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The Awakening and Ghaflat Al-Turāb: Two Modern
Myths

By

Maha Tabet El-Ghazal

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requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
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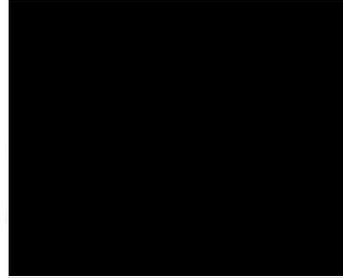
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To my loving mother, sister, husband, and daughter

The Awakening and Ghaflat Al-Turāb: Two Modern Myths

Maha Tabet El-Ghazal

Abstract

The Awakening by Kate Chopin (1899) and the Lebanese novel *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* by Rachid El-Daif (1991) convey mythical themes namely: the party, the *hortus conclusus*, and death and rebirth. These themes allow a study of how the two cultures affect the protagonists in both novels. It appears that the protagonists seem to act as enlightened rebels in their communities. These enclosed communities or pocket cultures affect Edna and Sāyid. Edna tries to rebel through resorting to nature and its elements. She is similar to Aphrodite/Astarte in her appearance at the dinner party. This likeness foreshadows Edna's last swim where she tends to be reborn from the sea just like Aphrodite. The lineage of Aphrodite/Astarte is also related to the presence of the Virgin Mary in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. Sāyid's rebellion comes through his reaction towards the religious practices in his community and their superstitious beliefs. While Edna leaves everything behind and becomes one with nature, Sāyid chooses to stay in Ehden but live on the hope of witnessing a change one day. The protagonists rebel in one way or another and their rebellious views mark an underlying sarcasm to the trite thoughts of the two pocket cultures presented in both novels. Edna and Sāyid signify attempts of revolting against enclosed cultures. The rebellion might not be complete, but the trial is what really counts. The road that the protagonists follow matters more than where this road finally leads to. It is the journey that counts the most.

Keywords: Mythical themes, Party, *Hortus Conclusus*, Death and Rebirth, Enlightened Rebels, Pocket Cultures, Aphrodite/Astarte, and Virgin Mary.

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Introduction

Choosing two novels for the sake of comparison and contrast in a thesis study is a challenging aspect. I had to research and think deeply about my choice concerning the American novel *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin (1899) and the Lebanese one *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* by Rachid El-Daif (1991). How are the two novels actually related? What is the link that binds them together? According to my personal experience and after living and observing the Lebanese culture found in Ehden, I can say that El-Daif's novel shows how the people of this village live and act. While reading the novel, I was really imagining relatives or people that I know or grew up with as portrayed through the characters of *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. The enclosed culture of the village of Ehden has a lot in common with that of the Gulf in *The Awakening*. Both communities are considered enclosed and rather different from their surroundings. For instance, the people in Ehden are concerned with their own problems like the invasion of the color blue, while the Civil War is ruining most of Beirut and its suburbs. The same applies to the Gulf resort where all the women and children stay for the summer in a carefree atmosphere away from the work capital of New Orleans.

Ehden, geographically speaking and up until now, is considered a summer resort just like Grand Isle. There are no people who “come from” Ehden, which means that nobody has on his/her identity card that he/she comes from the village of Ehden. This village has always been the summer resort for the people who come from the Northern town of Zgharta. So, all of these people have two houses, one in Zgharta and a summer house in Ehden, just like all the characters in the novel. Similarly, the people who are in the American novel own houses in New Orleans while they rent houses or apartments for the summer season at Grand Isle.

Living in such enclosed societies affects the protagonists of both novels. Edna and Sāyid come from two pocket cultures. These cultures are not basically the mainstream of the whole country, so they tend to be enclosed cultures and this makes the protagonists suffer in different ways. Not all the Lebanese communities are like Ehden and that is why it is considered a pocket culture which is in a way alienated from the rest of Lebanon with its own pre-rational beliefs. At Grand Isle, the Creole society is also a pocket culture since it is not the mainstream American culture but rather an amalgam between American and French. This amalgam makes Edna suffer and drives her to leave this community and seek freedom. Hence, both Edna and Sāyid are considered abnormal in the eyes of their pocket cultures. They act or speak in a way that differs from what their societies dictate and believe. So, they become rebels, each one of them in a way.

Although the two communities share the concept of the pocket culture, yet one needs to pay attention to the geographic location of each. While Ehden is on a high mountain in the North of Lebanon, Grand Isle is an island facing the sea. The nature of each summer resort plays a role in the nature of the people. Usually, mountain people are more enclosed and considered rough and firm, while sea people are more open since the sea brings goods and people to its shore from abroad. How is this portrayed in both novels? Does *The Awakening* allow more space for Edna to rebel? Is the space offered for Sāyid more limited? Can the pocket culture of the 1990's be more enclosed than the pocket culture of the late 1890's?

The discussion of the two communities with respect to *The Awakening* and *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* comes through the discussion of mythical motifs and symbols in some of their central themes namely: the party, the *hortus conclusus*, and death and rebirth. It appears that the protagonists seem to act as enlightened rebels in their

communities, i.e., their pocket cultures. How will Edna and Sāyid deal with their personal problems vis-à-vis their societies? Will they be able to free themselves from the fetters of religion or social etiquette as dictated by their communities?

The purpose of this thesis is to bring a new perspective to well-known archetypes and to common motifs in both novels. As Thubron puts it, “So these churches are set among the hills by the genius of a pagan world, where the landscape serves them best, united and completing one another” (175). Edna rebels when she runs away from a Protestant/Catholic organized religion to a pagan world of goddesses and nature. Sāyid tries to question his Maronite world but is not really allowed to do so due to the restrictions of his enclosed society. Both try to free themselves from the fetters of their communities. Will they succeed?

Edna and Sāyid face many difficulties throughout the events of the stories. They encounter changes and ups and downs. They deal with what is happening in different ways. In both novels the effect of the mythical motifs and symbols works especially on the protagonists. The themes of the novels take one to the realms of paganism and religion, seclusion and freedom, and the presence of goddesses and queens, whether subtle or strong, which creates a mythical atmosphere. This connection between mythology and the characters will help understand the characters more and appreciate them as round, complicated characters.

According to Northrop Frye, “myth provides the basis and structure of literature, and how literature is the primary discourse generated by and constitutive of mythic consciousness” (Gill 5). This is evident in both works of literature under study. As Guerin puts it, “Mythology tends to be speculative and philosophical; its affinities are with religion, anthropology, and cultural history...the study of myths reveals about the mind and character of a people...myths are the symbolic projections

of a people's hopes, values, fears, and aspirations" (159). This is evident in the analysis of the Creole community and the community in the village of Ehden, which is important to understand Edna and Sāyid's characters and what they go through due to their presence in two enclosed societies.

Moreover, the idea of how myths represent the hopes and fears of the people in the enclosed pocket cultures is also evident in both works. For example, the inhabitants of Ehden fear the color blue that is invading their village, and they have hope that the Virgin Mary with her blue cloak can save them from this upcoming evil. The dichotomy of the color blue as holy while related to the Mother of God and evil while outside the church shows how this pocket culture is superstitious and pre-rational. Similarly, the Creole society shows people's anxieties and struggle. Edna, for instance, struggles with her fears and questions concerning traditional religion. She comes from a Protestant family, and she marries a Catholic man. She has her anxieties especially during the ceremony at the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in the island.

In both novels, there is also the presence of religion and its focal role in the lives of the people. Sometimes this presence creates inquiries and even fear in the protagonists. Sāyid has his doubts concerning religion especially as to how religion is practiced in his village, but he seems quiet about this. Even when his son asks him if he believes in God, it was not Sāyid who answered but rather his mother. Edna tries to free herself from the traditional practice of religion as well. She even refuses to attend her sister's wedding because it is a ceremony that typically portrays the fetters that religion puts on the married couple who abide by its laws when they get married. Is Edna able to free herself and express her subversive thoughts more than Sāyid?

For El-Saleh, a work of literature does not copy a mythical concept or story per se. It just takes inspiration from a mythical concept whether fully or partially (5).

In both novels, the mythical concepts are embedded and one would read between the lines to extract them. This is the task of the mythological approach, to reveal the hidden mythical issues and show their influence on the story's atmosphere, themes, characters... etc. For example, Kate Chopin does not write the story of Aphrodite in her novel. She portrays Edna Pontellier at the dinner party as a regal woman. The mood of the scene with all the colors and symbols shows how Edna incorporates a goddess of beauty, which is in this case Aphrodite/Astarte. Similarly, Rachid El-Daif does not relate the story of the Virgin Mary nor does he quote from the Bible. It is through the influence of religion and certain religious practices that he shows how the people of Ehdén think and react to the situations they go through.

“Myths are by nature collective and communal; they bind a tribe or a nation together in common psychological and spiritual activities... It is a dynamic factor everywhere in human society; it transcends time, uniting the past... with the present... and reaching toward the future” (Guerin 160). The idea of myths as “collective” applies to both novels. It is through the connection of the indirect presence of Aphrodite/Astarte in *The Awakening* along with the evident presence of the Virgin Mary in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* that the two mythical representations become rather one. The story of Aphrodite/Astarte carries a resemblance to that of the Virgin Mary. In fact, the story of Aphrodite paves the way to the presence of the Virgin Mary later on in Christianity. The pagan goddess has temples that were turned into churches devoted to the Mother of God in Lebanon after the success of Christianity. This shows how the idea of “collective and communal” can be applied. Furthermore, myths take their characteristics from their environments, but they are also, in a way, universal (Guerin 160). This concept of universality helps to show the common grounds

between the Phoenician/Greek goddess and the Mother of God. Both figures become archetypes of one concept which is the idea of the Mother.

