taken to indicate that she *used to be* highly organized. The way Edna's essential self is presented in the text does, however, support the claim that she is sensitive. She appears to be subject to intense emotional reactions that are beyond her own comprehension, and act on impulses that she cannot put into words. Edna is in touch with her essential self to the extent that she feels its presence and notices when it is this part of her that is reacting, but it still appears to be a mysterious, indefinable something at "the very depths of her being." Of course, it would be a tall order for anyone to conceptualize their soul in a manner that can be examined and described. For a fictional character whose arc revolves around attempting to establish her identity, the simultaneous primacy and inaccessibility of the essential self supports the characterization of Edna as confused about her sense of self, yet eager to search for her "true" identity within.

In my reading the essential self is a fundamental aspect of Edna's identity development, but not a very prominent feature of the narrative. However, others have read the uncovering of the essential self as Edna's main goal. Andrew Delbanco writes concerning Edna's claim that "I would give up the unessential; I would give away my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself" (49) that "With this series of renunciations, she has begun to sense the existence of an irreducible self. But the question is – and it becomes the novel's most urgent question – what constitutes this essential self?" (Delbanco 95). I would suggest rephrasing this question, asking instead what true identity can be constructed or developed on the basis of this essential self? This is what will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

3.1.2. The Constructed Self

The first proper description of Edna in the text, aside from a few remarks from her husband about her being sunburnt, reads: "Mrs. Pontellier's eyes were quick and bright … She had a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought" (6). From the very beginning, then, the narrator sets Edna up as an introspective character, and also demonstrates the complexities of her inner life by the choice of the word *maze*. Moreover, *maze* suggests confusion and fumbling. But Edna is not only thinking about and searching for understanding and a sense of self, she is also exploring her own cognitive and emotional states and mechanisms. Edna's engagement with her own inner life does not take the form of passive observation (like, for instance, examining a picture); rather, it is active and in motion (like finding the way through a maze). Instead of passively waiting for her "true" self to reveal itself, she sets out to develop it, actively attempting to approach herself as autobiographical author, although she falls short of fully constructing a self-narrative. While she exhibits agency and a willingness to introspect, she also appears to believe that the goal is to construct an entirely new self that accommodates only her essential self, rather than integrate her life with her subjective experiences and her hopes and dreams.

A clear shift in Edna's metacognitive awareness occurs early in the novel: "An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. … It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood" (9). This scene in many ways marks the start of her journey of self-discovery,

and can be considered Edna's first awakening. It represents the beginning of her awareness that she lacks a clear understanding of who she is as an individual, separate from her children and husband. Edna's husband, Léonce Pontellier, reproaches her for her lack of interest in her children, and after he falls asleep, she has a strong emotional reaction that she perceives as not directly related to the specific argument they just had. Rather, she "could not have told why she was crying," but she is aware of "an indescribable oppression" (9), and it is clear from both the context and the few reflections Edna is able to make about the situation, that she is feeling confined and oppressed by her roles as wife and mother. Moreover, she is aware of not fully understanding her own reaction. In other words, she is realizing not only that she needs to craft a separate space where she can be herself independently of the social roles she inhabits, but also that she needs to understand herself and her own cognitive and emotional processes better. The awareness of the unfamiliarity of her feelings, realizing that they are coming from "some unfamiliar part of her consciousness," indicates that this is the point at which she acknowledges that parts of her inner life remain unexplored, which triggers her interest in engaging in introspection and expanding her metacognitive abilities. Introspection plays a central role in Edna's identity formation, especially in the form of metacognition, i.e. the awareness, analysis and regulation of cognitive, emotional, and perceptive processes both as they are happening and retrospectively. Metacognition is often, although not universally, consider to consist of two main components: a) knowledge of cognition, and b) regulation of cognition (Schraw). After this initial recognition that she has something unfamiliar inside her, Edna will actively seek to increase her metacognitive knowledge, but she makes no attempt at cultivating metacognitive regulation, choosing instead to give her thoughts and emotions free rein.

A few pages later, there is another demonstration of the limits of Edna's self-knowledge: "Edna Pontellier could not have told why, wishing to go to the beach with Robert, she should in the first place have declined, and in the second place have followed in obedience to one of the two contradictory impulses which impelled her" (15-16). It is unclear whether she herself is realizing this and examining her own thought process in the situation at hand, or if the narrator is informing the reader of something that Edna is completely unaware of. The second interpretation provides a reminder that a heterodiegetic narrator usually knows more than the characters they are describing. The reader's construction of a character is also aided by the narrator's observations of what/who the character is *not*, what they are not thinking, and what they do not know or do not perceive. There are other, less ambiguous examples of the narrator revealing aspects of Edna that the character herself is unaware of,

like “she did not admit this, even to herself” (21). Whether or not the above quote represents Edna’s reflections or the narrator’s, it comes shortly before the following: “Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (16), which clearly demonstrates that Edna is becoming increasingly aware of her individuality and taking an interest in exploring both her sense of self and how that self relates to the world. Her attempted rejection of, and inevitable susceptibility to, social influences will be explored below, and it will become clear that Edna does not progress to a full recognition of her “relations” to “the world about her.” It is the world within that she seeks to explore. After only a few scenes, Edna has been set up as a character with a rich, but insufficiently explored, inner life. We have also seen her dawning realization that she wishes to establish her own identity independently of her social roles, as well as her growing awareness of the limits of her self-knowledge. As the narrative progresses, Edna will develop a clearer understanding of who she is along with an increase in metacognitive activity and abilities, although she never achieves a fully integrated self-narrative.

It soon becomes clear that Edna’s interest in introspection is not a new phenomenon, and neither is her awareness of the distinction between individual sense of self and social identity. The narrator informs us that “Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life – that outward existence which conforms, the inward life that questions” (16), which nuances the initial impression that she is just awakening to this insight. What is new, however, is the interest in actively exploring this distinction, the realization that her metacognitive abilities are limited but expandable, and the burgeoning intention to take a more agentive role in her own identity formation. It is important to note that as a child she “apprehended *instinctively*” this distinction, which might even mean that she was unaware of possessing this knowledge, and certainly indicates that she was not consciously reflecting on it. In these early pages Edna is realizing that she needs to actively explore her own thoughts and feelings in order to find out who she is as her own person. In other words, the interest in introspection is not new for her, what is new is the interest in developing her metacognitive abilities and deliberately using introspection as a means to an end, that end being to carve out a space for herself as an individual.

There are numerous examples of Edna voicing her interest in thinking about thinking, and her awareness of the limits of her self-knowledge, such as the conversation she and Adèle Ratignolle have on pp. 18-19, where she says “I was really not conscious of thinking

anything; but perhaps I can retrace my thoughts … for the fun of it" (18), or when she tells Robert Lebrun that "A thousand emotions have swept through me to-night. I don't comprehend half of them. Don't mind what I'm saying; I am just thinking aloud" (31). Edna is not scared by her lack of understanding of her own thoughts and emotions. Rather, she is intrigued and wishes to actively pursue the development of her metacognitive abilities.

Edna's identity formation is directional, and she herself views the process she is going through as a journey and sees moving forward as the only option – "She had resolved never to take another step backward" (59) – the metaphor, whether the image of walking is Edna's or the narrator's, underlines that this process is not one of rambling discovery, but of actively moving toward something. Naturally, this directionality also entails moving away from something, in Edna's case the socially imposed identity that is engendered by her marital status, gender, religion, class, and so on. Her journey is inward. Edna says to Alcée Arobin that "One of these days … I am going to pull myself together a while and think – try to determine what character of a woman I am; for, candidly, I don't know" (84). At this point in the story, Edna has been attempting to find herself, so to speak, for some time, but of course, her identity formation is never completed. Perhaps she did "pull [herself] together a while and think" at some point. This may have been the thinking she did "after Robert went away, when she lay awake upon the sofa till morning" (115), but of course, thinking is not enough to develop a complete self. As will be explored in the next section, Edna's identity formation is stunted by her disregard for external factors. While there is certainly development, and it is driven by introspection, the story shows that relying solely on this method of identity construction is not viable.

Metacognition is explicitly narrated in *The Awakening*. The narrator describes not only how Edna gains insight into her own person and constructs her personal identity, but also to what extent these processes are conscious, and how Edna perceives them, how she thinks and feels regarding her own cognitive processes, her emotions and her increasing self-awareness. This demonstrates the important role of metacognition in active identity formation. It also facilitates the demonstration of inner tensions and contrasts, Edna is both actively pursuing her identity, inadvertently discovering aspects of her own self that she has hitherto been unaware of, and rejecting the parts of her self that she perceives as not her own. In other words, there is both deliberate cultivation and ungovernable instinct at play, and the narrator's comments on Edna's level of metacognitive awareness allows the reader to identify what kind of identity development is happening at any given point in the text.

It should also be noted that in the final scene, when it may be said that all Edna has left is her essential self, the narrator describes her feelings about the people in her life and her relationship to them, but Edna herself "was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach" (115). She is done with introspection, "She had done all the thinking which was necessary after Robert went away" (115). Her thoughts at this point are fluid and seemingly un-verbalized. That is, they appear to be verbalized by the narrator rather than Edna herself. It is curious, then, to note that what lingers in her mind are thoughts and memories of the people who have mattered to her. Once Edna stops actively engaging with her inner life, she is left with body, soul, and traces of the people in her life. This demonstrates that her personal identity, however true she may have felt it to be, was an active construction that needed to be continually upheld and maintained.

Both Edna's choice to actively pursue identity development, and the way in which she attempts to do so, are powerful tools for characterization. The simple act of admitting to herself that she does not know who she is and the subsequent attempt to create an answer indicate that she possesses at least a fair amount of fearlessness and openness. She accepts without hesitation that there are parts of her inner life that are unfamiliar to her, and she approaches introspection willingly and eagerly. This paints her as curious and unafraid. Her decision to delve into her own self also hints at less flattering character traits, like self-absorption, perhaps even selfishness. This is further emphasized by the way in which she goes about developing her identity. The choice to disregard social factors and only search for identity within reveals a disregard for others' opinions, and perhaps a degree of condescension and aloofness, even a feeling that other people would taint or damage her identity. The thought that her interpersonal relationships could aid in identity development or ought to be included in her self-narrative does not occur to her. These traits are confirmed by behavioral characterization and by passages of psycho-narration that describe her perception of her surroundings. Not long after the return to New Orleans from Grand Isle, before Léonce leaves for New York, Edna contemplates her neighborhood and "felt no interest in anything about her." Everything she sees is "part and parcel of an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic" (55). Shortly thereafter, Edna commits to what her husband perceives as an "absolute disregard for her duties as a wife" (59). She no longer follows the expected social etiquette of staying home on Tuesdays to receive visitors, nor does she visit those who have attempted to call on her while she has been out. Toward her husband she takes an uncompromising stand, refusing any attempt to placate him by playing the part of a good housewife. Edna's self-interest is also confirmed by her lack of scruples regarding her

infidelities. The characterization of Edna as selfish is enhanced by the fact that Léonce Pontellier, against whom she rebels so decisively, is shown to be a patient and devoted husband. While he does voice his disapproval of some of Edna's actions, he attempts to reason with her rather than control her, and after he has consulted Doctor Mandelet on the matter he appears to accept the advice given: "leave your wife alone for a while. Don't bother her, and don't let her bother you" (68). There is no indication in the text that Léonce has severe shortcomings aside from perhaps an uninteresting personality and the mere fact of being a husband.

The kinder interpretation is that Enda is simply fiercely independent. Her approach to identity development suggests this character trait, as well. Her seemingly selfish acts might be seen as the inevitable results of societal expectations forcing her into marriage and motherhood, roles that her strong need for independence keeps her from fulfilling. Finding a clear feminist message in *The Awakening*, or seeing its protagonist as feminist, leans on this reading. As a woman, Edna was not given other alternatives, and by the time she found the strength to challenge these patriarchal norms, she had a husband and two children, who end up as unfortunate casualties in her battle for autonomy. However, the feminism of *The Awakening* is contentious. The reading outlined above is certainly available, but it is by no means the only interpretation. Edna's story has been seen as "a kind of prologue to a feminist awakening" (Urgo 32), she has been labelled "a gender anomaly" (Williams 56), and been read as attempting to access the role of "male solitary genius" (Hildebrand 191), to name but a few interpretations.[6] Whether feminist or not, and whether motivated by a disdain for others or by an inherent need for independence, Edna's attempt to escape social identity is ultimately futile. Not only in the sense that it is unsustainable and lonely, but Edna's identity development is influenced by others to a much greater extent than she realizes.

3.1.3. The Rejected Self

Edna's first appearance in the novel is mediated through her husband's observing gaze. In fact, the very first mention of her reads "his wife, Mrs. Pontellier" (5), identifying her first by her role as wife and then by her husband's name. Her own given name is not revealed until several paragraphs later. Over the course of the first eleven chapters the narrator gradually

[6] Williams' article provides a partial overview of the various opinions on Edna's feminism or lack thereof.

shifts from referring to the protagonist as “Mrs. Pontellier” and occasionally “Edna Pontellier” to simply “Edna.” Only when she is “beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being” (16) is she referred to by her given name alone, and “Mrs. Pontellier” is still frequently used until after she has “perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant” (33) which is when the narrator starts to use just “Edna” more or less consistently. This parallels Edna’s move from being looked at by Léonce as “one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage” (5) to proclaiming that “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions” (109). The rejection of the confining roles of wife and mother is in some ways the most linear aspect of Edna’s identity development, but attempting to do away with social identity is also her most complicated process. Vivian Vignoles argues that “it is only people’s interpretation of a given aspect of identity content as social or personal that makes it so” (290). Edna’s interpretation certainly seems to be that she is pursuing an exclusively personal identity, but the attentive reader cannot fail to notice the element of willful ignorance that enables this interpretation. This section examines Edna’s attempt to reject her social self, and the interpersonal factors that influence her identity development. McAdams takes care to emphasize that the actor, agent, and author layers of the self “are not reified and autonomous things. Nor are they distinct roles” (“Psychological Self” 274). For an adult with a successfully developed ability to self-narrate, all three layers are always present. While Edna seems to believe that she has suppressed the self as social actor, the novel as a whole knows and reveals that the rejection of certain social roles does not result in complete autonomy.

Catalyzed by the argument over Edna’s lack of maternal instinct, which results in her breakdown on the porch where she begins to feel “An indescribable oppression” (9), Edna proceeds to distance herself more and more from her husband and children, breaking out of the social identity forced upon her by marriage and motherhood. She stops sharing her husband’s bed, stomps on her wedding ring, stays behind in New Orleans when Léonce goes to New York, and the children are sent to stay with their grandmother for an extended period. Edna starts to make her own money by selling her artwork, has a brief affair with Alcée Arobin, moves out of her husband’s house, tells Robert that “We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of any consequence” (109-10), and when, in her final moments, Léonce and the children enter her mind it is accompanied by the defiant thought that “they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul” (116).

Perhaps the most significant step Edna takes in going from being a wife to being an independent person is to move to the “pigeon-house.” She makes the decision without being

entirely conscious of her own motivations, demonstrating the impact of the unknowable essential self outlined above. In her attempt to explain herself to Mademoiselle Reisz, she says that the old house "never seemed like mine, anyway – like home," but also admits that moving "is a caprice" (82). However, the impulsivity of the decision does not mean that it is not motivated by something fundamental in Edna. William James identifies the home as part of what he calls the "material Self," and states that everyone has "a *blind impulse* . . . to find for ourselves a home of our own which we may live in and 'improve'" (280-81, emphasis mine). Edna's move comes at a point in the story when she has progressed quite far in her subjectivity, and has shed much of her social identity, but she has yet to "determine what character of a woman [she is]" (84). The pigeon-house, then, can be seen as an attempt to rebuild something of her external identity, her material self. The narrator informs us that "The pigeon-house pleased her. It at once assumed the intimate character of a home, while she herself invested it with a charm which it reflected like a warm glow" (95), which matches James' "live in" and "improve."

While Edna's progression from wife and mother to freeing herself from familial constraints might be fairly linear, it is also complex. She meets resistance from some of her friends. Adèle Ratignolle visit the pigeon-house only once, and when she leaves says "I shan't be able to come back and see you; it was very, very imprudent" (97). While Adèle does not explicitly give a reason why she cannot come back, she says this directly after she criticizes Edna for living alone and spending time with a known womanizer like Arobin, so the implication appears to be that she cannot be seen to approve of Edna's new lifestyle. Moreover, while rejecting Léonce seems to be easy for Edna, she is more ambivalent about abandoning her children. Early on, it is made clear that Edna is "not a mother-woman. The mother-women . . . were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (11). The religious language should be noted: "idolized," "worshiped," "holy privilege," and "ministering angels." This further distances Edna from the mother-women, as she is never shown to have much religious inclination, instead the novel contains several references to her fleeing church services. When describing a childhood memory to Adèle she says "Likely as not it was Sunday . . . and I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service" (19), and during her trip with Robert to the Chênière Caminada she leaves church because "A feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame [her] during the service" (34). She does tell Adèle that "during one period of my life religion took a firm hold upon me," but then adds that now she is "just driven along by habit" (19).

Not a mother-woman, then, Edna "was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them" (21). This anticipates Adèle's final words to Edna: "think of the children! Remember them!" (111), which are then mirrored by Edna in her musings the night before her suicide: "She had said over and over to herself: 'To-day it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn't matter about Léonce Pontellier – but Raoul and Etienne!'" (115). However, this quote is followed by the observation that Edna "understood now clearly what she had meant when she said . . . she would never sacrifice herself for her children" (115), and her final thought of them, as remarked above, is that they are not entitled to "possess" her. James observes that "between what a man calls *me* and what he calls simply *mine* the line is difficult to draw. We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves," and he lists "our children" as an example of one of these things, before commenting that "we are dealing with a fluctuating material; the same object being sometimes treated as a part of me, at other times as simply mine, and then again as if I had nothing to do with is at all" (279, emphasis in original).

Edna not only rejects the expectations placed upon her based on marital status and motherhood, she attempts to do away with social identity entirely. For a while she feels liberated by this. After moving to the pigeon-house, she felt like she had "descended on the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual" (95). However, while she might conceptually equate individualism with solitude, in practice she does not isolate herself. She maintains her friendships with Adèle and Mademoiselle Reisz, has an affair with Alcée Arobin, and when Robert returns from Mexico she expresses a wish for them to be "everything to each other" (109). Moreover, her descent on the social scale has been short. While she may scorn certain social customs, she retains her position as a member of the upper middle-class. Because Edna is white and economically secure, she has enough initial liberty that she is able to spontaneously set out on a quest for even more liberty. As Molly J. Hildebrand argues, "she desires not a fundamental change in the racial, class, and social system of her world, but simply the elimination of the barriers which prevent *her* from accessing all the vestiges of white masculine privilege" (190, emphasis in original).

An easily available and very common reading is that Edna's ultimate wish is to be free and autonomous, and that none of the social roles available to her allow for this option. Peter Ramos, in "Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*," claims

that "Edna's search for such an unrestricted, undefined and, ultimately, impossible state – a freedom from identity – ironically deprives her life of meaning (and finally of life itself)," but he defines identity as "at base a social construction, a practical fiction one inhabits" (147), excluding from his definition the private, internal self that Edna chooses to develop at the expense of her social identity.[7] Ramos equates *identity* with what we might call identity *categories*, roles like *artist* or *mother*, and in that sense Edna is certainly attempting to escape identity. However, this approach does not account for identity in the sense of coherence of personal existence, and it also falls short of recognizing the full complexity of social identity. Ramos posits that "both Mademoiselle Reisz and Adèle Ratignolle explicitly inhabit social identities available to them only to actively and creatively transform them. In doing so, they implicitly demonstrate the options available to women of this time period, options Edna fails to exercise and sustain" (148). This is something of an oversimplification. Adèle Ratignolle does not step far outside the boundaries of what is expected of her and demonstrates little agency in her identity construction, and Mademoiselle Reisz' relationship with her community is tenuous precisely because of the way she has constructed her identity. When she first enters the narrative, she is characterized as "a disagreeable little woman . . . who had quarreled with almost everyone, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample on the rights of others" (27). It is true, however, that both women are able to craft identities which can accommodate both their need to adapt to social demands (which Adèle does to a greater extent that Mademoiselle Reisz) and their personal selves. Ramos is also correct in his observation that Edna "fails to exercise and sustain" these options. She does not attempt to develop an identity that can reconcile her sense of self with her social roles, or even consider the possibility of doing so, and while Adèle and Mademoiselle Reisz are significant influences on her identity development, Edna never considers modelling a self on either of them.

A possible reason why Edna makes no effort to construct an external self that suits her could be her failure to see that her private self is inextricably linked with her social self. It has been noted that Edna's "true self had been developing while in relationship with others and the world" (McConnell 43), a fact that Edna herself, and to a somewhat lesser extent the narrator, almost entirely disregards. Mademoiselle Reisz becomes Edna's confidant and

[7] In contrast, Michael T. Gilmore writes that when Léonce, about halfway through the novel, tells Doctor Mandelet that Edna is "not like herself," he is "plainly mistaken; Edna has never been . . . more in touch with her *identity*" (83, emphasis mine), yet another reminder that the word *identity* can be defined in widely different ways, and that it is important to notice which concept is being invoked at any given time.

mentor, and as the latter swims to her death, one of her last thoughts is of the pianist telling her that "The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies" (116), signaling that Reisz's ideas about selfhood have had a profound impact on Edna. Mademoiselle Reisz is certainly "the solitary, consummate artist, a sorceress who purges Edna of all narratives of others in preparation for her baptismal swim into mastery of the 'I'" (Kearns 79), and she also plays an integral part in Edna's initial awakening. When Edna first heard Mademoiselle Reisz play at Grand Isle, "the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul" (28). Throughout the story, Edna will continue to seek Mademoiselle Reisz's company and advice, but above all her music. As Edna gets into the habit of visiting the pianist in New Orleans, the narrator informs us that "in the presence of that personality which was offensive to her, . . . the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna's spirit and set it free" (80). In a way, Mademoiselle Reisz's role in Edna's awakening is sensory, more than social, but it is nevertheless an experience that Edna could never have undergone in isolation.

Adèle's role in Edna's awakening is also in part sensory, although visual, not auditory. While at Grand Isle, Edna "began to loosen a little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her. There may have been – there must have been – influences, both subtle and apparent . . . but the most obvious was . . . Adèle Ratignolle. The excessive physical charm of the Creole had first attracted her, for Edna had a sensuous susceptibility to beauty" (16). Again, the determining factor in her awakening is a subjective, sensory perception, but one which could not have been experienced without a social bond. Moreover, it is interesting to note that it was this friendship that made Edna "loosen a little the mantle of reserve." This also supports the reading that Doctor Mandelet's description of Edna as "highly organized" refers to how she used to be. As discussed above, Edna's choice to actively investigate her selfhood indicates a degree of fearlessness and openness. It is difficult to imagine that she would have been able to undertake her subsequent exploration of self, had she been as reserved as she is said to have been prior to her friendship with Adèle.

The last physical-but-social aspect of her awakening is, of course, her sexuality. Although it is Alcée Arobin who gives her "the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded" (85), the "first-felt throbbings of desire" (33) had already been stirred by Robert. Edna does not identify Robert as a catalyst until much later, after he has returned from Mexico and looks at her with "the same glance that had penetrated to the sleeping places of her soul and awakened them" (99). In fact, Edna does not recognize any of these influences. When she "let her mind wander back over her stay at Grand Isle; and she tried to discover wherein this summer had been different from any and every other summer of her life," she

has only a vague notion "that she herself – her present self – was in *some way* different from the other self" (42, emphasis mine).

As noted, all three of these awakenings are physical, although facilitated by social circumstances. Adèle provides the visual, Mademoiselle Reisz the auditory, and Robert and Arobin the sexual. Edna only partially recognizes the importance of the body in forming a sense of self. While she seems to include the body in her definition of selfhood when she stubbornly says to herself in her final moments that her family "need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul" (116), her claim that she would "give up the unessential . . . would give [her] life" (49) indicates a dualism of body and soul, and that she ascribes little importance to the embodied self. This is reiterated by her suicide. The readings that see her suicide as the only way she can achieve true selfhood presuppose that the body is not part of the self. Moreover, she has given birth to two children, which entails that for Edna her own body is a living reminder of the oppression of motherhood. However, active, physical presence in her own body is a big part of her identity development. The three examples above are completely essential to her development, as is learning to swim. Not only does the sea symbolize endless possibilities, but acquiring a new physical ability empowers Edna. It does not seem a stretch to say that this is a critical step toward the confidence she needs to break out of her social identity and attempt to carve out a space in which to be herself fully.

Edna's refusal to see that her private self is intimately connected with her social one might be her downfall. She focuses exclusively on forming her private, inward identity, and her suicide could be read as surrender upon realizing that she does, after all, long for true connection with others, but that the self she has cultivated is entirely incompatible with the social selves available to her. Ramos argues that Edna longs not for freedom, but "meaning – which, increasingly for Edna, involves not selfhood but the unattainable yet always longed-for lover" (152). This reading, however, ignores Edna and Robert's last conversation, where Edna, after Robert fantasizes that Léonce might set her free, emphatically states that she is "no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not," explaining that she has no wish to be given from Léonce to Robert, and would "laugh at you both" (109) if the two men were to come to this kind of understanding. In other words, Edna is refusing to be defined by her relation to a man, asserting exactly the freedom that Ramos claims she does not truly long for. However, Ramos is partially right in identifying "Edna's lifelong inability to commit herself to anyone or -thing" (152-53) as her fatal flaw, but it would be more accurate to say that she is unable to commit herself to anyone or -thing *except her own selfhood*. Edna commits herself so entirely to herself that she obliterates her ability to inhabit

and adapt to social roles, refusing herself the option of trying to incorporate a social identity in her sense of self.

The novel makes no explicit comment on Edna's reasons for ending her life, nor is the reader privy to the exact moment of her decision or even to what extent her suicide is deliberate. Making definitive statements about specific factors leading to Edna's demise seems speculative, but some inferences can be made. On the one hand, Edna "had done all the thinking which was necessary after Robert went away, when she lay awake upon the sofa till morning" (115). On the other, nothing in the way her walk to the beach and her swim are narrated indicates that her final choice is premeditated. While it is stated that she "knew a way to elude" the familial bonds and romantic entanglements that have come to feel antagonistic to her, this is immediately followed by the comment that "She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach" (115). Some of Edna's thoughts during her walk to the beach are explicitly shown to be narrated retrospectively, they are her thoughts from the previous night, while other passages of psycho-narration are more elusive. It is at times unclear whether the narrator is repeating thoughts and emotions Edna has had in the past, that she is having in that moment, or is verbalizing Edna's unsymbolized thinking and unarticulated feelings. However, what does emerge is that the thoughts of both Edna and the narrator dwell mainly on Edna's family and romantic involvements, as well as the novel's two mentor-like figures, Mademoiselle Reisz and Doctor Mandelet. Whether because her interpersonal relationships are what Edna most strongly wishes to escape or what she finds hardest to leave behind remains unclear. Kathrine Kearns, along with numerous other critics, reads Edna's suicide as "a sacrifice to the seemingly irreconcilable imperatives of autonomy and maternity" (78). That Edna perceives this irreconcilability is clear, but what she ultimately longs for, and whether her suicide is an act of giving up or breaking free, is not. Regardless, what is undeniable is that when all else is stripped away, when she has shed the symbolic garments of the "fictitious self" as well as her actual garments, traces of her social connections remain with her until the very end.

The way other characters are shown to impact her identity development, and her susceptibility to sensory influences, show that Edna is highly sensitive and somewhat suggestible. However, the most significant characterization derived from this aspect of her identity development is the revelation that Enda is wrong about herself. Her unwillingness or inability to see the effect that other people have on her identity development indicates a degree of self-deception that complicates the picture of a curious, open, and ruthlessly introspective traveler in search of self which is painted by her active identity construction.

Edna is shown to be aware of Adèle's influence on her emergent liberation, and to eventually realize Robert's role as a catalyst in her awakening. This indicates that Edna's refusal to acknowledge that her identity is in part social is nor just self-deception, but willful ignorance.

3.2. Edna's, the Narrator's, and the Novel's "Theories" of the Self

Edna's ideal self is easily recognizable as fiercely independent to the point of being isolated. A small, but significant, detail which further underlines this is the fact that she reads Emerson when her husband and children have left, and she is luxuriating in the feeling of being all to herself (74). Ralph Waldo Emerson was a leading transcendentalist figure who, when he resigned his pastorate in 1832 said "I am determined . . . to do nothing which I cannot do with my whole heart" (B. Perry 2). He wrote in "Self-Reliance," one of his most famous essays, that "Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. . . . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. . . . No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature" (Emerson 99). The insistent individualism of the transcendentalist school of thought is a perfect fit for Edna's pursuit of autonomy. She has, after all, "resolved never again to belong to another than herself" (82). In her final moments, Edna's mind lingers on the significant people in her life, and it is difficult to determine if she regrets not feeling more connected to them, or if she fully feels like she is escaping their bonds. Either way, for the majority of the narrative Edna's conception of what she is pursuing, her theory of what it means to be her true self, relies heavily on absolute autonomy and subjectivity.

Edna underemphasizes the significance of external factors in her identity development, and idealizes autonomy and subjectivity at any cost. So does the narrator, whose consciousness is closely aligned with Edna's. While extra- and heterodiegetic narrators are generally assumed to be reliable, they are not necessarily objective. It is often held that the more overt a narrator is, the less likely they are to be entirely reliable (see e.g. Rimmon-Kenan 104).[8] This assumption is based on the classical definition that "a narrator [is] *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (Booth 158-59, emphasis in original).