For Frye, literature is the “modern cultural manifestation...” of mythology (Gill 7). It is through modern characters like Edna and Sāyid and their communities in general that mythology is represented in a modern format. This “manifestation” can be understood in C.G. Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious. Jung

differentiates between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The

“personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term ‘collective’ because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substance of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us” (Jung 3-4).

It is through this concept that one finds common grounds between two novels from such different ages and societies, one from the West, while the other is from the East.

The basic common factor is evident through the use of the archetype of

Aphrodite/Astarte/Virgin Mary. For Jung, the “contents of the collective

unconscious...are known as *archetypes*” (4). Jung speaks of the mother archetype,

and it will be related to Aphrodite/Astarte/Virgin Mary. Jung even gives an example

of this archetype which is the Mother of God as well as the concept of the goddess

(81). He explains how the archetype itself can have many symbols. For example, the

Mother archetype can be demonstrated through many symbols which carry meanings

such as “fertility and fruitfulness” (81). So, the symbol of a mother can be attached to the sea, a garden, a tree, a spring or fountain, and many other symbols as well (Jung 81). For instance, in *The Awakening* one notes the symbol of the sea clearly. Edna wants to learn how to swim, and at the end she ends up walking on the sea. Aphrodite is born from the sea waves, and Edna returns to the sea which represents to some critics her rebirth rather than her death. The sea is the symbol of fertility and the mother’s womb. Edna did not die but rather was reborn. As for *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*, the connection of the Virgin Mary with the cedar tree and the apple tree is evident. The cedar tree is everlasting and always green, so the Maronite people pray for Mary and call her the cedar of Lebanon, as will be seen in the second chapter of the thesis. Moreover, the symbols of the garden, the fountain, and the spring will be linked to both novels in the second chapter in the context of the *hortus conclusus*. The *hortus conclusus* is a symbol of the mother archetype, especially that of the Virgin Mary. A discussion of the types of trees found in the enclosed garden of *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* will put all the elements of the garden together, from the water to the greenery. As for Chopin’s novel, the *hortus conclusus* of Grand Isle oppresses Edna. She wants to free herself from the fetters of this society. She does not find her freedom in the pigeon-house or at the Chênière Caminada. All these enclosed places do not satisfy Edna or give her the true feeling of freedom. It is only at the end of the novel when she leaves everything behind and heads towards the sea that she feels the true freedom.

The symbol, by definition, is something which stands for something else (Abde Irahman 15). This is apparent in how the “cedar tree,” for instance, stands for the Virgin Mary to the extent that the villagers in the story call her cedar tree by association. AbdeIrahman also differentiates between the term symbol and the term sign. He discusses how a symbol carries an abstract notion, while a sign is more

concrete (17). Then, he also notes how a symbol is something that is agreed upon by a certain society. So, it stands for the same thing for all the individuals of this society (17). This is exactly the case with the symbol of the cedar tree where it stands for the Mother of God for all the people in Ehdén. It is something nonnegotiable, according to them.

It is crucial to differentiate between the concept of a motif and that of an archetype and its symbols. According to Jung, “Mythological research calls them [archetypes] ‘motifs’” (42). So, for some critics as Jung describes, they are both two faces of the same coin. According to Garry and El-Shamy, “a motif is a small narrative unit recurrent in folk literature” (xv). For instance, the color blue in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* recurs over and over again throughout the novel to become an important motif. Wolpers explains the concept of a motif clearly:

“A literary motif may be any imaginative unit based on perception, sensation, and/or feeling...It can be handed down by tradition, usually connected with literary modes or genre patterns, and may often be modified in later periods by individual authors and/or literary movements and schools. It may also be something newly discovered, rediscovered, or invented. Thus, the process of literary history, its oscillating movement and the interaction between tradition and innovation, can be adequately studied through motif analysis” (80).

Hence, according to Wolpers, the concept of a motif is related to culture and is not only general. It can also be connected to a “specific cultural and literary context” (83). For instance, the motif of the color blue in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* is connected directly to the superstitious beliefs of the culture in Ehdén and how they consider this color as a bad omen when it is not connected to the Virgin’s cloak. A motif is basically a

“medium size” unit; it lies under the larger umbrella of “plot and theme” (Wolpers 88).

A theme in a work of fiction “refers to the underlying idea of the work which stands revealed through character, action, atmosphere, and other elements of plot,” the motif is part and parcel of a theme while dealing with the mythological approach (Burgess 378-379). According to Wolpers, “There are two levels, that of the objects and the states of consciousness represented – actions, people, things, places, feelings, or even ideas that carry specific information – and that of their significance as general characteristics of human experience. This twofold dimension of factual as well as (primary) expressional meaning links the motif to the more abstract level of themes” (81). For example, in *The Awakening* the color gold is mentioned on several occasions especially in its recurrence at Edna’s dinner party. So, the common theme which is the party portrays the color motif clearly in both novels. The party theme which is the general level has more specific units underlying in it like the concept of the color blue or the color gold. Nevertheless, a theme should not be considered as a “mere abstraction” only but rather as “something inherent in some of the motifs and the language used” (Wolpers 89).

Thompson explains the idea of a motif even further. He discusses how the concept of a mother in itself is not considered a motif; rather, the concept of the evil mother becomes a motif that one can find recurrent in works of literature (Garry and El-Shamy xv). Nevertheless, the idea of a mother is a “basic experience of human existence that it may be considered an archetype” just like the archetype of Aphrodite/Astarte/Virgin Mary as discussed earlier (xv). Basically, “While a motif is a unit of interest in a tale or some other genre such as a proverb, joke, ballad, or riddle, an archetype is a pattern of primary significance with deep psychic resonance

that also occurs in various literary genres” (Garry and El-Shamy xv). So, a motif can be specific to one particular work of art, while the archetype is more general. Both works consist of archetypes and motifs, and they also consist of common themes that bring the two novels together.

Vladimir Propp further explains the term motif. He quotes both Stith Thompson and Veselovski saying that the two agree that a motif is a “minimal narrative unit” (Lieberman xxvii). A group of motifs, i.e., units, makes up the plot of a story (xxvii). As the term theme is defined earlier, it is related to the plot of the narrative, and it affects the narrative as well. Thus, a motif plays an important role in building up the plot and also the theme of a story.

Propp differentiates between the characters found in folklore and those found in literature. The characters in literature are “unique individuals; they typify a period or social milieu, generalize the features of many people and reflect a great number of prototypes, but remain individuals. They have their own names and possess their own personalities” (Propp 27). This is not the case in myth or folklore. Although characters in *The Awakening* or *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* resemble gods or goddesses or are affected by religious figures like the Virgin Mary, they remain unique individuals struggling in their societies and trying to prove themselves as free enlightened characters. This is the case especially for Edna and Sāyid. Myth embedded in the two novels will give a new light and understanding to the characters and their societies, but it will not reduce them to mere mythological figures.

The embedded myth found in both novels leads to a clearer understanding of both works. It also helps to comprehend the protagonists and how they rebel against their societies. They are enlightened rebels who struggle to find their own path. They

want to be individuals with unique concepts and thoughts outside the trite concepts of their pocket cultures.

Chapter 1

Pagan and Religious Goddesses: The Images of Aphrodite and the Virgin Mary

One of the common themes between *The Awakening* and *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* is the central party scene, a turning point for the events and for the fate of the protagonists. This scene introduces a common archetype, which is the archetype of the mother.

The image of the Greek/Phoenician goddess in *The Awakening* strikes a resemblance to the images of the Virgin Mary in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. Both images are introduced clearly during the dinner parties. For example, in *The Awakening* Edna appears as a queen, very similar to Aphrodite/Astarte. In *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*, the dinner party introduces the invasion of the color blue that takes place afterwards. This color will be directly associated with the Virgin Mary. Hence, this chapter will study the lineage of Astarte/Aphrodite/Virgin Mary and the motif of color associated with the archetype, whether it is gold in *The Awakening* and blue in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. The colors are key motifs that will shed light on the protagonists, on their reactions to the parties, and, later in the stories, on the changes taking place around them. Edna's baptismal swim or Sāyid's questions and concerns towards the practice of religion come both after the party scene. Thus, this theme is a key event to the most important developments in the fate of the protagonists.