[8] While examples of unreliable hetero- and extradiegetic narrators exist, they are, on the whole, "extremely unusual" (Rimmon-Kenan 105), especially if the narrator is also covert. Terence Patrick Murphy and Kelly S. Walsh's article "Unreliable Third Person Narration? The Case of Katherine Mansfield" presents an interesting take on the possibility of an unreliable heterodiegetic narrator, arguing that difficulty in differentiating the voices of the narrator and the protagonist engenders unreliability.

An overt narrator is more likely to represent an individuated consciousness, and the more personified a narrator is, the more likely it is that their views will diverge from those of the implied author. This is a reasonable deduction, but it would perhaps be more accurate to say that an overt narrator is more likely to be *obviously* unreliable. Moreover, the Boothian definition of unreliability as ideological distance between narrator and implied author has been contested, adjusted, and expanded many times over. When the implied author is removed from the equation, as many contemporary narratologists prefer to do, it becomes less clear why an overt narrator should be less reliable than a covert one. After all, the former's subjectivity is more easily detected, which might in a sense make them more reliable. When the reader is able to conceptualize the narrator as a standalone consciousness with beliefs and opinions of their own, it may be easier to distinguish between accurate descriptions of the storyworld state of affairs and the narrator's subjective perceptions, and as such it is more difficult for the narrator to mislead the reader.

It would be a stretch to call the narrator of *The Awakening* unreliable in any conventional sense, but a narrator that at times fuses with the consciousness of a single character does in fact share a lowest common denominator with unreliable narrators, namely that they require the reader to "introduce a correcting factor of his own into the narrative, to check or balance some particular bias or blind spot" (Harvey 74-75). Moreover, the question of whether to place greater trust in a covert or an overt narrator is particularly interesting in this case because this narrator is both. The narrator of *The Awakening* is often covert in the sense of being so closely aligned with Edna that it is can be difficult to tell whether narrator or protagonist focalizes a given passage. However, the narrator occasionally becomes very overt, even personified, when using the first person plural pronoun, as in "that fictitous self which *we* assume like a garment with which to appear before the world" (59, emphasis mine). In this passage, the narrator becomes an independent consciousness by using *we* instead of, say, *people,* and in so doing indicates that they have all the subjectivity and fallibility of any other individual. While the narrator does know more than Edna, on several occasions commenting on the latter's lack of knowledge or awareness, what is given is not an impartial account, but one heavily colored by the protagonist's ideals and perceptions. The narrator sides with Edna, shares her beliefs, "remains effaced and . . . readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates" (Cohn 26). Although the consonance is weaker in the earlier part of the novel, even entirely absent in the first few pages, and although other characters occasionally focalize brief passages, the narrator and Edna are closely aligned for most of the narrative. A reading such

as this, which attempts to understand one specific character, must be aware of biases that might be shared between that character and the narrator.

The close alignment between the narrator's and Edna's consciousnesses somewhat obscures the novel's other convictions. Cristina Giorcelli writes that "From the point of view of stylistic coherence, . . . the message of *The Awakening* is blurred by the dichotomies and ambiguities that pervade the entire narration. The author's wavering hold on surface and underlying meanings . . . indicates a refusal to take sides and baffles judgment" (110). While her stylistic analysis is insightful, Giorcelli seems to miss the depth of Chopin's psychological portrait. She describes the characterization of Edna as "psychologically, emotionally, and socially drawn in terms so stark as almost to oversimplify her case" (110), a claim that can easily be refuted by the mere fact that 120 years after the publication of *The Awakening*, and thirty years after Giorcelli's article, Edna's identity is still being debated.[9] What Giorcelli reads as "the author's wavering hold" can be accounted for by the narrator's subjectivity and the increasing cohesion of protagonist's and narrator's consciousnesses, interrupted by the narrator's occasional visits to other characters' minds. As discussed above, Edna is blind to the external factors that influence her identity, and she also seems unaware that her journey consists of identity dissolution as well as development as she refuses to integrate significant parts of her life into her self-narrative. The narrator shares Edna's view of selfhood, telling us in no uncertain terms that "she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self" (59).

While the narrator might share Edna's conception of the ideal form of selfhood, an awareness of the difficulty of this endeavor is present in the text which does not appear to be present in Edna's mind. The observation that Edna "was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her," is followed by a passage of vocal authorial narration that both foreshadows the novel's ending and comes across as a warning to the reader: "But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!" (16). Edna never makes it past the "vague, tangled, chaotic" stage, and

[9] In fairness, Giorcelli goes on to comment that *The Awakening*'s "meaning and structure may be better recognized and valued if one takes a many-sided perspective and allows a number of options to coexist and play off against one another. Such a reading does not choose between or reconcile dualities, but holds them in what Richard Wilbur, in another context, calls 'honed abeyance'" (110-11). I would go a step further, and argue that instead of passively accepting the dualities, they should be actively engaged with as an integral part of the narrative.

increasingly the narrator is also drawn into the tumult. The passages of authorial narration become fewer as the story unfolds, consistent with the narrator's shift from referring to the protagonist as "Mrs. Pontellier" to calling her "Edna." The gradual increase in cohesion, especially in terms of language, between narrator and protagonist has been noted by amongst others Xianfeng Mou, although she believes it is Edna's perspective that changes rather than the narrator's: "Chopin also allows Edna to approach closer and closer to the narrator's opinions" (104), and Jacqueline Buckman who considers "the development of a female speaking subject" to be "one of the work's central concerns" (58). On the other hand, Dorothy Goldman claims that "even the narrator, whose language initially mimics the heroine's confused and inarticulate understanding of the process of self-realization, must finally abandon her" (49), and George M. Spangler perceives "a detached tone" (251) in the narration. These differing opinions can at least partly be accounted for by the way the narrator flits in and out of Edna's perspective. However, the idealistic consonance is obvious: just like Edna, the narrator considers the autonomous self to be superior. The main difference between them is the narrator's awareness of the dangers that come with pursuing this kind of self.

Mademoiselle Reisz, frequently a voice of reason in the novel, also exhibits skepticism as to the feasibility of the kind of self Edna longs for. Nevertheless, she and the narrator both seem to admire the endeavor; the narrator states that Edna is "casting aside that fictitious self" (59), and Mademoiselle Reisz talks of "the brave soul" (65) and "The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice" (85). Edna herself sometimes exhibits doubts and confusion, but she has also "resolved never to take another step backward" (59), and she feels as though "Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual" (95). The exhilaration of independence is the dominant impulse in Edna, so it is left to the narrator and Mademoiselle Reisz to remind the reader that she has dived into troubled waters moments after learning to swim.

The narrative never states or even strongly implies that Edna was wrong in pursuing personal identity at the expense of developing a stable social self with which she might have been able to feel comfortable, but the cautionary voices of Mademoiselle Reisz and occasionally the narrator are allowed to alert the reader to the fact that the undertaking could be doomed. The fact of her death and the unhappy ending to her love story with Robert serve as stronger signals that the protagonist's actions were misguided and fatal. The novel has been seen as a "cautionary tale" (Wershoven 28), and Kearns notes that "Chopin is not, finally, wholly seduced by her protagonist's fantasies. Edna's versions of reality, produced along a continuum modulating from fevers, dreams, and fantasies to consciously contrived

statements, are simultaneously eviscerated and empowered by the larger text" (63). This simultaneous evisceration and empowerment makes it difficult to determine the novel's overarching conception of identity and morality. While Edna (and the narrator) may consider the autonomous self an ideal, and ignore the moral consequences of pursuing absolute independence, the novel as a whole paints a more complex picture. Adèle's "Think of the children" (113) and the characterization of Edna's husband as patient, caring, and accommodating serve as reminders that social secession comes at a cost paid by those who are left behind. Doctor Mandelet's remark that "youth is given up to illusion" – the subsequent "my dear child" (112) confirms that he includes Edna in his definition of youth – suggests to the reader the possibility that Edna's endeavor is no more than naïve reverie.

3.3. Identity as Process, Identity as Characterization

It seems self-evident that the portrayal of identity development is a means of characterization in and of itself, if we accept the premise that characters appear to have identities. At least some of the contents of the self are inevitably revealed, but characterization also happens in the depiction of how a character relates to their own identity, and in the process of their active or passive identity development. I have focused on the form and development of Edna's identity to a larger extent than its contents, both because identity as process is so central to the novel, and because this is the more subtle form of characterization. It has been said that it "is the heart and the great triumph of Mrs. Chopin's characterization – that the relentless force that compels Edna is felt – and felt insistently – rather than analyzed, explained and, least of all, condemned" (Spangler 251), and it is felt because the reader discovers Edna as Edna discovers herself.

Studying the forces that act on Edna's identity development also reveals aspects of her character that both protagonist and narrator are blind to. Edna "has constructed a self-narrative for her life that, unlike *The Awakening*, functions to deny rather than reveal reality" (Glendening 68), and this is easily overlooked unless particular attention is paid to the construction of this partial self-narrative. Bearing in mind that narrative identity is not only a way to understand ourselves, but also to understand others, the reader's construction of Edna's identity is limited by this denial of reality. However, the reader has the privileged position of the bird's eye view, and can attempt to integrate Edna's perspective with the other

voices in the book, and understand her development better by taking a step back and examining its form and progression. Adèle points out that "you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life" (97), which highlights the unfinished state of Edna's identity. Her identity is indeed that of a child, because she tries to abandon her existing self in favor of an entirely new one. The result, of course, of attempting to function only as autobiographical author while suppressing the self as social actor is that the self cannot be integrated.

There is a tendency in much of the existing scholarship on *The Awakening* to give soundbite answers to questions like what Edna's development consists of, why she commits suicide, what she is like, and what her fatal flaw is. This is to do Chopin's nuanced psychological portrait a disservice. I have attempted instead to capture the complexities of depicting identity development in narrative. The prevailing view that Edna dismantles her social identity in order to pursue complete subjectivity, or that she is torn between her social and personal selves, is perhaps too simple. As demonstrated, at least three selves can be found within Edna, and they cannot be easily disentangled. There are other ways to delineate the components of Edna's identity and her identity formation processes, as evidenced by the large body of scholarship on the topic. The way in which the different aspects of Edna's identity are seen to intertwine, and the fact that various definitions and delineations are possible and valid readings of the novel, mirrors the scientific and philosophical literature on the topic of self and identity. There is no one way to define identity, no easy way to distinguish the components and processes involved, no consensus as to what identity is made up of and how it is developed. Even the terminology is inconsistent. *The Awakening*, then, showcases the complexities of this topic. Chopin's novel, along with the critical work it has engendered, demonstrates the difficulties in explaining a phenomenon that is at the very heart of the human condition, difficulties that science still grapples with more than a hundred years later.

4. Fragmented Identity in *The House of Mirth*

"All I can say, Lily, is that I can't make you out!" (66) says Judy Trenor, and Carry Fisher muses "Sometimes … I think it's just flightiness – and sometimes I think it's because, at heart, she despises what she's trying for. And it's the difficulty of deciding that makes her such an interesting study" (163). Judy and Carry might as well be stand-ins for the reader as they voice their confusion about who Lily really is. The characterization of Lily Bart takes many forms and focuses on a number of different aspects, without ever giving the reader full access to her inner life, or fully defining an identity. This does indeed make her "an interesting study." In this chapter I examine how characterization functions as identity attribution, and *The House of Mirth* presents a particularly interesting case study, because the identity attributed to its protagonist is so incomplete. It is not incomplete in the sense that the heroine is insufficiently characterized, but in the sense that this incompleteness is itself a feature of her identity.

The previous chapter considered a novel centered around one woman's intentional pursuit of identity, and considered how the portrayal of identity development functions as characterization. Turning now to Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, a novel in which identity formation is kept in the background to a much larger extent than in *The Awakening*, a different aspect of the relationship between identity and characterization comes to the foreground, namely how characterization attributes to the character in question a certain identity. In the case of Lily Bart, the characterization is varied and might even seem inconsistent at times. The different ways of characterizing Lily – directly by the narrator, by Lily herself, by other characters, and indirectly through plot and narrative structure – together attribute to her a fragmented and underdeveloped identity.

4.1. Both . . . and . . .

As Wharton explains in her autobiography, she was set on writing a novel about the New York leisure class, a subject which seemed to be one of "certain subjects too shallow to yield anything to the most searching gaze" (*A Backward Glance* 206). Her challenge was how to find "the typical human significance which is the story-teller's reason for telling one story rather than another" in a depiction of such a superficial milieu, and she came to the

conclusion “that a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys. Its tragic implication lies in its power of debasing people and ideals. The answer, in short, was my heroine, Lily Bart” (207). However, while Wharton’s primary intention may have been to depict a specific milieu, with her protagonist serving as a figurehead for those destroyed by it, that in no way detracts from the psychological portrait she paints or robs it of its complexity, realism, or centrality to the narrative. Wharton’s observations about her own novel suggest the possibility of reading Lily entirely as a product of her environment, but they do not make it obligatory to do so. Authorial intent is treacherous territory. Neil Gaiman writes: “If someone tells you what a story is about, they are probably right. If they tell you that that is *all* the story is about, they are very definitely wrong” (“Introduction”, emphasis in original), and it is important to bear in mind that “someone” includes the author. As Michael Holquist, paraphrasing M. M. Bakhtin, puts it: “My voice gives the illusion of unity to what I say; I am, in fact, constantly expressing a plenitude of meanings, *some intended, others of which I am unaware*” (xx, emphasis mine). No single person, then, not even Edith Wharton herself, can tell us that “this is *all The House of Mirth* is about.”

Taking Wharton’s observations as important background information, but not necessarily the whole truth, this reading rests on the observation that Lily Bart is both a product of and reject from her environment. Her contradictory relationship with her milieu is an important factor in creating confusion about Lily’s identity, both for the reader and for Lily herself. Moreover, this “both . . . and . . .” kind of description will apply to many aspects of Lily’s characterization and the identity it conveys. Blake Nevius, considering the passage from Wharton’s autobiography cited above, notes that “The characterization of Lily Bart was central to the problem,” but considers Lily to be “an essentially lightweight and static protagonist” (55) for most of the narrative. My reading does not consider Lily neither lightweight nor static, but incomplete. Not incomplete as a textual construct, but incomplete as a non-actual individual. This is conveyed through the composite nature of the characterization. Ulfried Reichardt notes that Lily’s “sense of self . . . rests on a continuous exchange between conventions and expectations of society, that is, external space, and a vague inner feeling of something beyond her social role, yet which is never fully realized” (347). In other words, the sometimes vague and superficial characterization, which may to some translate as the characterization of a “lightweight” character, is neither incomplete nor inconsistent, rather it depicts a fluctuating and unfinished identity.

During the climactic moment of Lily Bart's downfall, her final conversation with Lawrence Selden where she makes the spur-of-the-moment decision not to use Bertha Dorset's letters to regain her social standing, she feels an urge to make him "see her wholly for once" (265), but, as William E. Moddelmog points out, "[Selden] never does 'see her wholly,' and neither do the novel's readers" (337). The reason Selden is unable to "see her wholly" could well be that Lily does not see herself wholly, either. In a kind of reverse bildungsroman, the protagonist's sense of self crumbles as the narrative progresses. Lily's identity remains unintegrated until the end, as, due to a combination of unwillingness and inability, she refuses to engage in active identity construction. Rather than structure her fragmented identity into a coherent self-narrative, the bits and pieces of her selfhood drift apart and out of her grasp. The narrator also appears unable to see Lily "wholly," seeing instead a number of different Lilys. Throughout she is characterized by the narrator and by other characters as contradictory, dual, or indeterminate. However, by synthesizing Lily's self-perception, Selden's focalization, and the narrator's perspective, the reader, at least, might come closer to a complete understanding of Lily's identity than Moddelmog thinks. The inconsistencies are not a hinderance to, but rather a means of, characterization. As C. J. Wershoven points out, in an essay that considers the similarities of *The House of Mirth* and *The Awakening*, "there is little sense of certainty about the heroines and their conflicts at all" (28). However, in *The House of Mirth* that uncertainty is much more keenly felt. While Edna Pontellier's identity development, as we saw in the previous chapter, is incomplete, the strong consonance between narrator and protagonists, and the latter's determination and agency, give that novel a feeling of directionality. The fragmented characterization, the frequent presence of other focalizers, and Lily's passivity and refusal to engage in honest introspection bring the uncertainty to the foreground in *The House of Mirth*.

The characterization of Lily Bart and the identity it gives rise to could fill several books. This study considers a limited, but varied selection of the different means of characterization present in the novel. I begin with a consideration of Lily's view of herself, where her unsuccessful self-construction is examined with special emphasis on her self-division, self-deception, and self-objectification. Lawrence Selden's rose-tinted perspective is then examined. After the exploration of these two perspectives, the internal and the external, I turn to a close reading of a single scene, the display of *tableaux vivants* where Lily's portrayal of Reynolds' Mrs. Lloyd is perceived by the audience as a picture of Lily herself. This scene reveals much about the confusion of false personas with true selves that can be seen throughout the novel. Finally, I discuss two different ways in which the narrative composition

supports characterization: Gerty Farish and Bertha Dorset as foils and rejected possible selves, and the way the settings mirrors Lily's identity development. This ought to give enough variation to appreciate that the fragmented characterization leads to the attribution of a fragmented identity. All of these topics could have been treated more in depth, the *tableaux vivants* scene alone is rich enough that an exhaustive treatment of it would leave no room in this chapter for anything else. I have chosen variety over depth because it is necessary in order to understand how the fragmented nature and underdeveloped state of Lily's identity is communicated. In short, this chapter focuses more on the form of her identity than its contents, although both are of course taken into account.

4.2. Lily's Self-Construction

Where Edna Pontellier's self-construction is incomplete, and perhaps misguided, but active and directional, Lily's is fluctuating, and takes the form of destruction as much as construction. I have chosen to focus on three aspects of Lily's relationship with herself: self-division, self-deception, and self-objectification. These aspects overlap and bleed into each other, and must be seen to exist on a continuum, not as separate elements.

4.2.1. Self-Division

Deborah Esch notes that "At pivotal junctures in the unfolding of [her] fate, Wharton's heroine finds herself doubled, or more precisely self-divided" (9). Nevius also considers this self-division, noting that "we are asked to believe that two sides of her personality are struggling for possession," but in contrast to Esch, ha does not see the self-division as being truly present in the narrative throughout. Rather, he believes that "there is no possibility for a genuine moral conflict until near the end of the action when as a result of suffering she experiences the self-realization which is the condition of any moral growth" (57). I disagree with Nevius' denial that the self-division permeates the narrative, and his limiting it to moral conflict, and with Esch's implication that the *same* self-division can be found throughout. However, both touch upon something essential: the way in which the characterization of Lily indicates a fragmented identity.

There are two significant occasions where the text explicitly evokes the idea of Lily containing not one, but two selves. During Lily's and Selden's walk at Bellomont, we are told that "There were in her at that moment two beings, one drawing deep breaths of freedom and exhilaration, the other gasping for air in a little black prison-house of fears" (57-58). A second mention of two beings occurs when Lily is leaving the Trenors' house after her altercation with Gus: "She seemed a stranger to herself, or rather there were two selves in her, the one she had always know, and a new abhorrent being to which it found itself chained" (130). These would not appear to be the same two selves. In the first example, there is one Lily who is drawn to Selden's lofty idealism, and another that is terrified by the consequences of choosing romance over pragmatism. Lily knows that if she is to reach her goal of marrying a rich husband, her attention needs to be on Gryce, not Selden. But, as always, she is capricious and malleable, and has failed to resist when "the whole current of her mood was carrying her toward Lawrence Selden" (48). Under Selden's influence she finds herself questioning her motivations and desires, and since Lily does not know how to integrate conflicting impulses, she finds herself split in two. The second example seems to indicate more clearly an old and a new self. Considering the linear progression of the narrative, the old self here would either contain both of the selves mentioned above, or be equal to one of them, while the "new abhorrent being" represents a third. She also says to Gerty Farish that "your old self rejects you and shuts you out" (145), demonstrating that she feels like this new self is taking over. As before, she is afraid, but where the frightened self in the first example is overcome by unidentified fears in the plural, in this case it seems that the old self is afraid of one thing: the new self. The new self represents not so much a development but a revelation, the controlled and self-deceptive Lily is forced to confront aspects of herself that she has been ignoring. She has realized her naivete and the limitations of what she can gain from social manipulation and putting herself on display. While the inner turmoil stills somewhat, at least periodically, the new being remains with her for the rest of the narrative. That this new insight, the influence of the new being in her, has a lasting impact becomes clear when Sim Rosedale offers to lend her money to pay back her debt to Trenor. Lily rejects Rosedale's offer, which he calls "a plain business arrangement," because "it is exactly what Gus Trenor proposed; and that I can never again be sure of understanding the plainest business arrangement" (258).

Esch also considers both of these scenes, but uses the second as an illustration that "The self-division proves permanent" (9). As I have argued, these scenes hardly seem to depict the same division. Self-division does seem to be a permanent, but not static, feature of Lily's inner life. There is also a more fleeting mention of two selves during her interaction

with Trenor: “She felt suddenly weak and defenceless. . . . But all the while another self was sharpening her to vigilance” (128). Again, the two selves do not appear to be divided along the same lines as the other mentions of two selves. More subtle indications of self-division can be found throughout the narrative as well, for instance when Lily “wondered at herself, as she had so often wondered, that, possessing the knack [i.e. social talent], she did not more consistently exercise it. But sometimes she was forgetful – and sometimes, could it be that she was proud?” (173).

Contradictory traits, desires, and dispositions seem to engender not just inner tension, but entirely separate personas for Lily. Throughout the novel the various Lilys compete for center stage, and they are never properly integrated. The characterization of Lily frequently takes the form of “yes, but . . .” or “both . . . and . . .” statements. This pattern can be found in her emotional reactions, her outward appearance, and in her relationship to herself. The *tableaux vivants* scene, which will be examined more in depth below, demonstrates that Lily can give of the impression of being simultaneously herself and someone else. Selden often sees her as inherently contradictory, too, which will also be discussed below. Moreover, the “doubling,” as Esch calls it, can be seen frequently in her reactions. She finds Selden’s expression of “no more than the satisfaction which every pretty woman expects to see reflected in masculine eyes” when they meet for the first time since Bellomont to be “distasteful to her vanity, [but] reassuring to her nerves” (82). When she returns from Europe, she receives the new of her aunt’s death with a “shock of dismay” which is “mitigated, almost at once, by the irrepressible thought that now, at last, she would be able to pay her debt” (191). Most clearly, perhaps, her self-division can be seen in her actions. Many scholars have argued that action is the primary, or even the only, means of characterization. James Phelan, as discussed Chapter 2, discovered when he set out to write *Reading People, Reading Plots* that it was impossible to separate character from plot, and Charles Child Walcutt considers characterization to be fundamentally “a function or a product of the action” (3). Lily’s actions reveal her contradictory nature time and again. An early example is when she fails to go to church with Percy Gryce, even though it had been her suggestion to do so, choosing instead to spend the day with Selden. Her competing impulses are shown again when rather than follow through on her intention to “evad[e] [Selden’s] request” (122) to see her after their kiss in the Brys’ conservatory, she invites him to come see her the next day, and in her impulsive and fatal decision to burn Bertha Dorset’s letters, which were to be her ticket to social redemption.

4.2.2. Self-Deception

Lily's self-division takes a subtler form, as well. When she examines herself the way one might examine another person – with keen interest, but at a distance and without access to the deeper parts of their inner life – she is splitting herself into observer and object. While she might be "a keen reader of her own heart" (49) and frequently questions her own motivations, desires and emotions throughout the narrative, she also appears reluctant to delve too deeply into her own inner life. Although the narrator attempts to convince us that she is "too intelligent not to be honest with herself" (36), she is never *fully* honest with herself, because she is also "always scrupulous about keeping up appearances to herself" (72). Lily herself seems to see this control over her inner life as desirable, suggested by, for example, the choice of words when she experiences of "a mood of irritability that she was usually too *prudent* to *indulge*" (37, emphasis mine).

Moreover, Lily is shown throughout the narrative, even at the very beginning when she still has all her social standing and her hopes and dreams for the future, to be extremely uncomfortable in her own company. It is stated that "she wanted to get away from herself, and conversation was the only means of escape that she knew" (18), and that "she knew herself by heart too, and was sick of the old story" (87). This is presented as a life-long problem for her, and it persists throughout the novel, as one of Lily's most consistent character traits. Toward the end of the novel we are once again reminded of it when she feels "a dread of returning to the solitude of her room, while she could be anywhere else, or in any company but her own" (253). The language of "getting away from herself" and "her own company" again evokes the notion of two beings contained within one person. This tendency to separate herself from herself is one of the most consistent aspects of the characterization, and indicates that Lily's identity is fundamentally unintegrated. The observation that "she had never learned to live with her own thoughts" (156) is one of the few indications the novel contains of a coherent narrative identity. Ironically, this refusal to introspect and *be*, rather than observe, a self, prevents Lily from acting as an autobiographical author and fully developing her self-narrative. Along with her other seemingly consistent dispositions, malleability and capriciousness, the most stable of Lily's traits appear to also be the most significant obstacles to forming a stable sense of self.

It is interesting when considering Lily's self-deception to note the frequent characterizations of her as childlike. The scenes in which she is likened to a child often coincide with a demonstration of poor mentalization skills. Mentalization is a term from

psychology, a key concept in the study of personality disorders, above all borderline personality disorder. Similar to the philosophical term "Theory of Mind," it refers to the ability to attribute complex mental states to self and others. Mentalization is necessary in order to "make sense of ourselves and others, implicitly and explicitly" (Fonagy and Bateman 5). While the ability to mentalize is believed to be innate in humans, it is developed and improved throughout childhood and adolescence. In other words, children do not have well-developed mentalization skills, and moreover, individuals with poor mentalization might sometimes revert to a childlike (prementalistic) state, especially when encountering conflict, perceived threats of abandonment, and other emotionally intense situations in close interpersonal relationships. In this prementalistic state it becomes difficult to recognize that what seems true in the mind is not necessarily true in the external world. While this observation is based on insights that the study of psychology arrived at many years after the publication of *The House of Mirth*, for the reader who is aware of the concept it adds an interesting layer to the novel. There can be little doubt that Edith Wharton had a tremendous understanding of human psychology, and although the terminology did not exist in her time, she has nevertheless managed to capture the phenomenon accurately.

A poor capacity to mentalize is closely tied to problems with forming a stable and coherent self-image. Being careful not to attempt to diagnose Lily Bart with any mental health problems, or in other ways go too far in psychologizing a fictional character, mentalization and how it relates to both childlike mental states and an unstable, disintegrated perception of the self, is a useful model for considering the characterization of Lily. The previous chapter examined how Edna Pontellier, in her quest for identity and self-knowledge, sought to expand her metacognitive knowledge. This can be seen as mentalizing turned inward. In fact, some go as far as to say that metacognition and mentalization are "virtually the same" (Kongerslev et al. 189). Lily shies away from metacognitive knowledge, preferring to close off parts of her inner life. Not only does she have limited mentalization skills, but she actively avoids mentalizing.

The observation that Lily is both unable and unwilling to properly mentalize makes it possible to connect the dots, so to speak, between the way she is sometimes referred to as a child or childlike, her lack of a clear identity, and her misjudgment of her own and others' intentions and motivations. The active refusal to mentalize is commented on several times. Although Lily is "a keen reader of her own heart" (49), it is later revealed that "She knew herself by heart, and was sick of the old story" (87). By this point, the reader knows that she is only giving herself access to part of the story, because she is "scrupulous about keeping up

appearances to herself" (72), and when the narrator later comments that "her mind shrank from any unusual application" (101), it becomes clear that Lily is unlikely to challenge her own ineffectual introspection. Her failure to mentalize others is demonstrated repeatedly, such as in her blindness to Gerty's unfriendly reaction when she shows up at her friend's door after having escaped Gus Trenor, in her mishandling of the situation with Bertha in Europe, and in her inability to communicate adequately with Selden in their final encounter.

The most sustained depiction of a failure to mentalize in combination with strong emotions, identity crisis, and the presentation of Lily as childlike, occurs in the scene with Gerty after Lily's escape from Gus Trenor. Lily, in the distressed state of having "two beings" battling inside her and with the "iron clang of [the Furies'] wings . . . in her brain" (130), does not notice that "Gerty's first movement was one of revulsion" and is deaf to her friend's "faint derisive murmur" (143). She appears both unwilling and unable to fathom that Gerty, who she sees as dull and simple-minded, can have a complex inner life, and she is even blind to the outward signs of Gerty's state of mind. This failure to mentalize is accompanied by the characterization of Lily as childlike. Although the phrase "her friend" is used several times to refer to Lily in passages focalized by Gerty, the way the two interact is more reminiscent of an adult attempting to calm and comfort a distraught child, and at the end of the scene when they have gone to bed "Gerty silently slipped an arm under her, pillowing her head in its hollow as a mother makes a nest for a tossing child" (147). Lily is repeatedly likened to a child by the narrator who states that "the clatter of cups behind her soothed her as familiar noises hush a child whom silence has kept wakeful" (143), and later observes that her "face melted from locked anguish to the open misery of a child" (146). The idea of a young child is further underlined by Lily expressing a fear of the dark, her incoherent speech, and her imperfect understanding of the passing of time. The repeated characterization of Lily as a child and her failure to mentalize underlines her identity crisis. In her despair at feeling a "new abhorrent being" (130) arise within herself, she shuts down and reverts to a childlike state.