1.1 The History of Aphrodite/Astarte:

The archetype of Aphrodite/Astarte/Virgin Mary embedded in the dinner party theme requires a close look at its history. Aphrodite is the Greek name of the goddess of "love, beauty and sensual desire" (Coulter and Turner 61). She is also called Ishtar for the Babylonians and Venus for the Romans. Her name might have "Phoenician

origins” (61). Thubron discusses the myth of Adonis and Ishtar. He says that there is a possibility that the Phoenicians “first brought the Great Goddess from the east, and it was they who made Lebanon her home and diffused her cult through the Mediterranean” (18). Later on, this goddess’s name became Astarte (Thubron 20). Aphrodite “was born of sea foam...she landed either at Paphos in Cyprus or at Cythera...which also indicate her connection with the goddesses Ishtar and Astarte” (Coulter and Turner 61). This same idea is also developed by Thubron who says that “Astarte came to Greece by stages, stayed at Cyprus many years...[and] the legend grew that she was born of foam...[where] A king, it was said, installed her cult in Athens...and the Greeks accepted her and called her Aphrodite” (34). So, Aphrodite/Astarte has a deep connection with the sea, and this will be related later on to Edna and her last swim. Through this association with Aphrodite/Astarte, Edna, according to Gilbert, gains a rebirth at the end of the novel. Her motion on the water at the very end is a movement towards “the mythic, the pagan, the aphrodisiac” (328). This concept will be under research and question in the last chapter of the thesis.

“This lapis lazuli vulva, the golden star – these things lay on Ishtar’s altar...” (Leeming and Page 106). This quotation suggests a connection between Ishtar and, her type, the Virgin Mary, via the color blue of the lapis lazuli that is used in representations of the Mother of God in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* and also in paintings and icons in the Maronite Church and in the Oriental Church in general. Thubron discusses how the temples of ancient goddesses became churches for the Virgin Mary. Even some shrines that were dedicated to Astarte are now churches for the Virgin Mary in Lebanon, such as the church of “Our Lady of Mantara” (Thubron 29). It is said that Mary used to wait for Jesus at that hill to meet Him while He preached in Lebanese villages such as Tyre and Sidon. Hence, the name “mantara” derives from

Arabic meaning “the lady who waits.” Thubron even adds that a carving of a woman was found near the church. Archeologists could not tell whether it is the image of Astarte or Mary (30). This denotes the resemblance even in representation and imagery and not only in role or story.

Ishtar, who is the lover of the Phoenician god Tammuz, is the “Great Earth Mother” (Thubron 19). Later she was named Astarte and later on Aphrodite. The title of the “Great Earth Mother” is also given to the Mother of God:

“The Virgin Mary herself is an example in her early form of the sublimation of Goddesses. Her Near Eastern relatives are those Earth Mothers whose son-lovers must die for the good of all. She, after all, is impregnated by God as the Holy Spirit, only to give birth to God as Son. But in Christian myth, she is made a virgin, denied sexuality, and given the disguise of the simple Jewish maiden who willingly becomes the vehicle for an event beyond her comprehension. It is only later that Goddess herself will be exposed in Mary’s role as Queen of Heaven” (Leeming and Page 154).

But whereas Aphrodite was shown as promiscuous (Leeming and Page 140-141), the Virgin Mary remained a virgin according to the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Maronite Church. The importance of Mary lies in her being the Mother of God and the “Queen of Heaven.” That is why she is shown in *Ghaflat Al- Turāb* and in the eyes of the villagers as powerful and able through her prayers to her son Jesus to remove all evil from the village. She is the queen who is pure and virtuous and her words are of value to her son.

1.2 The Mother Archetype:

Jung discusses how the earth can be a mother archetype, and he also writes about the Mother of God (81). The concept of the earth as a mother is evident with Edna who learns more about herself through Mother Nature. She is united with the elements of nature through her last swim, and she even ends up taking off all her clothes and walking on the water at the end of the novel (Chopin 558). She is in Mother Nature's womb naked like a newborn. Jung also gives a typical example of a mother symbol, which is the example of the "Lord's mother" (82). The mother archetype is "associated with the life principle, birth, warmth, nourishment, protection, fertility, growth, abundance" (Guerin 163). The Virgin Mary is considered the mother of all the villagers in Ehden, who pray for her to protect them. In *The Awakening*, the image of the mother will be seen with the resemblance of Edna to Aphrodite and also with Adèle Ratignolle as a mother figure and her counterpart Sāyid's mother in *Ghaflat Al- Turāb*.

1.3 Edna's Dinner Party:

In both novels, the mythical figures are properly introduced after or during the party. In *The Awakening*, the dinner party scene, Edna's twenty-ninth birthday, takes place in Chapter 30. There are only nine chapters following it, but it is considered as a central event and changes the course of the story. Arobin calls the dinner party the "coup d'état" (Chopin 534). Edna is portrayed as "the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" (Chopin 537). Edna is associated with Aphrodite/Astarte, and the motif of the color gold will appear at the party.

In Gilbert's discussion, Edna in the party scene gives up traditional religions. She abandons her faith, i.e., leaves the church to seek a religion that is "possibly matriarchal but certainly female religion" (325). Edna is trying to free herself from

traditional dogmatic religion. She is trying to have a new life away from the fetters of her society. She is an enlightened rebel. The link between the pagan goddesses and Edna proves how she is moving away towards a different cult, towards a different form of religion. Gilbert explains how the connection with Aphrodite who is born from the sea helps Edna free herself and at the end of the novel gains a “resurrection, a pagan, female Good Friday that promises a Venusian Easter” (327). This quote shows how the party theme will transform Edna and liberate her introducing her to a new religion, that of goddesses and nature. The concept of “resurrection” will be questioned in chapter 3.

The dinner party is a very important event for Edna. It symbolizes her free will to move after the party from her husband’s house and live alone in the pigeon-house. Nevertheless, in the eyes of some critics, Edna’s move to the pigeon-house is not really an act of financial independence from Léonce. She is still that mythical queen with her accessories and diamonds (Dingledine 6). Dingledine is discussing the financial dependence since the party itself was paid with Léonce’s money, and the pigeon-house itself is not for Edna. According to Gilbert, too, Edna’s true freedom is not really established in the pigeon-house. She acquires freedom only at the end of the story when she is one with nature, like Aphrodite who is born from the sea and associated with natural elements like the water(327-328).

“Though Edna had spoken of the dinner as a very grand affair, it was in truth a very small affair and very select, in so much as the guests invited were few and selected with discrimination” (Chopin 535). Her dinner party is for a select few, unlike the party in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* where all the villagers come to the center of Ehdén to celebrate together. What basically differentiates Edna’s party from the party

of the villagers is the atmosphere and the description of the dinner table and the guests.

“There was something extremely gorgeous about the appearance of the table, an effect of splendor conveyed by a cover of pale yellow satin under strips of lace-work. There were wax candles in massive brass candelabra, burning softly under yellow silk shades; full, fragrant roses, yellow and red, abounded. There were silver and gold, as she had said there would be, and crystal which glittered like the gems which the women wore” (Chopin 536).

The symbolism of colors is clear in the text. The type of fabric used at the dinner party such as silk connotes a royal atmosphere, as if Edna is a queen or princess. She is surrounded by majestic colors and fabric. The color yellow is mentioned twice in the description of the table. It is associated with the color gold that is seen on the table as well. These two colors are “the emblem of the sun” (Clement 9). For Giorcelli, gold is the symbol of “the fully realized, supreme essence” (112-113). She further discusses this when she mentions how Edna rises to the level of the sun during the dinner party (125). The color is not only found on the dinner table but also on Edna herself. Her dress is made of gold satin fabric (Chopin 537). Even the cocktail glasses offered to the guests sparkle in an extraordinary way, to the extent that Miss Mayblunt wants to keep her glass and just watch its glimmer all evening (Chopin 536). Gilbert connects Edna/Aphrodite, explaining how the latter is “Golden and decked in gold, she is associated with sunset and sunrise” (330).

Gold is associated with kings and queens and is also a color related to the Virgin Mary in some of her pictures or representations. Edna herself looked like a queen at the party. She wore a “magnificent cluster of diamonds that sparkled, that

almost sputtered, in... [her] hair, just over the center of her forehead” (Chopin 536). Like a queen, Edna wears a crown. Similarly, the Virgin Mary, who is the queen of heaven and earth for the Maronites, wears a crown on her head in many of her paintings and statues such as in the church of Our Lady of the Fort in Ehden (see fig. 1). Several other paintings or statues of the Virgin Mary show her as a queen with a crown on her head. For example, the representation of the Dormition or Assumption of the Virgin Mary in the Maronite Church portrays her as a queen and describe her wearing a crown with twelve stars on her head, which is how John presents her in the Book of Revelation (Badwi 256-258). The significance of the number twelve is also related to *The Awakening* since Edna invited twelve guests to her dinner party: “She had counted upon an even dozen seating themselves at her round mahogany board...[but] there were only ten, after all, which made a cozy, comfortable number” (Chopin 535). But the number twelve at Edna’s party is disrupted since only ten guests actually show up. So, the number of perfection according to Christian thought, which is the combination of “5 and 7, the sacred numbers” is broken at Edna’s party, whereas it stays complete with the stars around the head of the Virgin Mary (Schimmel 192). It became a whole with the Christian figure of Mary, but it is incomplete with Edna. The latter does not abide anymore by general Christian dogmas and follows her own beliefs. The dinner party is the first step towards getting rid of the typical religion and social etiquette that the Creole pocket culture believes in.

The dinner party shows the Creole society at work, yet a certain atmosphere that is farthest from such a society invades the party. Chopin says that the dinner’s ambience is a “mystic” one (537). Giorcelli explains how the dinner party suggests an oriental tone through “the music of mandolins... the perfume of jessamines

[sic.]...the splash of a fountain...” (129). The mandolin comes from the Arabic lute, the Jessamine is a typical oriental flower, and the fountain is found at the “heart of the Arabic garden” (Giorcelli 129). So, the gathering has a mythical connotation with the resemblance and comparison to Aphrodite/Astarte and an Arabian mood. This brings together what was discussed earlier about Aphrodite’s origin in the Orient. She is Astarte the “Queen of Heaven, the Mother of all deities, the Holy Guardian of the earth, the Great Goddess” (Leeming and Page 33). This description is very similar to the representation of the Virgin Mary, who is also an oriental queen. She lived all her life in Palestine, and she became the Queen of Heaven since she is the Mother of God in the eyes of the Catholic Church. So, the representation of the oriental elements in *The Awakening* shows another element in common with the Lebanese novel. Both works come from different places of the world, but the oriental atmosphere along with other motifs and archetypes connect the two.

1.4 The Villagers’ Dinner Party:

As for *Ghāflat Al-Turāb*, the party is more a rural, rustic one. It is not a sophisticated party but rather a simple one where the traditional Lebanese dish of *mjaddara* brings all the people together (El-Daif 27). It is situated rather at the beginning of the novel but is also a key scene that will change the events and affect the protagonist. It is after this party that the color blue starts invading the village clearly and the people feel threatened and afraid. They start praying to the Virgin Mary to protect them from evil. The color blue motif and the archetype of the Virgin Mary are well introduced after this party.

The novel portrays a highly mystical atmosphere that surrounds the village and influences all the characters in the story. Sāyid lived in New York for six months, but he chose to return to the north of Lebanon to live in Ehden with his mother and

son until the Civil War in Beirut would be over (El-Daif 12). He is a photographer who is captured by the mountains and the natural beauty in Lebanon. He loves bold colors and wants to paint the churches and the mountains with bright playful colors. His friends do not understand him. They think that he is somehow mad, especially when he talks about painting the church of Saint George. The idea of painting the mountains or at least the upper layer of the rocks in the mountains is an idea that Sāyid takes very seriously, but his friends find it silly and impossible (El-Daif 12). This notion of painting the mountains foreshadows the invasion of the color blue that will occur especially around the mountain of the church of Our Lady of the Fort. It is the highest point in the village and its strategic location plays an essential role in the story.

Sāyid's mother mentions the color blue when she talks to her son about what she saw at Saint George's church. The shadow of Yusuf Beik Karam's statue has a blue shade reflecting on the ground outside the church. She tells her son that this is a sign of something bad about to happen (El-Daif 25). The idea of the color blue becomes more evident after the party that the villagers attend at the center of the village, called *Mīdān*. The location of the party is important since the center of the village is a strategic place where all the villagers come together. The party is more like a rural gathering to all the villagers, and, as it is described, it is an authentic Ehdénian night (El-Daif 27). The atmosphere is very casual and spontaneous. There was no planning for the evening. Sāyid and his friends simply decided to gather together and eat dinner. The people, when they saw them from their balconies, went down to join them. At the party, all the villagers drink from the water of Ehdén which is blessed water according to them (27). The night and the event stand in contrast to the well-prepared dinner party of Edna and her friends. She was dressed in an evening

gown and all her crystals and chandeliers were taken out for the occasion, whereas in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*, the gathering is nearly unprepared, as people showed up. All this spontaneity marks the rural life in Ehden. The people are not pretentious or sophisticated. They are rather very simple in the way they live. Their belief in God and His mother has a great connection to the way they live and think.

The second time the color blue is seen is when it enwraps the only cedar tree in Ehden. The color starts with the statue of Yusuf Beik Karam who is considered a saint by the people of the village, and the second time it envelopes the cedar tree, which is directly associated with the Virgin Mary (El-Daif 25, 35). The first two times that the color appears are like an introduction to the third time which is the most serious. Note the symbolism of number three. It is the number of the Holy Trinity in Christianity. Also, it is the number associated with the description of the Virgin Mary: “hymns to the Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition address her alternately as mother, Virgin, and queen” (Schimmel 60-61). Mary is not a goddess according to Christian tradition. She is rather a queen.

Sāyid’s mother is really concerned about the appearance of the color blue in such a bizarre way. She says that it is the sign of evil. She is wondering what her son and his friends are doing during the night and whether they are doing something wrong so that God is showing His wrath. She insists that the priests ask everyone to pray and seek the mercy of God. This color blue is contaminating the blue color of the sky, according to the mother. She asks the Virgin Mary with her blue cloak to look upon them and protect them from all harm and evil (El-Daif 35). Note the disparity between the blue color of the sky and the Virgin’s cloak and the color blue that is becoming the concern of the villagers. The people agree with Sāyid’s mother considering the color blue as an evil threat to the whole village.

1.5 The History of the Color Blue:

Why is it the color blue in particular? What are its connotations and why does it carry such mythical and symbolic connotations to the people of the village of Ehden? Pastoureau clearly states that the concept of a color is “first and foremost a social phenomenon” (7). The role of society in determining what connotations and denotations a color might carry is essential. This is the case in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* since the people in Ehden think that the color blue has negative connotations and consequences for the whole village. Pastoureau explains that “it is society that ‘makes’ color, defines it, gives it its meaning, constructs its codes and values, establishes its uses, and determines whether it is acceptable or not... The issues surrounding color are above all social issues because human beings live in society and not in solitude” (10). The idea of color is, hence, shaped according to each society, its belief, its background, its culture, and everything else related to that group of people, as is the case with the people of El-Daif’s story.

The villagers of Ehden are Maronite Christians. Throughout history, the Virgin Mary has been represented or portrayed with a blue veil or a blue dress. The color is directly associated with her since a long time in history, and in the Maronite Church as well. Thubron notes that “the worship of Aphrodite and Adonis was strongest in north Lebanon” (16). This worship became, with Christianity, especially in the north of Lebanon where Ehden lies, the worship for the Lord’s mother. The name that the Maronites give to the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God (El-Jmayel 7). Their belief in Mary combined the Western and the Eastern traditions, which is also obvious in the way Mary is drawn in pictures and icons (El-Jmayel 11). In the Maronite Church, the recent pictures of the Virgin Mary are influenced by European art (El-Jmayel 146). Nowadays, the Maronites in most of their churches use pictures

of the Mother of God or even statues rather than icons that represent the Virgin Mary. Most of the representations are basically pictures which are directly related to the photographic schools in Italy and France rather than to the art of icon drawing (El-Jmayel 146). Hence, they are pictures rather than icons. Most of the time, these show the Virgin in blue. The statue of the Virgin Mary in Our Lady of the Fort in Ehden shows her wearing a white dress and on her left shoulder a blue veil that descends to her right knee (see fig. 1). The statue is a European representation of Mary in the modern way. So, her representation is not through an icon as it was the case in churches before.

Nevertheless, even in the typical Maronite icons, the Virgin Mary is represented wearing totally blue or at least a blue veil. For example, in the icon of crucifixion, she is with John the apostle, and she wears a white dress and a blue veil (see fig. 2). It is in the icon, according to Badwi, that one finds the “favorable world for contemplation that, beyond space and time, leads us to the transfiguration. The harmony of the icon raises us up to the Divine by its techniques of lines and colors always faithful to the inspiration of the old and the modern” (13). The icon is like a prayer. It takes the contemplator to a new realm, to the world of God. The painter of an icon should be a believer who studies this art and even fasts and prays before drawing. This shows how the choice of any color in the icon is not something haphazard but rather an influence of prayer and dogmas found in the church’s teachings.

The beginning of an association of the blue color with the Virgin Mary goes back to the ninth century (Pastoureau 41). In Christianity, especially in both the Catholic and the Orthodox churches, the worship of the Mother of God comes right after the worship and love of God. The church makes it clear that she does not have

the same value and importance as God, but she is the woman who is pure and was born without original sin, as the Catholic Church insists. So, the painters wanted to keep the most expensive pigments of color to represent the most important woman in Christianity. The pigment that was used to extract the color blue was the lapis lazuli. Lapis lazuli was the only means to get the blue pigment for painting (Pastoureau 21). The pigment was rare, and the painters wanted to preserve it for a special personality, which is basically the Virgin Mary. Although the sapphire “is the most frequently mentioned stone in the Bible, yet the word for sapphire sometimes refers not to the stone we know by this name, but to lapis lazuli” (Pastoureau 21). The latter stone originates in the Orient, and it is a special stone that “produces a wide range of blue tones of striking intensity. It is dense and reflects light well but as a result does not spread easily over surfaces. For this reason, and because of its high cost, it is usually confined to small areas” (Pastoureau 21-22). All this added to the idea of associating the color to an important figure. They used to paint mainly the Virgin’s veil in blue.

The color blue comes in union with the color gold in some paintings and representations. The combination of both colors shows the connection between *The Awakening* and *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. The color gold that dominates the scene at the dinner party in *The Awakening* and the color blue that invades Ehden in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* are two colors that were used together since the twelfth-century in order to “evoke divine light and presence” (Pastoureau 44). Moreover, the color gold itself is seen on the head of the Virgin Mary in Our Lady of the Fort statue where she wears a golden crown (see fig. 1). She is the queen and this royal color is associated with her just like it is related to Edna’s dress, table, and glasses where she is associated with Aphrodite/Astarte.