Lily's self-deception frustrates the reader's task of forming a conception of her as a character, but it also serves to explain to the reader why she is so difficult to understand. It is only natural that it is impossible to "see her wholly" when she refuses to see herself wholly. The self-deception also makes it impossible for Lily to integrate her identity. After all, she cannot form a complete self-narrative without giving herself complete access to the self.

4.2.3. Self-Objectification

Lily's tendency to observe herself, rather than be present in her own mind, facilitates her self-objectification. In an early scene, she happens to be on the same train as Percy Gryce, and realizing that "he was too shy to come up to her," she knows that she must "devise some means of approach which should not appear as an advance on her part" (18). What follows is a series of calculated moves: almost falling into Gryce's lap, preparing tea "with careless ease" (19), monitoring her every facial expression, and carefully steering the conversation in the right direction. Because of her self-division, she can monitor and direct her own behavior to suit the situation, right down to details like "proceed[ing] to give the last touch to Mr. Gryce's enjoyment by smiling at him across her lifted cup" (20). When she mentions his Americana, it is the "one spring she had only to touch to set his simple machinery in motion" and seeing his enthusiasm lit by the subject "she felt the pride of a skillful operator" (20). This scene demonstrates how Lily sees social interaction not as an organic interchange, but as something to be orchestrated. Her own role in this carefully conducted orchestration requires self-effacement. She uses her body as a prop and delivers lines, rather than participate in genuine and spontaneous connections with others.

Lois Tyson, who argues that Lily sabotages herself in the marriage market because physical intimacy would break the spell of her transcendent project to become an *objet d'art*, remarks upon "Lily's desire to aestheticize herself *out of existence*" (5, emphasis mine). Lily's refusal to explore and develop her inner life, choosing instead to identify entirely with her outward appearance, is referenced repeatedly. Her preference for "any company but her own" (253) is both remarked upon by the narrator and illustrated through Lily's actions. Where Edna Pontellier was seen to engage actively in the development of her metacognitive knowledge, Lily shies away from this kind of insight. Instead, she is shown to have strong metacognitive regulation, to the extent that "when she made a tour of inspection in her own mind there were certain closed doors she did not open" (72-73). Although looking in the mirror might scare her whenever she sees the smallest hint of aging, she still examines her own physical appearance obsessively. On the other hand, she exclaims "I can't bear to see myself in my own thoughts" (145).

Less direct portrayals of Lily's refusal to engage with her own inner life can be found as well, such as when she longs for "the gradual cessation of the inner throb, the soft approach of passiveness" (277) that the chloral gives her. This particular example is significant, because such a visceral description of this aspect of Lily moments before her death and exit

from the narrative, makes it one of the traits most likely to linger in the reader's mind. Due to the recency effect, i.e. the tendency to remember the last information received the best and make judgments based on this, we can assume that the reader's final conceptualization of a given character will give greater prominence to traits made salient toward the end of a narrative. The recency effect does not simply affect how we remember information, but has been shown to impact person perception as well (Fang et al.). If the emotion perceived last in our observation of real persons affects our overall perception of that person, there is little reason to think that this would not hold true for the perception of fictional persons as well (cf. Palmer). Lily's longing for passivity and incognizance emphasizes the idea of her as object rather than person, and if her self-reification was not successfully carried out in the storyworld, it is at least cemented in the reader's mind.

4.3. Selden's Lily

The structure of a narrative is of course integral to the reader's conception of the story. This has been convincingly argued and demonstrated by a number of critics – one famous example is Menakhem Perry's "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Meaning [With an Analysis of Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily']." While Perry's article uses as its case study a story in which the achronological structure and delayed revelations are essential tools in producing poetic effects of suspense, suspicion, and surprise, the argument that the dynamics of a text greatly influence how the story comes across holds true for all narratives. As explained in Chapter 2, the prevailing view in cognitive literary studies is that character is constructed by the reader as a form of *continuing consciousness* (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 175-83), based on a number of frames or scripts relating to knowledge of literary genres and character types, as well as real-world knowledge of how actual persons operate. A *model person* (Herman, Phelan, et al. 125-31) is constructed in the reader's mind the first time a character is introduced. Subsequent references to that character add to the reader's existing knowledge and conception, sometimes confirming and sometimes contradicting the idea of the person that the reader holds in their mind. It is important, then, to consider the fact that Lily Bart is introduced in *The House of Mirth* not as perceived by herself or by the narrator, but as seen through the eyes Lawrence Selden. The novel is in fact bookended by two scenes in which Selden watches Lily without her knowledge. The novel's very first paragraph sets

Lily up as a visual object, something to be observed and admired: "[Selden's] eyes had been refreshed by the sight of Miss Lily Bart" (5). In just half a sentence, Lily is defined by the narrative and by Selden as someone whose very beauty is so special, so pure, that simply seeing her in a crowd can "refresh" the eyes. Although Lily becomes a nuanced and dynamic character as the narrative progresses, this initial presentation is never directly contested. Moreover, Selden, who supposedly loves and understands her, is never able to see her other traits as anywhere near as important as her appearance.

There can be little doubt, then, that any analysis of the characterization of Lily Bart needs to consider Selden's perspective. Readers have a natural tendency to identify and empathize with focalizer-characters (Jahn, "Focalization" 103), and Bakhtin observes that "any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed . . . already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it" (*Dialogic Imagination* 276). In other words, the reader is never entirely free of Selden's perspective. It has been claimed that "Few fictional heroines have been as consistently under observation as Lily Bart, and few heroes have proved such consistent observers as Lawrence Selden" (Yeazell 15), but this is surely influenced by the tendency to identify with focalizers, and by the prominence given to Selden's perspective by the narrative structure. While Selden might be the most interested and adamant observer of Lily, Yeazell goes too far in calling him a "*consistent* observer." Like the narrator and Lily herself, Selden sees different versions of her at different points in the story, but unlike narrator and protagonist, he always believes his perception of her is complete and accurate. The irony becomes strikingly obvious in the *tableaux vivants* scene. As the first *tableau* is revealed, the narrator remarks that the effect of *tableaux vivants* depend on an "adjustment of the mental vision . . . . to the responsive fancy they may give magic glimpses of the boundary between fact and imagination," and adds that Selden "could yield to vision-making influences as completely as a child to the spell of a fairy-tale" (116). As more *tableaux* are shown, Selden is completely riveted: "Each evanescent picture touched the vision-building faculty in Selden, leading him so far down the vistas of fancy that even Gerty Farish's running commentary . . . did not break the spell of the illusion" (117). The state of mind that Selden is in must not be ignored when considering his perception of Lily. To his eyes "The noble buoyancy of her attitude, its suggestion of soaring grace, revealed the touch of poetry in her beauty . . . . Its expression was now so vivid that for the first time he seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart" (118). Selden's dreamlike state and the description of Lily's beauty as poetic underscores that he sees a fairytale version of her. Moreover, the phrasing "*seemed to*

see . . . the real Lily," implies that he is not actually seeing her true self shining through, but a mirage that corresponds to his idealized inner vision of her. As Tyson puts it: "When Selden believes that the Lily Bart he sees in the tableau vivant is 'the real Lily' [(118)], it is because she has merged with her image" (6).

Selden's direct definition of Lily is often focused on her appearance. Of course, he and Lily belong to a society in which a woman's main purpose is to be ornamental. The fact that Selden conforms with this expectation and his position as the mediating consciousness when Lily is first introduced draw the reader's attention to the fact that Lily's beauty is seen by her society as her defining feature. The first few pages are littered with descriptions of Lily's appearance and the way in which she stands out from the crowd. Her introduction – when Selden's eyes are "refreshed" by the sight of her – is followed by the observation that "Her vivid head, relieved against the dull tints of the crowd, made her more conspicuous than in a ball-room" (6), and shortly thereafter Selden observes "sallow-faced girls in preposterous hats, and flat-chested women struggling with paper bundles and palm-leaf fans" and asks himself whether it can be "possible that [Lily] belonged to the same race?" (7). There is such a focus on Lily's beauty in these early pages, that the initial model person constructed by any reader would have almost exclusively superficial characteristics, and likely be marred by stereotypical assumptions commonly made about beautiful women, such as expecting Lily to be shallow and stuck-up.

Selden's focus on Lily's appearance goes far beyond being a personification of the male gaze. Tyson argues that for Lily "self-reification is attempted through self-aestheticization: her project is to escape existential inwardness by becoming an *objet d'art*" (3), and considers Selden to be a facilitator of this project. He has such a strong influence on her "not because he offers her an alternative to this goal, but because he offers her the more effective means of achieving it through a parallel project of his own" (3-4). In other words, Selden's idealism and romantic nature do not lead him to humanize Lily and help her see her own value as more than her physical appearance, rather it contributes to the objectification perpetrated by Lily herself and her milieu. Character as object naturally exists on a seesaw with character as person, but the exact nature of the dehumanization that objectification leads to varies. In the case of Lily Bart, the effect is not to attribute to her traits such as shallow, superficial, or vain, but rather to shift the focus entirely from her internal to her outward characteristics, subtly hinting that there is not much to found within. Because the narrative gives so much space to a perspective that considers beauty her most important trait, the reader, automatically identifying with Selden, also becomes an accomplice in the

objectification of Lily. Aided, of course, by Lily's self-objectification, this aestheticized, reified idea of her permeates the entire novel. The primacy given to superficial character traits underscores the incompleteness of Lily's identity.

It is not altogether fair to accuse Selden of only focusing on Lily's appearance, however. He also sees her a scheming socialite, and, increasingly as the narrative progresses, as a maiden in distress who he may or may not be in a position to rescue. The first instance of characterization that does not focus on Lily's appearance is Selden's certainty that "if she did not wish to be seen she would contrive to elude him" (5). The word *contrive* emphasizes that Lily is capable of complex social manipulation. Moments later, as they are leaving the train station and Lily wishes to go to "a quieter place" for tea, Selden finds that "Her discretions interested him almost as much as her imprudences" and he is "so sure that both were part of the same carefully-elaborated plan" (6). This is also one of the first instances of the "both . . . and . . ." characterization that can be found throughout the novel. Selden's is the first voice in the novel to invoke the notion of Lily as inherently contradictory. Upon seeing her in the very first scene, we are told that "There was nothing new about Lily Bart, yet he could never see her without a faint movement of interest" (5). As they walk away from the train station, he observes that "Everything about her was at once vigorous and exquisite, at once strong and fine" (7). In the same way that Lily as aesthetic object is first established through Selden's perspective, so is her duality. Another example is found during their walk at Bellomont. Selden muses that "His attitude had been one of admiring spectatorship, and he would have been almost sorry to detect in her any emotional weakness . . . . But now the hint of weakness had become the most interesting thing about her" (61). She is beautiful, an object to be admired, *and* she has "emotional weakness" which makes her fascinating in a different way. However, a few pages later he again sees her as the careful schemer making conscious use of her feminine wiles when he thinks that "even her weeping was an art" (64). Until this point, Selden has been focused on Lily's beauty and on her social prowess, which he considers with a mixture of condescension and admiration. During this scene another perspective is added, and the three dominant sides of Lily as seen by Selden become evident; the aesthetic object, the weak and emotional girl, and the scheming socialite.

The presence of voices in the novel that explicitly point out the elusiveness of Lily's identity counterbalances the voices that appear to have her figured out, like Gerty and Selden. It also reminds the reader to be mindful of simple characterizations, be they Selden's, the narrator's, or Lily's own. When Judy Trenor and Carry Fisher, as quoted above, point out the difficulty in determining who Lily is, it reminds the reader to take Selden's certainty with a

grain of salt. His state of mind in the *tableaux* scene has been commented on, but it is not only when coaxed to exercise his "vision-building faculty" that Selden's perceptions are strongly influenced by his mood. Upon entering Gerty Farish's apartment, which has been repeatedly referred to as "dingy," he finds that "Its modest 'effects,' compact of enamel paint and ingenuity, spoke to him in the language just then sweetest to his ear. It is surprising how little narrow walls and a low ceiling matter, when the roof of the soul has suddenly been raised" (135). This is the day after he and Lily shared a kiss in the Brys' conservatory, and he has just received her note that she will see him the next day. It seems that Lily brings out Selden's romantic nature, causing him to see everything through a golden sheen.

Gary Totten notes that Selden, despite his "apparent moral indignation" at Ned van Alstyne's crude remarks about Lily's appearance in the tableaux vivants scene, also "ultimately relies on his aesthetic sense and spectacular processes to appraise Lily" (80). Selden is not offended because Lily is defined by her looks, but because her beauty is "lightly remarked on" (Wharton 118). Selden's, and some readers', belief that he sees the real Lily is not an indication that he sees beneath the surface, but rather that he sees her beauty as indicative of her substance. He is "aware that the qualities distinguishing her from the herd of her sex were chiefly external," but is dissatisfied with conclusion, because "a coarse texture will not take a high finish" (7). Although Selden might think he sees the real Lily throughout the novel, when he is in fact faced with her earnestness and helplessness in their final interaction, "her presence [becomes] an embarrassment to him" (264).

4.4. Tableaux Vivants

The *tableaux vivants* scene is a scholars' darling, and for good reason.[10] This scene is full of information about how Lily is perceived by Selden, by Gerty, and by her "set," as well as how she sees and presents herself. An important characteristic of Lily's that has not been discussed yet is conveyed in this scene: her malleability. She is said to be "in her element on such occasions" due to "her vivid plastic sense" and "dramatic instinct" (114). Above all, what compels Lily to participate is "the exhilaration of displaying her own beauty under a new aspect: of showing that her loveliness was no mere fixed quality, but an element shaping all emotions to fresh forms of grace" (114). The narrator is careful to remind us that Lily's

[10] See e.g. Reichhardt, Wershoven, Lidoff, and Totten, to name but a few examples.

tableau is an illustration both of her talent for putting on whatever guise is needed to fit the circumstances, and of her obsession with her own appearance.

Wershoven notes that Lily's, just like Edna's, "search for identity is further complicated by the heroines' confusion of inner and outer self, a confusion underscored by their pervasive sense that they are acting, not living" (34), and Reichardt calls Lily's self "essentially 'performative'" (348). Nowhere is this more obvious than in the *tableaux vivants* scene. When Lily's *tableau* is revealed, the narrator notes that "She had shown her artistic intelligence in selecting a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself" (117-18), which reflects this confusion of inner and outer self. Lily is not said to embody the *representation* of a person, but the actual *person* represented, yet she is also portraying herself. It would appear that in Lily's case, to be herself is equivalent to looking like herself. The word *type* is curious, too. The most obvious interpretation is that the narrator is referring to a type of appearance. However, considering the many references to the exceptional quality of Lily's beauty, even the idea that she should belong to the same visual type as another woman is odd. Perhaps type is instead a near-synonym of role, yet another subtle indication that Lily is "acting, not living."