The status and appreciation of the color blue took on a new notion in the twelfth century. The images of the Virgin Mary, especially the color of her robe, were painted in blue during this century and onwards. This gave the color a new meaning and changed it into a color of “sanctity and divinity” (Pastoureau 49). It is noteworthy to mention that before the twelfth century, Mary was depicted in blue but very rarely, and she was rather portrayed more in a variety of colors that were mostly dark ones (Pastoureau 50). Painters would draw the Mother of God using blue in order to be able to use the expensive lapis lazuli at the expense of their sponsors, since the stone was considered a gem and related directly to gold (Pastoureau 52). Blue became of high importance and value from that century onwards. It took a new notion and was directly related to a great figure in Christianity.

At some point in history the color blue was considered a color of evil. During the thirteenth-century, rich dyers who promoted red wanted to diminish the use of the new color, blue, which was invading the market in spite of its cost, so they wanted painters to draw the devil as blue. However, “their pleas went unanswered, and blue ceased to be considered a diabolical color” (Pastoureau 39). The people of Ehden consider it as such, since they are seeing it prevailing over their village. They consider it a diabolical color when it is outside the sphere of Christianity, especially if it is not related directly to the Virgin’s robe or cloak.

Although, and according to Pastoureau, the color became associated with the Virgin Mary mainly during the twelfth century, in the Maronite Church one notes the use of the color even before this period. The color blue, hence, started to be related to Mary Mother of God in the Syro-Maronite Church two centuries before. The most famous and important icon for the Virgin Mary in this church’s tradition is the icon of Our Lady of Ilige. It dates to the tenth century and gives inspiration to more modern

icons later on. The icon represents Mary carrying baby Jesus. She is wearing a blue veil over her robe, around her head and shoulders (see fig. 3). The icon is a typical Syro-Maronite icon. The painting of Our Lady of Ilige may “stand together with Codex Rabulensis (6th century) as historical and cultural evidence concerning the origins of Maronite iconography. By itself, the Mother of God of Ilige sums up a tradition of iconography going from the tenth century to our own day” (Fahed 83-84). For the Maronite Church, this icon represents the interference of the Mother of God in their history, how she protected them during difficult times that the Maronite Church went through (Fahed 83). This idea of being a protector of the church still finds its roots in the minds of the villagers in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. They ask her to pray for them (El-Daif 33-34).

1.6 The Influence of the Color Blue:

The color blue rules the events of *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. After the death of Boutros and Charbel, people felt that there was something even more serious and frightening about to happen. The people woke up to hear the church bells tolling (El-Daif 102). The church bells usually announce a death, a wedding, or war news. This time the church bells had unusual news for the people of Ehden. The mountain of the Virgin Mary became blue in color (El-Daif 102). For the inhabitants, the news is shocking and frightening. They want to see what is going on. Only Sāyid stays in bed. He tells his mother that he cannot do anything, and he wants to sleep. Sāyid’s nonchalant behavior towards the event sets him apart from the rest of the people in Ehden. He knows that what is going on is not a fatal matter. So, he simply wants to go back to sleep. For him, if the mountain were blue then his dream of painting the mountains of Lebanon started to become true. He is similar to Edna in this matter. She disregards what the people say about her and does not abide by social etiquette. She prepares a

party at her house in the absence of her husband, and she invites Robert, the person she is in love with. The protagonists live in their own world where they aspire and dream of things that are far away from what society wants or dictates. They are, in a way, enlightened rebels.

For Orsi, Mary could be a reflection of the psychological and social needs of the people. She is a “cultural figure” (7). This is quite evident in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. It is through the people’s reactions towards the events taking place in the village that one notes the intervention of the Virgin Mary in their lives. For example, the reaction of Sāyid’s mother contrasts that of her son. She panicked and went to church to hear the mass and listen to the instructions from the priest (El-Daif 102). She is like all the other inhabitants who came to church to hear the news from the priest himself. The event shows how each person perceives the situation. All the villagers, except for Sāyid, pray and seek the intercession of the Mother of God when the bells of the church announced that there is danger coming their way since the mountain of the Virgin Mary turned blue. They felt that it was the end of the world. For Sāyid, the situation is different. This proves how these villagers need comfort and support. They need the presence of the church and Mary by their side. Their social and psychological circumstances, and their upbringing as well, all dictate to them that their only way out is to pray and ask God to have mercy upon their village. To them, the mountain of the Virgin Mary is blessed and sacred. The church of Our Lady of the Fort is a miraculous one. They tell stories about it; how it was ruined by the invasion of some colonial army, but the church was restored and rebuilt miraculously all by itself (El-Daif 103). Till today, the people of Ehden tell the story of the miraculous stones of the old church of the Virgin Mary. They consider that the strategic location of the church on top of the mountain gives the village a feeling of security and

protection from all evil. Since the mountain became blue in color this is considered direct danger, according to them. They cannot see the mountain anymore. They cannot reach the church, and the women who went to pray are stuck there and cannot liberate themselves. These women claim that even the statue of the Virgin Mary inside the church was enveloped in blue (El-Daif 117). This invasion became like a barrier between the villagers and the church. If they do not see the Virgin Mary, then they are in danger. The men prepared five groups of people. They scattered in different directions to rescue the women. These groups carried guns and bombs as if they were at war (El-Daif 109).

The location of the church of Our Lady of the Fort plays an essential role in the mentality and upbringing of the people of Ehden. The novel describes the location of the mountain. The height of the mountain is 1600 m from the sea coast to the church itself (see figs. 4, 5, and 6). The people of Ehden claim that the church looks on the whole world (El-Daif 103). Even Yusuf Beik Karam, the famous Ehdenian leader, considered the mountain and the church as buffers and protectors from the enemies. Hence, no wonder that the villagers feel perturbed and upset by the situation to the extent that they feel the need to carry guns. The whole serene atmosphere of the village is turned upside down. Their fort, as they call the church, a very significant name, is in danger. The villagers, thus, still consider that the color blue is a color with evil connotations when it is no longer in its normal sphere. If it is not the color of the sky, sea, or the Virgin's cloak, then they should be aware of the repercussions. It could be the color of envy, since in the Orient the evil eye is fought by using a blue eye to get rid of all jealousy and bad thoughts:

“The belief in the evil eye, the evil look, or the magic eye maintains that certain creatures, including men, animals, and other living (visible

or invisible) entities, possess the magical power to cause negative, harmful, or bewitching effects by means of a glance...The evil eye, also called the envious eye, is the source of a sickness transmitted by someone who is envious, even without intention...It is common for the people of the Middle East...The envious eye is depicted as...the blue eye..."(Garry and El-Shamy 141-142).

This belief is not related to any Christian thought or teaching, yet the influence of the society also plays a role in shaping a certain community. The presence of different religions and mentalities in Lebanon influenced the people of Ehden and made them think that there is an envious evil eye that is casting a spell on their village due to the invasion of the color blue. The villagers of Ehden consider that this color represents jealousy and invasion to their privacy and their quiet village. Their calm village is unlike the capital which is chaotic and full with all the fighting and killing that is going on during the Civil War. The villagers have a different kind of war. They are the victims of their superstitions and pre-rational thoughts. They are entrapped in a pocket culture which follows the teachings of the Maronite Church blindly while also believing in evil envious spirits and eyes. They do not represent all of the Lebanese culture. They have their own problems and worries that have nothing to do with the real problems and serious conditions that the country is going through.

1.7 The Protagonists and Religion:

As for Sāyid, he has a different stand than the rest of the villagers. He does not believe in superstitions, and he considers the matter of the color blue as a trivial matter. He is shown having doubts in believing, probably not in the belief of God per se but rather in the way the people of his village believe and practice their belief. He did not answer his son when the latter asked him if he believes in God. The person

who answered was the grandmother. For her, this is something non-negotiable. Everyone believes in God. Only animals do not believe in God since they have no brain. This was the grandmother's reaction (El-Daif 40-41). The ten-year old boy is wondering and might even have some doubts regarding God and the way religion is practiced around him. He is like his father, but Sāyid already knows that talking about religious matters regarding the belief in God in the presence of his mother is futile. Sāyid lived in New York for six months (El-Daif 10). He was even married to a French woman, but they are now divorced. The idea that he traveled abroad and got in contact with Western cultures shows his openness to the idea of atheism even, since it is something more common in the West than in Lebanon, especially in a small Maronite community like the pocket culture of Ehden. There is no apparent proof in the novel that Sāyid renounced his faith in God, but it is clear and evident that his ideas are more objective than the rest of the villagers, especially his mother's ideas. He thinks differently, since he even has a mistress, which is something that his mother disapproves of let alone the whole village. Sāyid understands the society he is in very well and tries not to offend them. That is why he does not answer his son, and also he tries to see his mistress at night. When he tries to come close to her one night, she becomes reluctant and does not agree. She is feeling remorse, and she even says that Sāyid might not have yet received the wrath of God but that she will (El-Daif 46). This is the case since she is a woman who lives alone without a husband and Sāyid is only her lover, not even her fiancé. For a restricted community like the one they live in, the woman is looked at in a negative way more than the man. He is divorced and free according to the society, but she is the one contaminating her honor and her house.

Edna, just like Sāyid, questions religion and its practices in her society as well. The dinner parties gave the protagonists space and opportunity to try and rebel against their surroundings. Sāyid has a mistress, and after the party he goes to visit her. The son's question concerning Sāyid's belief in God also comes after the party.

The question about religion and its practices is also an issue in *The Awakening*. The novel was published in 1899. Although *The Awakening* was written long before the Lebanese novel, the issue of religion and its practices seems freer than with the community in Ehden. Edna comes from a rigid Protestant family. She is able to conquer her father's rigidity and even religion when she draws him and also when she refuses to go to her sister's wedding: "Before her pencil he sat rigid and unflinching, as he had faced the canon's mouth in days gone by. He resented the intrusion of the children... When they drew near he motioned them away with an expressive action of the foot, loath to disturb the fixed lines of his countenance, his arms, or his rigid shoulders" (Chopin 521). Edna even renounces the faith of her husband, who is a Catholic Creole. She leaves the church because she feels that she is suffocating and that she does not belong there. She is an enlightened rebel who is seeking another type of religion, one which is close to the goddesses, since she is associated to the goddess Aphrodite at the dinner party. "Chopin's novel is, of course, the narrative of an antireligious awakening, the emotional and sexual enlightenment of a married woman who, attaining 'more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman' (Chap. 6), takes a lover and kills herself rather than resume her respectable existence" (Gilmore 61). Gilmore argues that Edna is not able to "break free from imitative attitudes" (80). Is Edna really able to break the fetters of the society? This will be further discussed in chapter 2.

Edna's escape from traditional religion is shown in her taking refuge in nature. She is, hence, presenting the archetypes of a pagan deity that blend both "nature and culture" (Pratt 113). This is the case since at the dinner party Edna is shown as Aphrodite surrounded by her close friends. She is part of culture and the tradition of goddesses which is revived with her. Later, she is seen one with nature. She decides to loosen up during that summer at Grand Isle (Chopin 477). This happens when she becomes closer to nature and learns more about it through her senses. The first encounter with nature is a walk on the beach with Madame Ratignolle: "The walk to the beach was no inconsiderable one, consisting as it did of a long, sandy path... There were acres of yellow camomile reaching out on either hand. Further away still, vegetable gardens abounded, with frequent small plantations of orange or lemon trees intervening" (Chopin 478). The color yellow motif recurs in this scene again as it did at the dinner party. It is also associated here with the sun since Chopin writes that the green leaves of the trees glisten due to the reflection of the sun on them (478). The color yellow and the golden one of the sun come hand in hand as Clement also argues (9). The significance of the green leaves is related to the theme of *hortus conclusus* that will be further discussed in the next chapter.

1.8 The Dyad of the Mother:

According to Showalter, Edna's "awakening... begins not with a man, but with Adele Ratignolle" (45). The walk on the beach gives Edna a new feeling and experience, as if she is in a new world. She is going through a transformation at Grand Isle that she has never felt before.

To Giorcelli, Edna finds an alternative to the typical religion. She becomes so "attached to Adele Ratignolle – who possesses 'grace and majesty' and speaks 'the law and the gospel' – that she looks at her 'like a faultless Madonna,' [who is] 'the

fair lady of our dreams,' with 'spun-gold hair,' blue eyes that resemble 'sapphires,' and lips 'so red one could only think of cherries'" (121). The description of Adèle is very significant, especially with the use of color imagery. She combines the colors blue and gold. She is the "Madonna" of Edna's world. She has eyes like sapphires, which can resemble the lapis lazuli of the Virgin Mary's representations, and she has red lips which bring her more down to earth where she becomes more sensual, according to Giorcelli. She shows Edna a new perspective away from traditional religion. So, Edna herself at the dinner party is shown as the representation of Aphrodite or Astarte, and now one notes the resemblance of Adèle's description to that of the Virgin Mary. Adèle is the modern "Madonna" who is both divine and sensual in her beauty and portrayal. She combines the royal gold and the blue of the sapphire along with the sensual and fiery red color of her lips which is obvious in her description above. She is flirtatious and talks about giving birth to her children very openly, a thing that Edna finds very embarrassing and inappropriate. Edna thinks that the freedom of the Creole society in "expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable... Never would Edna Pontellier forget the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival the harrowing story of one of her *accouchements*, withholding no intimate detail" (Chopin 474). Edna is close to Madame Ratignolle and likes her company, but she is rather different in her thoughts and character. Adèle is free in the way she talks, but Edna is seeking a different type of freedom. Chopin, sarcastically, describes how the Creole society has its restrictions and its "lofty chastity," but discussing sexual matters openly is allowed and even encouraged. Edna feels uncomfortable with this.

Edna is a mother of two children, yet she is not a typical mother as her society demands her to be. Edna is not the so-called protective and nourishing type of mother. What Guerin earlier associates with the idea of the Earth Mother as nourishing cannot be really related to Edna per se. Chopin makes this clear when she writes:

“Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (473).

One of these typical women is Adèle Ratignolle. She is a nurturing and caring mother in the eyes of her Creole society. Chopin discusses these women because they are also flirtatious. Sarcastically, Madame Ratignolle is described as “married for seven years” (Chopin 474). The symbolism of this number as the number of perfection adds to Chopin’s mockery since Madame Ratignolle’s marriage is far from being perfect (Schimmel 132). Adèle is perceived as an angel with wings, while Edna is more down to earth and real. Edna is basically the new figure of Aphrodite with her beauty and the way she is portrayed at her dinner party. She is the rebel who leaves the job of the typical mother-woman to women like Adèle and goes to seek her true self in nature.

The dyad of the mother figure as dictated by society and portrayed ironically by the writer is also found in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* through the figure of Sāyid’s mother. She is Adèle’s counterpart. She is also a typical mother-woman according to her society. She is a naïve villager who takes care of her grandson after his French mother left him. She has a strong and uncompromising opinion when it comes to religion and

the proper way of practicing it. She refuses to negotiate or even listen to the idea that there might be no God or that her son does not believe in God (El-Daif 40-41). Sāyid knows his mother very well. He does not try to change her or argue with her about any matter. He tries to neglect her comments and basically does what he wants. For example, she always warns him about the evil that he is doing. She is referring to his mistress, but the latter does not pay attention to what she says, since he goes to see his mistress after all (El-Daif 46). The writer even makes fun, in a way, of this character since he portrays her as very simple minded. “She is wondering how in some countries the sun rises from behind the sea. She asks how this could be. Can the sun rise wet? Sāyid gave up. He has tried several times to explain to his mother that such news is basically nonsense, but she does not listen or believe” (El-Daif 44). This woman follows exactly what the church and the priest tell her. She attends mass every day in the morning, and when the color blue started invading the village she felt the threat and knew that it is because of the evil that is going on in the village. She wants her son to pray. She wants him to listen to what the priest instructs. She believes that only the Virgin Mary with her blue cloak can protect the village from the evil that is invading. She believes that evil spirits are roaming the streets at night and that her son and his friends should stop all their gatherings at night because what they are doing is suspicious (El-Daif 35). This woman is a typical elderly woman who lives in Ehden. She is like many others who are very attached to customs and traditions. She is rather very different from her son. Sāyid does not seem to argue with her a lot, but he deeply knows that they possess different characters. She realizes this as well, and she knows that her son is leading a sinful life according to her, but all she can do is talk to him or get angry sometimes. Both Sāyid’s mother and Adèle seem to accompany the protagonists during the majority of the events in the novels. They are there to show a

discrepancy between their views and beliefs and the protagonists' views and opinions. They are more a representation of the typical pocket cultures that both Edna and Sāyid are trying to overcome. The protagonists are trying to lead a life that is different from that of their mother or friend in each case.

It is true that the idea of the Virgin Mary finds its roots in pagan religions, yet the development of the Christian faith set it also apart from the ancient religions. Both figures, Aphrodite and the Virgin Mary, mark a great influence on the atmosphere and the events in both novels. They show the reaction and belief of the people. Their presence proves how the pagan world for Edna became a refuge, while the Christian practice in Ehen is under question for Sāyid. The protagonists' ideas and beliefs change and come under test as evident with the use of myth to highlight the transformation and development of Edna and Sāyid in both novels.

Chapter 2

Hortus Conclusus: The Enclosed Garden

As seen in chapter 1, *The Awakening* and *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* share the theme of the dinner party. In this chapter, another theme will be discussed with relevance to both novels. It is the theme of the location or place and in particular the *hortus conclusus*. The protagonists live in two enclosed communities. Even the physical location of each place is secluded and remote from the rest of the world. This concept will affect the protagonists and their quest towards their freedom from the fetters of religion and social standards. Their existence in Grand Isle and also Chênière Caminada in *The Awakening* or Ehdén village in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* affects their behavior, ideas, and their plan of rebellion.

2.1 The Origin of the *Hortus Conclusus*:

The word *hortus* is the word for garden, and it denotes the concept of enclosure: “*Hortus* (or *ortus*) remained the generic Latin word for a garden” (Webb 176, 185). Hence, “Etymologically, the word garden also conveys the sense of a protecting enclosure, a place set apart, and in all the modern languages refers to a walled or fenced precinct” (Büttner 17). The word *conclusus* in turn also denotes seclusion and enclosure.