The *tableaux* scene also illustrates the connection between Lily's appearance and her social manipulation. She has been brought up to see her appearance as her currency and as the measure of her worth. After Lily's father's bankruptcy and death, her mother's only comfort was "the contemplation of Lily's beauty. . . . It was the last asset in their fortunes, the nucleus around which their life was to be rebuilt. . . . and she tried to instill in [Lily] a sense of the responsibility that such a charge involved" (32). Lily also believes that "a beauty needs more tact than the possessor of an average set of features" (33), which tallies with her careful orchestration of social interactions. For her *tableau*, Lily has "purposely chosen a picture without distracting accessories of dress or surroundings" (118). At this point in the story, Lily has received news of Percy Gryce's engagement, and she is beginning to sense that her arrangement with Trenor might be more difficult to maneuver than she anticipated. Showcasing her beauty is a means of regaining control, and "the completeness of her triumph gave her an intoxicating sense of recovered power" (119). This power, however, comes at the expense of objectifying herself. While Lily might be more than willing to self-objectify, her focus on the external represents an avoidance of the internal, and robs her of the chance to develop her sense of self.

Some critics have shared Selden's belief that "Lily's subjectivity remains intact" (Totten 72) in the *tableau*, while others claim that she is "misperceived by Selden as the real

Lily" (Wershoven 34). As argued above, I belong with those who believe Selden is mistaken in his perception, but the variety of interpretations illustrates the difficulty of finding the "real Lily" in the text. After all, it is impossible to judge the accuracy of Selden's perception if the reader cannot with any certainty define the thing he is perceiving. Ulfried Reichardt presents a different take on Lily's authenticity in the tableau: "It is precisely when she performs a role, when she copies somebody else explicitly, that she does not have to hide the fact that she is performing. Only when she is on stage, rather than playing a role in real life, does she appear as the authentic Lily" (349). This observation touches on something very important, namely that when Lily is obviously and demonstrably playing a role, she is showcasing the nature of her selfhood. However, while the form of her self is visible in this scene, perhaps even truer here than in the rest of the narrative, its contents remain hidden.

4.5. Characterization Through Narrative Structure

This section considers two ways in which narrative structure and composition can engender or enhance characterization, one related to content and one to form: foils and setting. Fictional characters are characterized as much by what they are not, as by what they are. Characters who serve as contrasts to the protagonist, foils, show the reader which traits the protagonist lacks, and emphasize the traits which are present in the protagonist, but absent in the foils. I will limit the discussion of foils to the characters of Gerty Farish and Bertha Dorset. In addition to being significant contrasts to Lily, they are also explicitly suggested to her as possible selves, which she instantly rejects. Moreover, Gerty and Bertha are shown to be settled in who they are, their identities are coherent and stable. This does not mean that they are static or that their existences are completely comfortable – Gerty has her infatuation with Selden which for a moment threatens her friendship with Lily, and Bertha lives with the constant threat of her husband discovering her infidelities and leaving her. However, when juxtaposed with Lily's crumbling identity, they represent a radically different way of being a self.

Depictions of physical space in fiction are more than mere world-building. Describing the characters' physical surroundings does not only enhance the mimetic dimension of a narrative, but can play an important role in characterization. In *The House of Mirth*, the progression of locations and the way in which the story moves between these locations

emphasize Lily's identity dissolution. The move from Bellomont to a shabby boardinghouse not only parallels Lily's descent in the social hierarchy, it also highlights the effect that her regression from self-assured and admired *jeune fille à marier* to exiled has-been has had on her sense of self.

4.5.1. Foils and Possible Selves

A novel with a large gallery of characters offers potential possible selves for both the protagonist and the reader. The term *possible selves* denotes future, hypothetical self-concepts. These include "the ideal selves that we would very much like to become … the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming" (Markus and Nurius 954). Possible selves are fluctuating, subject to activation and suppression based on circumstance and mood, derived from previous self-concepts, perceptions of others' selves, and closely tied to our hopes and fears for the future. Lily has one superordinate possible self throughout the narrative, namely the vision of herself as a married, financially secure woman of the leisure class. This possible self is exceedingly vague, however, entirely undefined in terms of who her future husband should be, the road that might lead her there, and the degree of self-effacement necessary and acceptable in order to achieve her goal. Moreover, her motivations for envisioning this possible self seem disconnected from her true emotions and desires. Lily wishes to acquire a rich husband because she was raised by her mother to see this as her life's chief purpose, and because she is unable and unwilling to make her own money or adopt a less expensive lifestyle, due to a lack of education, limited vocational options for women at the time, and expectations places upon her by her social circle. Markus and Nurius point out that although "an individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, . . . the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences" (954). The only category made salient to Lily is that of wife to a wealthy husband.

Gerty Farish is introduced in Lily and Selden's first conversation, where she is suggested by Selden as a possible self. When Lily laments not having her own place to live, Selden remarks that he "even know[s] a girl who lives in a flat" (8). When Lily realizes that the girl in question is Gerty, she quickly rejects the possibility: "we're so different, you know: she likes being good, and I like being happy" (9). For Lily, who considers Gerty "fatally poor

and dingy" (78), even thinking about modeling her existence on Gerty's is impossible. Although having to marry for money is "a hateful fate," she considers the alternative to be even worse, and that alternative is personified as Gerty: "What choice had she? To be herself or a Gerty Farish" (25). Gerty is naïve, excitable, easily impressed, and leads an unglamorous life. She not only represents what Lily is not, but also what Lily does not wish to be. Her "indiscriminate and uncritical enjoyment" is "irritating to Miss Bart's finer perceptions" (115), which illustrates Lily's belief that she is above Gerty.

Like most of the characters, Lily's observations are rarely neutral, accurate or complete, and it is primarily through Lily's eyes that the reader sees Gerty. Despite Lily's assertion about their differences, Gerty also "wanted happiness – wanted it as fiercely and unscrupulously as Lily did" (142), but it is the Gerty that Lily sees who is given greatest prominence by the narrative, and it is this Gerty that functions as a foil and as a rejected possible self. Moreover, while Gerty might be shown to have feelings and desires as desperate as Lily's, her actions indicate that she does not tend to act on them. When a distraught Lily shows up at Gerty's door while the latter is consumed with jealous hatred toward her friend, Lily is too self-absorbed to notice that Gerty "shrank back" at the sight of her. On the other hand, "Gerty's compassionate instincts, responding to the swift call of habit, swept aside all her reluctances" (143). Not only does Gerty's altruism serve to illuminate Lily's lack of the same quality, but her responsiveness to others' distress illustrates how Lily's habit of "keeping up appearances to herself" (72) limits her ability to understand her own and others' mental states. As discussed above, Lily clings furiously to metacognitive regulation, but makes no attempt to gain metacognitive knowledge, and as such is untrained in the interpretation of thoughts and emotions, repeatedly exhibiting a failure to mentalize. This contrasts sharply with Gerty's intuitive understanding of others' feelings and needs. For instance, the latter easily picks up on Selden's feelings for Lily, as she comes to the painful realization that "He had come to talk to her of Lily – that was all!" (137).

Lily and Gerty are not only contrasted through Lily's statements and the narrative structure, but explicitly by the narrator's direct definition as well. When the two friends meet at Gwen Van Osburgh and Jack Stepney's wedding, Gerty compliments Lily, saying "I never saw you look so lovely! You look as if something delightful had just happened to you!" This is followed immediately by the narrator's rather unkind observation that Gerty "did not, in her own person, suggest such happy possibilities. Miss Gertrude Farish, in fact, typified the mediocre and the ineffectual" (78). There can be little doubt that this is the narrator's perspective, because it is followed by a description of "Lily's own view of her," which, in

typical fashion, “wavered” (78). Whether the narrator is communicating a supposedly objective truth or the opinion generally held by Gerty’s acquaintances is unclear, but either way the implication is that if Gerty is mediocre, Lily is anything but. This sentiment is mirrored by Selden’s sense that “she must have cost a great deal to make” (7), and Lily’s own feeling that Gerty’s simple-minded excitement served to “throw her own exceptionalness into becoming relief” (72). As so often, Lily is characterized by her beauty and by the impression she makes on others, and little is said about who she is behind the perfect exterior. Gerty is for the most part characterized by her personality and her habits, rather than her looks, highlighting the textual attention paid to Lily’s appearance. Gerty’s calm and predictable nature emphasizes Lily’s inconsistent behavior.

Another possible self that Lily pays even less heed to, but which is all the same made salient to the reader, is Bertha Dorset. The parallels between Lily and Bertha are perhaps more obvious than between Lily and Gerty, and the juxtaposition more exclusively highlights the difference (and similarities) in their personalities, whereas Gerty represents both contrasting traits and an alternative lifestyle. Lily and Bertha belong to the same social circle, and Bertha inhabits the role Lily is pursuing: a rich man’s wife with an important social position. Moreover, Bertha has, prior to the start of the narrative, had an affair with Selden, Lily’s main love interest throughout the novel. Carry Fisher suggests to Lily that George Dorset would gladly leave Bertha for her. These shared men and Carry’s suggestion that Lily quite literally take Bertha’s place, makes the possible self modelled on Bertha more prominent than the ones that can be derived from any of the other women of Lily’s set.

Bertha Dorset is portrayed as callous and manipulative, a person whose every act of friendship is motivated by the possibility of personal gain. In the case of inviting Lily to join them in Europe, Bertha’s hospitality is due to her need for Lily, in the words of the ever direct Carry Fisher, “to keep him [Bertha’s husband] blind” (164). Lily herself is of the opinion that “It was not in Bertha’s habit to be neighbourly, much less make advances to any one outside the immediate circle of her affinities” and that whenever she does so it is “prompted by motives of self-interest” (212). In Europe, Bertha’s callousness is contrasted with Lily’s naivete. Lily falsely believes that Bertha needs her support as a friend, and is confused by the rebuttal her concern is met with, and shocked at being banished from the Sabrina. Bertha’s self-interest is shown to be the safer course of action. By sacrificing Lily instead of accepting her friendship and support, Bertha’s marriage and her position in the social hierarchy are saved. It is Lily who pays the price for Bertha’s indiscretions. The depiction of the latter as

cold-hearted and disinterested in the needs of others engenders one of the novel's most positive characterizations of Lily when the two are positioned as opposites.

In the article "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*," Wai-Chee Dimock considers Bertha's successful manipulation of the social marketplace, where Lily loses in terms of both figurative and actual currency. The trip to Europe turns out to be a "rotten deal for Lily" (784), who has her reputation ruined and her expected inheritance decimated. Bertha's victory due to her superior skill in manipulating the social marketplace, casts doubt on the early characterization of Lily as a master of social interaction, as explicitly stated by Selden and implicitly demonstrated in her encounter with Percy Gryce on the train to Bellomont. Lily's lapse in judgment and misinterpretation of social cues in this part of the story is the first significant step toward Lily's identity dissolution. The complications arising from her arrangement with Gus Trenor, and the repeated rebuffs of Sim Rosedale, which she herself considers rash and unwise in retrospect, have thus far hinted at the limitations of Lily's social talents, but they have not been sufficient to subvert the image of her as an accomplished trader on the social marketplace. After her mishandling of the situation with Bertha, and the subsequent loss of her inheritance, Lily is robbed of idea of herself as the skillful orchestrator of social interaction and navigator on the treacherous seas of high society, and so is the reader. This development is made more prominent by the fact that Bertha retains her position without suffering any damage to her reputation, cementing her identity as Lily loses hers.

The presence of Bertha as a foil must surely be a significant reason why Lily's decision to burn the letters that would secure her ascent back up the social ladder, is seen by some as a "moral triumph" (Dimock 789). Using the letters to blackmail Bertha is clearly indicated as Lily's safest and easiest way to regain her social standing. The reader is encouraged to use Bertha as yardstick against which to measure the morality of this course of action when Lily contemplates the fact that "Bertha Dorset, to save herself, had not scrupled to ruin her by an open falsehood; why should she hesitate to make private use of the facts that chance had put in her way?" (259). Although Lily uses Bertha's actions to justify her own intentions, the effect of the comparison is also to indicate that by using the letters Lily puts herself in the same category as Bertha, albeit not at the same level of ruthlessness. Burning the letters, then, becomes the moral choice, because it is the opposite of what the amoral Bertha would do. It is also a further rejection of Bertha as possible self, a thought that Lily recoils from. Carry Fisher's suggestion that Lily replace Bertha as George Dorset's wife is "too odious" (207) for Lily to even consider. By burning the letters Lily rejects Bertha as a

possible self both by destroying the evidence of the most significant thing they have in common, an involvement with Selden, and by refusing to make the choice Bertha would surely have made had the roles been reversed.

4.5.2. Setting as Characterization

When *The House of Mirth* was first published, some critics felt that the novel lacked plot and that its episodic structure was too incoherent (Lambert 71). However, the narrative structure can also be seen to mirror the way in which Lily, whenever she "slips" on the social ladder, discovers only in retrospect that she has "recovered her footing . . . each time on a slightly lower level" (226). The narrative gaps force the reader to make these discoveries along with the protagonist. Moreover, it is an important supporting element in the characterization of Lily, who "had grown up without any one spot of earth being dearer to her than another" (274). The abrupt shifts from one location and situation to another highlight the restless and fluctuating nature of Lily's life and self.

Reichardt argues that the "notion of an autonomous subject," its dissolution so often associated with postmodernism, "has already been dissolving for at least a century" (342), and uses the *tableaux vivants* scene to illustrate how inner and outer selves merge in *The House of Mirth*. The same merging can be seen throughout the novel, too, in the way setting supports characterization. While the novel never directly confirms Selden's claim that Lily "has it in her to become whatever she is believed to be" (137), it does illustrate her tendency to become whatever she believes the circumstances call for. Lily's "faculty for renewing herself in new scenes" (169) allows her to abandon her old self and inhabit a new one at every turn. However, the price she pays for this constant renewal is that she has no continuity of self and cannot integrate her identity into a coherent whole. As her "increasing isolation is underscored by the narrowing perimeters of [her] outer world" (Wershoven 30), her dissolving self is also mirrored by her shifting and increasingly restricted surroundings. When Lily leaves Bellomont and the other luxurious settings of the novel's first half behind, the things she thought she knew about herself – her social talent, her control over her actions and emotions, the goal of marrying rich – fall by the wayside along with the possible selves presented by the rich wives of her original milieu. As her downward spiral progresses, she tries on new identities, but every new self appears to be a worse fit. She temporarily secures "an important place in the Gormer group" (205), but she is also aware that "to mark a sense of

differences and distinctions, would be fatal to her continuance in the Gormer set" (203), which naturally goes against her "finer perceptions" (115). She also finds "Her enjoyment of her surroundings . . . tinged by the unpleasant consideration that she was accepting the hospitality and courting the approval of people she had disdained under other conditions" (203). She is able to accept the situation only because "a hard glaze of indifference was fast forming over her delicacies and susceptibilities and each concession hardened the surface a little more" (203). In other words, she is to a greater extent than ever focusing of her outer self, letting the shell "harden" – solidifying her superficial identity, closing herself off to her thoughts and emotions. After the Gormers ascend in the social hierarchy and leave her behind, Lily attempts to work for a living, making hats for the renowned Mme. Regina. By this point, even Lily's wish to be seen as special seems to be gone. Now she only wishes to be accepted as an equal by the other girls at Mme. Regina's, she has "no desire that they should recognize any social difference in her" (246). However, she thinks of these girls as belonging to an "underworld of toilers" (246). It might be that her self-deception is once more at play. At this point there are only traces of Lily's original self left. This is emphasized by confronting her with a funhouse-mirror vision of her old social identity when she sees "the fragmentary and distorted image of the world she had lived in reflected in the mirror of the working-girls' mind" (246). Her surroundings reflect the change she has undergone. She is living in a run-down boarding house, which Rosedale describes as "no place for you" (257), having finally succumbed to the dinginess she so detests.