The idea of the enclosed garden started to flourish in the Middle Ages, since during the medieval time gardens were mostly appreciated as “secluded, even a hidden, place” (Webb 192). They used to consider the garden as a place to contemplate and pray. It is a place of solitude where one can find his/her true self. Not only the monks but also the laymen found solitude in gardens (Webb 174). As a place of isolation, the garden excludes sin, mortality, distraction...etc. This idea will be

further seen later on with Edna and Sāyid. So, were they able to find their true self? How did they react to the concept of seclusion and solitude?

The concept of the enclosed garden finds its roots in the Bible. It goes back to the life of King Solomon in the Old Testament who had an enclosed garden which affected his writing of the Song of Songs that was later associated to the Virgin Mary (Stewart 33-34). This is the basic line from the Song of Songs that deals with the enclosed garden and its association to the lover: “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountaine sealed” (Stewart 35). King Solomon wrote the Song of Songs for his bride. Later on, Christianity started reading the book spiritually rather than historically and associated the Virgin Mary who remained pure and chaste to the enclosed garden. So, “the virtues of Solomon’s Bride foreshadowed the higher perfection of Mary, while reminding of the flaw in her predecessor, Eve” (Stewart 35). Mary becomes the enclosed garden in contrast to Eve who was banned to enter the Garden of Eden after her sin. Mary becomes the new Eve who will carry the salvation to the world. She is the maiden who accepts the will of God unquestionably to become later on pregnant from the Holy Spirit. She is a fruitful garden since she gives birth to the savior Jesus Christ, yet at the same time she preserves her virginity that is why she is shown as an enclosed or even sealed garden. “The garden itself, which is enclosed by a wall (Song of Solomon 4,12), signifies the virginity of Mary and her state of immunity to the attacks of Satan. A well with flowing water (Song of Solomon 4, 15) signifies the well of life; a covered well is the ‘spring shut up’ of the Song of Solomon 4,12 and refers to Mary, into whom only the Holy Ghost entered” (Schiller 53-54). The motif of the well or fountain is evident in paintings representing the theme of the *hortus conclusus*.

2.2 The Elements of the *Hortus Conclusus*:

The representation of Mary as a *hortus conclusus* is evident in paintings from the Middle Ages especially in the presentation of the Annunciation scene. The paintings carry several motifs that will be related to the two novels. The scene of the Annunciation is usually portrayed at a spring or fountain (Schiller 35). The idea of water from a spring, fountain, or well is an important motif to both novels and is evident in the *hortus conclusus* of *The Awakening* and *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. The relationship to a spring or fountain is not actually related to the story of the Annunciation found in the Gospel of Luke but rather to a legend as Schiller argues (35). This shows how the story in the Bible is also related to mythology and legends the same way the two novels carry themes of myths in between their lines. “The figure of the enclosed garden, image of the splendor of Solomon’s kingdom and of his Bride, referred to the supernatural quality of the Virgin’s chastity. Chosen by God, she remained untouched, enclosed, sealed. Though shut from the world in both body and spirit, yet she bore fruit; her garden flourished with the flowers of a new dispensation” (Stewart 37-38). The fruit of Mary’s womb is Jesus.

Curtius discusses the elements of the *hortus conclusus*. He refers to it as “the pleasance” or “the *locus amoenus*” (195). He explains how the poetry of the Middle Ages included this concept. It “forms the principal motif of all natural description. It is, as we saw it, a beautiful, shaded natural site. Its minimum ingredients comprise a tree (or several trees), a meadow, and a spring or brook” (195). These motifs are well evident in the paintings of the Middle Ages also. They comprise the key elements in both novels.

Another key motif in the representation of the Annunciation scene is that of the tree. This motif will be associated to the Tree of Life found in the Garden of Eden.

Mary becomes the new Eve who carries in her womb the salvation to the world. This all starts when the angel comes to her and announces the good news. Hence, the Annunciation scene becomes a turning point in the history of humanity, and it signifies the beginning of a new era where hope and salvation are on their way. This is why the medieval church considered the Annunciation scene as a crucial one. They portrayed it in several paintings and icons. The tree becomes central in the association with *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*, especially the cedar tree in contrast with the apple tree.

The dichotomy between the *hortus conclusus* and the Garden of Eden calls for questioning the idea of the *hortus conclusus* in both novels. The protagonists are enlightened rebels who are not satisfied with their enclosed isolated communities. They are trying to rebel against the restrictions put on them by religion in their enclosed societies. Will this rebellion turn out to be an expulsion from the *hortus conclusus*? Can it be an echo of the story of Adam and Eve? Will Edna and Sāyid be prohibited in a way or another to be part of this enclosed restricted community or will they exclude themselves from it?

2.3 Grand Isle:

The location of Grand Isle in *The Awakening* shows how this resort is isolated. Grand Isle is a summer resort for women and children, so it is away from the city where men work. It is surrounded by the sea which gives it more significance since Edna during the summer will learn how to swim and also finds herself at the very end walking on the sea which might debate her death or rebirth. “The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude” (Chopin 558). Note the relationship of Edna with the sea. She cannot but feel solitude and seclusion in such a place. She has isolated

herself from the rest of the world to be united with nature. She feels one with the water. This feeling only came to her at Grand Isle. She never felt this way when she was living in the city with Léonce and the children. She decides to loosen up at Grand Isle during that summer and let her wings fly her away to a better place. Hence, the location of the resort plays a significant role in the development of Edna as a character.

The seclusion of Grand Isle allows Edna to explore herself, but one cannot deny that Grand Isle is basically part of the Creole society that Edna becomes part of due to her marriage to Léonce. She is rather different from this society. She feels alienated inside this enclosed community and that is why she tries to find her true self. She is an enlightened rebel who is suffocating in the grips of the small insular community of Grand Isle. Albert Rhodes explains the difference in societies between the Creoles and the Americans. Edna is a Protestant American who married a Catholic Creole. For Rhodes, the two communities are very different: “As to the Americans and Creoles, they do not seem to understand each other, although they think they do. The harsh, hard ways of these Americanized Englishmen are naturally repugnant to the more artistic nature of the Creoles, who do not go to the core, the better part of their rough neighbors, but stop at an unprepossessing exterior” (19). The rigidity of the Americans as described by Rhodes is shown through the character of Edna’s father who is a tough military man. Edna’s father even blames Léonce that he is too lenient with Edna, while a man should be stricter with his wife: “‘You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Léonce,’ asserted the Colonel. ‘Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it’” (Chopin 523). This was the advice of the Colonel to Léonce when Edna refuses to attend her sister’s wedding. She argues with her father and does not agree

with his rigidity and blind following of etiquette and protocol. Moreover, she does not feel a belonging to the Creole society as well: “Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them. There were only Creoles that summer at Lebrun’s” (Chopin 474). The quotation sheds light on how this society is enclosed and contains Creoles only. Edna is considered abnormal in the eyes of this pocket culture, since what she thinks or utters is surprising and repelling to her society.

This enclosed community of Grand Isle has its own religious and social ideas and norms. It is a place surrounded by natural elements where Edna will actually resort. So, it is not in the enclosed society of Grand Isle where Edna finds herself but rather in what surrounds this society. The first motif that is evident is the mention of the fountain. This took place at Edna’s dinner party: “Outside the soft, monotonous splash of a fountain could be heard; the sound penetrated into the room with the heavy odor of jessamine that came through the open windows” (Chopin 537). In the first chapter discussed, the theme of the dinner party sheds light on the mythical atmosphere of the party and its significant role in Edna’s last swim and eventually her awakening later on since she is the Aphrodite of the modern world. In this scene, it is significant that the motif of the fountain is outside the circle of the party. It is not inside the secular pagan atmosphere of the goddess Aphrodite but rather outside. Edna is trying to seek another religion while the sound of the fountain from outside reminds her of the Catholic *hortus conclusus* of the Creole society. Her community and her background keep on haunting her.

In the Annunciation scene, the enclosed spring designates the spring of life (Schiller 40). Mary is the one giving a new life through her acceptance to the angel’s words. She is the new woman who stands in opposition with Eve, the sinner. In many

icons, the Virgin Mary is painted next to a spring or fountain and with a garden enclosed full of flowers especially the lily and the rose, which both represent the Mother of God (Webb 175). In *The Awakening*, the flower is basically the jasmine. One cannot see it at the party scene. It is rather outside with the fountain. The two motifs of the *hortus conclusus* are outside Edna's circle. She is not like the obedient Mary who accepts the words of God and carries the savior while she is still a virgin and that is why she is represented as an enclosed garden that has never been violated, especially according to medieval tradition. The enclosed Catholic society of Grand Isle is insufficient for Edna. She creates the mythical pagan atmosphere where she resembles Aphrodite. Although Aphrodite/ Astarte is the predecessor of the Virgin Mary, yet the former was promiscuous as seen in the first chapter while the latter, and in the eyes of the Catholic Church, is a Virgin Mother. Edna is trying to rebel against the enclosed nature of the Catholic Creole society where even the fountain of life stands outside her sphere and not inside her party as if this Christian representation has no place in her rebellion and journey towards a different life outside the enclosed garden of Grand Isle.