4.6. Lily's Identity

Lily Bart's character arc and identity development could, grossly simplified, be summarized thus: A woman of the leisure class, who by virtue of her class and gender has no vocational skills or job prospects and is thus entirely dependent on financial support from friends and relatives, is nearing the invisible line between being a marriageable young woman and irrevocable spinsterhood. She is stunningly beautiful and socially adept, and has been brought up to consider marrying a wealthy man her one and only goal in life. However, this young woman is also both capricious and proud, and squanders or rejects several opportunities for the kind of marriage that she is ostensibly pursuing. Gradually her footing on the social ladder begins to slip. Her economic situation grows progressively worse, and she even attempts to

work for a living, but finds that her beauty and talents for self-presentation and social navigation are all but worthless on the job market. She has been brought up to do one thing and has envisioned one future for herself, and seeing the person she thought she was drift further and further out of reach, and facing an ever higher wall of social isolation and financial worries, she turns to chloral to be able to fall asleep at night. Eventually, she finds a possible solution to her problems in the form of blackmail, but at the last minute she burns the incriminating evidence that would ensure her triumph over her nemesis and provide her with social and economic security. The novel ends with her death from an overdose of chloral.

At the face of it, this summary is accurate. However, it is deceptively singular and linear, and Lily Bart is certainly not singular and her identity development far from linear. In fact, it is more accurate to call it identity dissolution. The fragmented nature of Lily's identity is communicated through direct definition pertaining to her malleability and tendency to take on whatever self is appropriate to the circumstances, and it is underscored by the overall heterogeneity of the characterization. In the previous chapter's examination of identity in *The Awakening*, it became clear that identity development does not happen in isolation, no matter how much Edna Pontellier may have intended to find herself solely by turning her gaze inward. A parallel is found when examining characterization as identity attribution; characterization is the result of a combination of voices and perspectives; Lily's self-characterization tells only a small part of the story. Other characters' perspectives and observations fill in some of the gaps, but also give rise to confusion. The presence of foils tells the reader as much about Lily as the direct characterization does. The dissolution of her identity is revealed through actions and events that contradict previous definitions of her, by her rejection of one possible self after another, and the rendition is supported by the narrative structure.

Lily's identity is never integrated, structured into a narrative-like coherence, and this is conveyed by characterizing her in the form of a series of disconnected portraits, some of which are the *objet d'art*, the fragile child, the social butterfly, the self kept at arm's length, and the outcast. She is described directly and demonstrated through her actions to be passive, malleable, capricious, contradictory, and self-deceptive. All these traits support the idea of an unclear and underdeveloped self-image. To the very end, Lily remains "a water-plant in the flux of the tides" (48). Tyson remarks, concerning her possibly accidental death, that it "has to be a passive suicide because only an 'accidental' death allows her to preserve the illusion she wants to preserve: that she hasn't acted, hasn't chosen, but has remained an object to the end" (8). This passivity makes her unable to pursue active identity development the way Edna does

in *The Awakening*. While Edna's identity development may not have been complete or successful, in Lily's case her blatant self-deception and refusal to introspect completely deny her to possibility of being an autobiographical author.

The focus on Lily's appearance further underlines her lack of a substantial identity. This is emphasized in a number of ways: Selden's focalization, the narrator's repeated references to Lily's appearance, the *tableaux vivants* scene, Lily's obsessive scrutiny of her own mirror image, Mrs. Bart's intense focus on and commodification of her daughter's beauty, and the way in which practically every male character with a speaking part (and many of the female ones) comments on Lily's looks. It has been claimed that the narrative creates "distance from the novel's characters; instead of providing a privileged view of a character's consciousness, Wharton's narrative stance prevents us from knowing them" (Lambert 74). While an extensive focus on superficial characterization at the expense of this "privileged view" of the character's inner life might be blamed for this effect, it can also be argued that the reader in fact gets to know Lily as well as Lily knows herself. In the same way that the narrator and the other characters define her by her superficial traits, so does Lily herself. Her self-division and self-objectification lead her to step outside herself in order to examine her identity, so even her inner self is shaped from the outside. When all the elements discussed above are considered together, it becomes clear that the characterization of Lily is not incomplete or incoherent, it simply describes a fragmented and unintegrated identity.

It has been claimed that "Lily does not 'write' the narrative of her life; she 'specularizes' it" (Totten 82). Returning to the language of psychology, this reflects Lily's failure to act as an autobiographical author. The "self-as-storyteller who ultimately aims to burnish and synthesize episodic information about the self into a coherent and integrative life story" (McAdams, "Psychological Self" 273) is absent from the narrative. Again, Wharton's psychological insight is striking. Early in life, the self is only "a social actor, struggling to regulate itself," then also a "motivated agent, . . . forward looking and future oriented," before finally the third layer, the "autobiographical author joins the agent and the actor, as the I now aims to create a story about the Me, in order to integrate the personal past, present, and future" (274). While the Jamesian I/Me distinction was likely familiar to Wharton, the rest of this observation is based on theories developed long after her time. However, this does not change the way in which characterization attributes identity, we simply have a modern vocabulary that makes it easier to describe. Lily is quite obviously a social actor, and to some extent a motivated agent, although, as discussed above, her ability to form and maintain possible selves is limited. The autobiographical author appears to be almost entirely missing.

The depictions of her failure to mentalize and the narrator repeatedly comparing her to a child highlights how the social actor, the first kind of self developed in childhood, is still the dominant layer of Lily's adult self. "Social actors present themselves to each other through performances, in which people play roles, follow scripts, enact routines, and manage the audience's impressions" (274), writes McAdams, in words that would have raised no eyebrows had they been uttered as a description of how Lily Bart navigates the world.

5. Conclusion

As Tristram Shandy learnt the hard way, capturing the entirety of a person in text is a futile undertaking. No fictional character, even the most meticulously narrated, psychologically complex protagonist, can ever be a representation of a complete self. However, this does not mean that examining a character's identity is fruitless. As I have demonstrated, fictional characters appear to have identities, and the way in which those identities are constructed and attributed can be analyzed. Moreover, while every identity rendered in text is necessarily incomplete, the incompleteness can also be a feature of that identity. By giving the reader enough information to fill in narrative gaps and integrate a character's identity, a text can capture a fully formed possible person without explicitly telling every aspect of their life and personality. On the other hand, by showing that the character is unable to connect the fragments of their self, the text builds a character whose incompleteness is itself a trait. The characterization and the depiction of identity development in *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* belong in the latter category.

It was never the goal of this thesis to give definitive readings of *The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth* that would make the existing analyses of the novels obsolete. The goal was to identify some shortcomings of existing accounts of character and characterization, and suggest the initial steps toward a more cohesive and holistic account of character. I have argued that by considering identity development and characterization as intertwined phenomena that support and advance each other, we may arrive at a deeper understanding of a particular character and of literary character in general.

The thesis began by investigating the existing approaches to character in different narratological traditions, and introduced narrative identity as a productive model for fictional identity. I suggested that characterization may be understood as identity attribution, and that identity development functions as characterization. The reading of *The Awakening* explored how identity development can be narrated, and indicated some characteristics or traits that can be recognized in Edna Pontellier specifically by examining her identity development. The process was investigated from the other side in *The House of Mirth*, where it was observed that the characterization, both by virtue of its components and its overall fragmented form, attributes to Lily an incomplete and unintegrated identity. The framework of narrative identity proved to be a useful tool for understanding characterization, and other psychological concepts have also provided terminology and models for describing character traits, actions,

and aspects of the self. This supports the claims made in the introduction that literary studies and the cognitive sciences can have a productive give-and-take relationship.

The central claim of this thesis is, of course, circular. The attentive reader will have noticed that when I repeated it in the previous paragraph, I switched the order of the two components. As I wrote in the introduction, it is unimaginable that a narrative could present a character's self-discovery or self-construction without also revealing who that character is, and on the other hand, characterization will inevitably shape the reader's understanding of the character's identity. This thesis could have explored characterization as identity attribution in *The Awakening*, and perhaps it did so without admitting it. For instance, Adèle Ratignolle's "you seem to me like a child, Edna" (97) is an obvious instance of direct definition that indicates the protagonist's incomplete identity. In *The House of Mirth*, identity is less explicitly thematized than in *The Awakening*, but the outline of identity development could of course have been traced, and characterization considered as its result, instead of its origin. In particular, Lily's self-division – its presence permanent, its form fluctuating – is as much a direct portrayal of her sense of self as it is indirect identity attribution through characterization. On the whole, however, this inversion would have seemed forced, and been less productive than the approach taken here. The novels must be allowed to guide our interpretation, lest we perform meaningless or reductionistic readings by forcing them into a rigid framework that does not fit them. Allowing room for both processes to co-exists is undoubtedly the most adaptable and productive approach. Considering the recurrent criticism of existing accounts as too rigid, it might seem disingenuous that I have forced this division, but when testing a new theoretical construct some compartmentalization is necessary in order to investigate the mechanisms involved. Readings that focus on the end result of this give-and-take between characterization and identity can and should consider it a two-way process.

Looking back on the two previous chapters, it is difficult to say which parts of my analyses deal with character and which deal with characterization. As I argued in Chapter 2, it is impossible to accurately determine where one ends and other begin. Perhaps the best approach is to say that characterization is a part of character. They cannot and should not be separated by the story/discourse distinction. This does not mean that we ought to abandon the story/discourse distinction entirely, but it is an argument in favor of James Phelan's suggestion that we see it as a "heuristic, rather than a truth" ("Authors, Resources, Audiences" 5).

Revisiting some of the accounts considered in chapter 2, the readings of *The Awakenin*g and *The House of Mirth* now provide the material necessary in order to discuss

how an explicit consideration of identity adds to the existing frameworks, and how the existing frameworks can be used to enhance the insights arrived at in chapters 3 and 4. This is not an exhaustive treatment of the potential of consolidating these different theories, but I would like to comment briefly on two of the approaches discussed previously. With regards to Ewen's distinction between direct definition and indirect presentation, identity development as a whole may be seen as an independent mode of indirect presentation. However, the picture is complicated by the fact that direct definition can play a central role in narrating or attributing identity. Once again, the conclusion must be that scales are preferable to binaries. As for the thematic, synthetic, and mimetic dimensions of character, the approach presented here can illuminate ways in which these three dimensions co-exist and interact. The foregrounding of active identity construction as seen in *The Awakening* draws attention to thematic concerns related to the nature of self and personhood. Exactly what the novel's overall thematic message is perceived to be, will depend on the individual reader's interpretation of Edna's suicide as liberation or defeat, among other factors. Edna's ideal self is revealed by the story to be unrealistic, and perhaps undesirable. Her strong mimetic presence draws the reader in and makes the thematic effect of the ending all the more impactful. *The House of Mirth* strikes a delicate balance between the synthetic and mimetic. Lily's self-objectification, the *tableaux vivants* scene, and the choice to describe her as a "*reader* of her own heart" (49, emphasis mine) all risk breaking the illusion that we are reading about a human being, but instead the synthetic dimension supports the mimetic. The attention directed toward Lily's artificiality helps paint her as someone who monitors and designs her outer persona at the expense of cultivating her inner self. The thematic dimension is also greatly enhanced by the characterization and identity attribution in *The House of Mirth*. Wharton, as discussed, had explicitly thematic goals. She wanted to showcase the destructive power of the New York leisure class, and Lily's identity dissolution is key to communicating this. Lily's crumbling sense of self would not have had nearly as powerful an impact, had her mimetic dimension not been so prominent.

I have always been the kind of person who feels absolutely devastated not to be able to do everything, study everything, know everything, and it is impossible for me to end this thesis without pointing out the things that I am sadden not to have had the time, resources, or ability to examine. The approach I have suggested is loosely defined. Further study can surely refine it and take it from concept to framework. The following suggestions reflect steps which may bring this fledgling theory into full bloom, and potential cross-overs with other fields of study.

Firstly, a full comparison of form and content is needed. A contrastive analysis of the form and the substance of identity within a text and between texts can further develop our understanding of the nature of identity in fiction, as well as reveal potential shortcomings and point to possible necessary additions to my account. This thesis has focused on the form and process of identity. While simply enumerating character traits may seem tedious, when put in dialogue with identity development and the process of characterization, I believe this would be a fascinating project.

Secondly, a comparison across genres, themes, and narrative modes would be illuminating. As for example Culpeper has demonstrated, even in genres in which there seems to be little characterization, identities are attributed to characters. Having studied two works of prose fiction with hetero- and extradiegetic narrators, there are many questions I have not been able to answer. How do we examine the identity development and characterization of homodiegetic narrators? Do the processes of identity attribution through characterization and characterization through identity development occur in poetry? In fairytales? In graphic novels? Does it make a difference if the character in question is successful in their pursuit of identity? W. J. Harvey says about "those Victorian novels which involve precisely the search for identity" that "narrators like Pip or David Copperfield clearly change and recognize the fact, but they never deny their past, however strange, as belonging to them and, in a sense, *being* them" (120, emphasis in original). We might assume that analyzing characters like these through a lens of narrative identity would be a straight-forward matter, but we cannot know until we try. It would be interesting to put a traditional bildungsroman in dialogue with one of the novels discussed in this thesis. Incorporating their lived experiences into their self-narrative is precisely what Edna and Lily are unable to do. This makes them frustrating and fascinating characters to study, but does it make them different from characters who successfully construct self-narratives? A large-scale diachronic study would surely be immeasurably enlightening. While I have found these two novels, situated as they are between the Victorian bildungsroman and the modernist disintegration of the self, to be excellent starting points, they provide but a miniscule glimpse of what identity in fiction can be. A comparison of characterization and identity across time, seen in light of contemporaneous and modern identity theories, might, if done well, get as close to a complete theory of character as it is possible to come.

And finally, the avenue I personally would most like to pursue: empirical reader-response studies. To take the readings arrived at through theory and test them against actual readers' conception of and identification with characters would be endlessly fascinating. This

kind of research could investigate how and to what extent different means of portraying and attributing identity influence the reader's interpretation of the character. A qualitative study of real readers' sympathy for and identification with a given character seen in light of how characterization and identity functions in the particular text, would, to me, be one of the most fascinating ways that the studies of real and fictional persons could enter into dialogue.

Works Cited

Bakhtin, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Lates Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, translated by Vern W. McGee, U of Texas P, 1986.

---. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, U of Texas P, 1981.

Binning, John F. "Construct | Psychology." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/science/construct. Accessed 16 May 2020.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed., U of Chicago P, 1983.

Bordens, Kenneth S., and Bruce B. Abbott. *Research Design and Methods: A Process Approach*. 10th ed., McGraw-Hill Education, 2018.

Buckman, Jacqueline. "Dominant Discourse and the Female Imaginary: A Study of the Tensions between Disparate Discursive Registers in Chopin's *The Awakening*." *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1995, pp. 55–76. doi:10.1353/esc.1995.0049.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Edited by Margo Culley, 3rd ed., W. W. Norton, 2018.

Clark, Andy, and David Chalmers. "The Extended Mind." *Analysis*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1998, pp. 7–19. doi:10.1111/1467-8284.00096.

Clark, Billy. *Relevance Theory*. Cambridge UP, 2013.

Clark, Matthew. *Narrative Structures and the Language of the Self*. Ohio State UP, 2010.

Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Representing Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton UP, 1978.

Cuddy-Keane, Melba. "Narration, Navigation, and Non-Conscious Thought: Neuroscientific and Literary Approaches to the Thinking Body." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 79, no. 2, Spring 2010, pp. 680–701. doi:10.3138/utq.79.2.680.

Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*. Routledge, 2002.

---. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Routledge, 2001.

Damasio, Antonio. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*. Vintage, 2000.

Delbanco, Andrew. "The Half-Life of Edna Pontellier." *New Essays on The Awakening*, edited by Wendy Martin, Cambridge UP, 1988.

Dimock, Wai-Chee. "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*." *PMLA*, vol. 100, no. 5, Oct. 1985, p. 783. doi:10.2307/462098.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Heart of Emerson's Essays: Selections from His Complete Works*. Edited by Bliss Perry, Houghton Mifflin, 1933.

Esch, Deborah. *New Essays on* The House of Mirth. Cambridge UP, 2001.

Evans, Rand B. "Introduction: The Historical Context." *The Principles of Psychology*, by William James, edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, vol. 1, Harvard UP, 1981.

Fang, Xia, et al. "Person Perception from Changing Emotional Expressions: Primacy, Recency, or Averaging Effect?" *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 32, no. 8, Nov. 2018, pp. 1597–610. doi:10.1080/02699931.2018.1432476.

Fludernik, Monika. "Identity/Alterity." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, edited by David Herman, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 260–73. *Cambridge University Press*, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521856965.018.

---. *Towards a "Natural" Narratology*. Routledge, 1996.

Fonagy, Peter, and Anthony Bateman. "The Development of Borderline Personality Disorder: A Mentalizing Model." *Journal of Personality Disorders*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2008, pp. 4–21. doi:10.1521/pedi.2008.22.1.4.

Frow, John. “Character.” *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory*, edited by Matthew Garrett, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 105–19.

---. *Character and Person*. Oxford UP, 2014.

Gaiman, Neil. “Introduction.” *Farenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury, kindle ed., Simon & Schuster, 2013.

Garvey, James. “Characterization in Narrative.” *Poetics*, vol. 7, no. 1, Mar. 1978, pp. 63–78. doi:10.1016/0304-422X(78)90005-0.

Gilmore, Michael T. “Revolt Against Nature: The Problematic Modernism of The Awakening.” *New Essays on The Awakening*, edited by Wendy Martin.

Giorcelli, Cristina. “Edna’s Wisdom: A Transitional and Numinous Merging.” *New Essays on The Awakning*, edited by Wendy Martin, Cambridge UP, 1988.

Glendening, John. “Evolution, Narcisissm, and Maladaptation in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*.” *American Literary Realism*, vol. 43, no. 1, Fall 2010, pp. 41–73. www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/amerlitereal.43.1.0041.

Goldman, Dorothy. “Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*: ‘Casting Aside the Fictitious Self.’” *The Modern American Novella*, edited by A. Robert Lee, Vision Press/St. Martin’s Press, 1989, pp. 48-65.

Hammack, Phillip L. *Theoretical Foundations of Identity*. Oxford University Press, 2014. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199936564.013.027.

Harvey, W. J. *Character and the Novel*. Cornell UP, 1965.

Hawthorne, John. “Identity.” Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics, edited by Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman, Oxford UP, 2005. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199284221.003.0005.

Herman, David, James Phelan, et al. *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*. Ohio State UP, 2012.

Herman, David, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, editors. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Routledge, 2005.

Herman, David, editor. *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Ohio State UP, 1999.

Higonnet, Margaret. "Suicide: Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century." *Poetics Today*, vol. 6, no. 1/2, 1985, pp. 103–18. doi:10.2307/1772124.

Hildebrand, Molly J. "The Masculine Sea: Gender, Art, and Suicide in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." *American Literary Realism*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2016, p. 189. doi:10.5406/amerlitereal.48.3.0189.

Hochman, Baruch. *Character in Literature*. Cornell UP, 1985.

Holquist, Michael. "Introduction." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, by M. M. Bakhtin, U of Texas P, 1981.

"How Do I Use Singular They?" *MLA Style Center*, 4 Mar. 2020. *style.mla.org*, style.mla.org/using-singular-they/.

"Identity, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press. *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com/view/Entry/91004. Accessed 29 June 2020.

"Identity, n." *Wiktionary.org*, en.wiktionary.org/wiki/identity. Accessed 29 June 2020.

"Identity, n." *Merriam Webster Online. www.merriam-webster.com*, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity. Accessed 29 June 2020.

Jahn, Manfred. "Cognitive Narratology." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman et al., Routledge, 2005, pp. 566–68.

---. "Focalization." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, edited by David Herman, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 94–108. Cambridge Core, *Cambridge University Press*, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521856965.007.

James, Henry. “The Art of Fiction.” *Selected Literary Criticism*, by Henry James, edited by Morris Shapira, Heinemann, 1963.

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. Edited by Frederick H. Burkhardt, vol. 1, Harvard UP, 1981.

Kearns, Katherine. “The Nullification of Edna Pontellier.” *American Literature*, vol. 63, no. 1, 1991, pp. 62–88. doi:10.2307/2926562.

Keen, Suzanne. *Narrative Form: Revised and Expanded Second Edition*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Knights, L. C. “From *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?*” *Macbeth: Critical Essays*, edited by S. Schoenbaum, Routledge, 2015.

Kongerslev, Mickey, et al. “The Quest for Tailored Treatments: A Meta-Discussion of Six Social Cognitive Therapies.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, vol. 71, no. 2, 2015, pp. 188–98. doi:10.1002/jclp.22154.

Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Translated by Michael Henry Heim, Faber and Faber, 1984.

Lambert, Deborah G. “*The House of Mirth*: Readers Respond.” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, vol. 4, no. 1, University of Tulsa, 1985, pp. 69–82. doi:10.2307/463806.

Lerner, Ben. *10:04*. Picador, 2014.

Lidoff, Joan. “Another Sleeping Beauty: Narcissism in *The House of Mirth*.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 5, 1980, pp. 519–39. doi:10.2307/2712411.

Mackenzie, Catriona. “Personal Identity, Narrative Integration, and Embodiment.” *Embodiment and Agency*, edited by Sue Campbell et al., Pennsylvania State UP, 2009, pp. 100–25.

Margolin, Uri. “Character.” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman et al., Routledge, 2005, pp. 52–57.

---. “Character.” *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, edited by David Herman, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 66–79. Cambridge Core, *Cambridge University Press*, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521856965.005.

---. “Structuralist Approaches to Character in Narrative: The State of the Art.” *Semiotica*, vol. 75, no. 1–2, 1989, pp. 1–24. doi:10.1515/semi.1989.75.1-2.1.

---. “The What, the When, and the How of Being a Character in Literary Narrative.” *Style*, vol. 24, no. 3, Penn State University Press, 1990, pp. 453–68. www.jstor.com/stable/42945873.

Markus, Hazel, and Paula Nurius. “Possible Selves.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 41, no. 9, 1986, pp. 954-69. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954.

Martin, Raymond, and John Barresi. *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self*. Columbia UP, 2006.

Martin, Wendy, editor. *New Essays on The Awakening*. Cambridge UP, 1988.

McAdams, Dan P. “Narrative Identity.” *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, edited by Seth J. Schwartz et al., Springer, 2011, pp. 99–115. *Springer Link*, doi:10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_5.

---. “The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 8, no. 3, May 2013, pp. 272–95. doi:10.1177/1745691612464657.

McConnell, Mikaela. “A Lost Sense of Self by Ignoring Other in The Awakening by Kate Chopin.” *The Explicator*, vol. 72, no. 1, Jan. 2014, pp. 41–44. doi:10.1080/00144940.2013.875878.

Moddelmog, William E. “Disowning ‘Personality’: Privacy and Subjectivity in *The House of Mirth*.” *American Literature*, vol. 70, no. 2, 1998, pp. 337–63. doi:10.2307/2902841.

Mou, Xianfeng. “Kate Chopin’s Narrative Techniques and Separate Space in *The Awakening*.” *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2011, pp. 103–20. www.jstor.com/stable/23208772 .

Murphy, Terence Patrick, and Kelly S. Walsh. “Unreliable Third Person Narration? The Case of Katherine Mansfield.” *Journal of Literary Semantics*, vol. 46, no. 1, De Gruyter Mouton, 2017, pp. 67–85. doi:10.1515/jls-2017-0005.

Olson, Eric T. “Personal Identity.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/identity-personal/.

Palmer, Alan. *Fictional Minds*. U of Nebraska P, 2004.

---. *Social Minds in the Novel*. Ohio State UP, 2010.

---. “Thought and Consciousness Representation (Literature).” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman et al., Routledge, 2005, pp. 602–07.

Perry, Bliss. “Introduction.” *The Heart of Emerson’s Essays: Selections from His Complete Works*, Houghton Mifflin, 1933.

Perry, Menakhem. “Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Its Meanings [With an Analysis of Faulkner’s ‘A Rose for Emily’].” *Poetics Today*, vol. 1, no. 1/2, 1979, pp. 35–361. doi:10.2307/1772040.

Phelan, James. “Authors, Resources, Audiences: Toward a Rhetorical Poetics of Narrative.” *Style*, vol. 52, no. 1–2, 2018, pp. 1–34. doi:10.1353/sty.2018.0001.

---. *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*. U of Chicago P, 1989.

Ramos, Peter. “Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*.” *College Literature*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2010, pp. 145–65. doi:10.1353/lit.2010.0001.

Reichardt, Ulfried. “Interior and Exterior Spaces: Versions of the Self in the American Novel around 1900.” *Space in America: Theory, History, Culture*, edited by Klaus Benesch and Kerstin Schmidt, Rodopi, 2005, pp. 341-356.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2002.

Ritivoi, Andreea Deciu. "Identity and Narrative." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman et al., Routledge, 2005, pp. 231–35.

Russell, Bertrand. *The Principles of Mathematics*. Routledge, 1996.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Indiana UP, 1991.

Schechtman, Marya. *The Constitution of Selves*. Cornell UP, 1996.

Schneider, Ralf. "The Cognitive Theory of Character Reception: An Updated Proposal." *Anglistik: Organ Des Verbandes Deutscher Anglisten*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2013, pp. 117–34.

---. "Toward a Cognitive Theory of Literary Character: The Dynamics of Mental-Model Construction." *Style*, vol. 35, no. 4, Winter 2001, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.35.4.607.

Schraw, Gregory. "Promoting General Metacognitive Awareness." *Metacognition in Learning and Instruction*, edited by Hope J. Hartman, vol. 19, Springer Netherlands, 2001, pp. 3–16. doi:10.1007/978-94-017-2243-8_1.

Schweitzer, Ivy. "Maternal Discourse and the Romance of Self-Possession in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." *Boundary 2*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1990, pp. 158–86. doi:10.2307/303221.

Shen, Dan. "Story-Discourse Distinction." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman et al., Routledge, 2005, pp. 566–68.

"Singular 'They.'" *APA Style*, https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/grammar/singular-they. Accessed 28 June 2020.

Spangler, George M. "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Partial Dissent." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1970, pp. 249–55. doi:10.2307/1344917.

Springer, Mary Doyle. *A Rhetoric of Literary Character*. U of Chicago P, 1978.

Strawson, Galen. "Against Narrativity." *Ratio*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2004, pp. 428–52. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9329.2004.00264.x.

"They." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/200700. Accessed 28 June 2020.

Totten, Gary. "The Art and Architecture of the Self: Designing the 'I'-Witness in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*." *College Literature*, vol. 27, no. 3, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 71–87. www.jstor.com/stable/25112537.

Tye, Michael. "Qualia." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, 2018, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qualia/.

Tyson, Lois. "Beyond Morality: Lily Bart, Lawrence Selden and the Aesthetic Commodity in *The House of Mirth*." *Edith Wharton Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1992, pp. 3–10. www.jstor.com/stable/43513092.

Urgo, Joseph R. "A Prologue to Rebellion: *The Awakening* and the Habit of Self-Expression." *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1, University of North Carolina Press, 1987, pp. 22–32. www.jstor.com/stable/20077844.

Vice, Samantha. "Literature and the Narrative Self." *Philosophy*, vol. 78, no. 1, Jan. 2003, pp. 93–108. doi:10.1017/S0031819103000068.

Vignoles, Vivian L. "Identity: Personal AND Social." *The Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology*, edited by Kay Deaux and Mark Snyder, 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 2018, pp. 289-316.

Walcutt, Charles Child. *Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction*. U of Minnesota P, 1968.

Weinsheimer, Joel. "Theory of Character: Emma." *Poetics Today*, vol. 1, no. 1/2, 1979, pp. 185–211. doi:10.2307/1772047.

Wershoven, C. J. "*The Awakening* and *The House of Mirth*: Studies of Arrested Development." *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1987, pp. 27–41. www.jstor.com/stable/27746245.

Wharton, Edith. *A Backward Glance*. D. Appelton-Century, 1934.

---. *The House of Mirth*. Edited by Elizabeth Ammons, 2nd ed., W. W. Norton, 2018.

Williams, Christina R. "Reading Beyond Modern Feminism: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." The Oswald Review, vol. 10, no. 1, 2010, pp. 53-65. scholarcommons.sc.edu/tor/vol10/iss1/5.

Wilson, Deirdre. "Relevance and the Interpretation of Literary Works." *University College London Working Papers in Linguistics*, vol. 23, 2011, pp. 69–80. pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0b0d/a8c9faf335310d08d2fc78db8341eb0c2318.pdf.

Yeazell, Ruth Bernard. "The Conspicuous Wasting of Lily Bart." *New Essays on The House of Mirth*, edited by Deborah Esch, Cambridge UP, 2001.

Zunshine, Lisa. *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*. Ohio State UP, 2006.