2.4 *Chênrière Caminada*:

Even more inclusive and secluded than Grand Isle is the *Chênrière Caminada*. The people of Grand Isle visit this island by boat. "Sailing across the bay to the *Chênrière Caminada*, Edna felt as if she were being borne away from anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening – had snapped the night before when the mystic spirit was abroad, leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails" (Chopin 494). The image here is very significant. The fetters of the society and religion at Grand Isle are trapping Edna. She feels as if she is suffocating. The trip to this island with Robert gives her a new perspective and allows her to

spread her wings away from the oppression that she is feeling around the enclosed Creole community at Grand Isle. It is during her stay on the island that the first step towards her awakening will take place.

Nonetheless, even at the *Chênière Caminada* there is a significant presence of religion as well. The Catholic community of Grand Isle goes to this island to attend the service at a “little Gothic church of Our Lady of Lourdes” (Chopin 495). Note that the church carries the name of the Virgin Mary. Even at this secluded and far island, the presence of religion haunts Edna since the church is described as “gothic” (Chopin 495). Edna could not stand the service at this church. She had a “feeling of oppression and drowsiness...Her head began to ache, and the lights on the altar swayed before her eyes. Another time she might have made an effort to regain her composure; but her one thought was to quit the stifling atmosphere of the church and reach the open air” (Chopin 495). The passage describes how the dogmatic service of the Catholic Creoles made Edna feel as an outsider. She felt as if she is suffocating. This practice is simply not for her. She cannot find herself enclosed in this “gothic” church. She wants to free herself and march to the “open air.” Martin argues that “After her awakening into a new sense of selfhood at Caminada Chenière (sunny isle), Edna disengages from domestic identity. This separation process is an essential aspect of the dynamic of protest and reform...” (24). The meaning of the island’s name carries the first significance on Edna’s enlightenment. Again there is the emblem of the sun as seen in the first chapter at the dinner party.

The *Chênière Caminada* becomes a familiar and comfortable place for Edna the moment she goes out of the church. She feels amazed by the trees and the beautiful nature of the island. Here, she can feel the presence of God. The island is full of orange trees. The oranges are not like the apple tree of the Garden of Eden nor

are they the everlasting tree of life like the cedar as will be seen later on in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. The trees and the serene atmosphere of nature at the island give Edna a peace of mind. Note the presence of the “cistern” which signifies the well or the fountain as a motif in the *hortus conclusus*: “A youth, a mild-faced Acadian, was drawing water from the cistern, which was nothing more than a rusty buoy, with an opening on one side, sunk in the ground. The water which the youth handed to them in a tin pail was not cold to taste, but it was cool to her heated face, and it greatly revived and refreshed her” (Chopin 495). Note how the water refreshes Edna and makes her feel alive again. This is a foreshadow to her last swim where the water will revive her again. In some paintings of the Annunciation especially the ones representing the enclosed garden during the Middle Ages, the fountain is at the heart of the enclosed garden. One painting by Jan van Eyck which is entitled *Madonna at the Fountain* represents the fountain clearly. The fountain is an allusion to Mary herself taken from the Song of Solomon: “The fountain of gardens: the well of living waters (4:15). It is this *fons hortorum*, which could also be understood as the bourne of life, that is here intended” (Büttner 41). This water, hence, is spiritual water that will enliven Edna and give her a new perspective and spirit. She will not be the daughter of the typical Catholic Creole church or community but rather a daughter of nature where she has found her true refuge.

Edna then sleeps at Madame Antoine’s house located on the island as well. Edna’s sleep becomes a notable step in her awakening later on as will be discussed in chapter 3. She sleeps in a huge white bed similar to Snow White, and then later on she speaks like Sleeping Beauty asking Robert “How many years have I slept?” (Giorcelli 128). Sleep, according to the Greeks, is a “divine brother” for death (Giorcelli 129). She resorts to mythology and fairytales rather than to Christianity,

whether it is Protestantism or Catholicism. She tries to find her own religion in nature through the defiance of the enclosed garden of Grand Isle. She becomes similar to the broken fence in one of the paintings of the Annunciation by Hubert van Eyck which is entitled *The Annunciation*: "...the crumbling garden wall...represents the breach between God and man caused by the Fall. From the point of view of this painting, that breach is as yet unhealed. The unmended wall, like the garden gone to seed, typifies the hopelessness of man's reliance upon himself, the endless frustrations to which man was doomed under the Law" (see fig. 7). This broken fence in the *hortus conclusus* shows how the human being sins and drifts away from God's path according to religion. With Edna, it is her way out of the insular enclosed society that she is living in. She drifts away from the typical religion and that is why she is like this fence portrayed in this medieval painting.

2.5 Ehden:

Sāyid in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* finds himself in an enclosed environment as well. He feels how far his thoughts are from those of the villagers in Ehden. The discussion of painting the mountains shows his original subversive ideas in comparison to the traditional people of the village, as seen in the first chapter. Moreover, the location of the village in itself is very secluded and far away from what is really going on in other parts of Lebanon especially in Beirut due to the bombing and killing during the Civil War. The villagers hear about the news of the war from the radio, or they read the local newspapers that arrive to the village. It is as if they live in another country, and they are concerned about what is going on in Beirut but do not feel the real pressure and danger. The danger that they face is, according to them, the invasion of the color blue. This danger is what makes their village even more secluded since the mountain of the Virgin Mary becomes unreachable and enveloped with this color to the extent

that the women who went up to pray were stuck up there. The people who went to inspect this phenomenon found women entrapped inside the church (El-Daif 116-117). These women, just like the rest of the villagers, are trapped by their practices and their beliefs. Some inhabitants like Robert even tell the story of how many kings were buried in the place called *Al-Sin* which leads to the mountain of the Virgin Mary. He insists that he read this fact in a book, but he will not announce in which book. Robert goes on to explain that these buried kings would bury their treasure with them since they think that they will come back to life (El-Daif 113). The ideas show the naivety of the people and their pre-rational thoughts. Here, it is just noteworthy to show how these people mix Christianity with superstitious beliefs that lead them to the thought of the color blue being a bad omen and representing the blue eye of envy that is stalking their village. Sāyid is stuck in this community. He chooses to return from New York and live with his mother and son in Ehden, yet that does not mean that he accepts all their thoughts and the ways they practice their social values and religion. He wants to go back to sleep when his mother tells him about the upcoming danger. Even when his son asks him why he stays up all night so that he sleeps all day, the latter does not answer him (El-Daif 66). He is rather secretive and tries to keep his thoughts and opinions to himself especially when he sees that his mother is present, and she is waiting to hear his reaction or his answer. He prefers to avoid answering because he feels that arguing with his mother is of no avail. He is a man who uses his reason more than his emotions.

The motifs of the *hortus conclusus* are evident in the village of Ehden which add to its seclusion and enclosed environment where the protagonist is stuck. The first main motif is that of the tree, whether it is the apple tree or the cedar tree. The apple tree and the cedar tree are two symbols that are directly connected to the Virgin Mary.

According to the Maronite Church, Mary is considered the new Eve (El-Jmayel 24-25). When she is represented with an apple in her hand, then this “designates her as the second Eve” (Clement 19). The description of the apple trees in contrast with the single cedar tree in Ehden in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* mark the symbolism of both. The remark on the apple trees is very significant, since growing apples is one of the important jobs in Ehden, but the people of the village never describe the apple tree as beautiful. The apple tree is basically a tree for commerce. It is even a fragile tree since it requires a lot of effort to plant and harvest. It is a tree that cannot stand in the face of difficulties. Even its wood is nothing like the wood of a cedar tree (El-Daif 33). This description marks how the apple tree is looked at. It is a tree that brought a curse to Adam and Eve. Of course, it will not be as important as the cedar tree, since the latter is mentioned in the Old Testament. King Solomon bought the wood of the cedars from the Phoenicians to build his temple. The apple tree is perceived as the symbol of sin in the eyes of the people of Ehden, since it “signifies the sin in Paradise” (Clement 19). It is with the Virgin Mary that this tree regains some of its positive connotations, since when it is related to the Mother of God it gives her the notion of being the new Eve who brought Jesus Christ the Savior to the world. It is through Mary’s obedience to the will of God that she stands in total contrast to the disobedience of Eve (El-Jmayel 24-25).

As for the cedar tree in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*, the villagers consider it as noble, beautiful, and holy. The Maronites pray for the Virgin Mary saying: Oh cedar tree of Lebanon, pray for us (El-Daif 33-34). The Mother of God is the everlasting cedar tree that stays green all year round. In Ehden, they have only one cedar tree, and they cherish it. It is a huge, old tree, and when the shadow of the tree turned blue one morning, the people were concerned and perturbed (El-Daif 34-35). What happened

to the cedar tree was a foreshadowing of what will happen later on in the novel to the mountain of the Virgin Mary, since the Mother of God is the cedar tree by association.

The cedar motif occurs several times in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. The cedar tree is seen on the ring in the dead man's finger. It comes with a picture of Yusuf BeikKaram (El-Daif 96). The second time the symbol occurs is also on a ring. Some men want to dig for a treasure amongst the rocks, and they claim that there is a precious ring with the symbol of a cedar branch on it buried under the huge pile of rocks. The pile of rocks is enormous as if it is not the doing of a human being but rather supernatural forces (El-Daif 113-114). This shows how these people still believe in superstitions. These people live in the mountain of Ehden. They are rough people who have rigid thoughts. They follow the priest's teachings, but they also have an uncompromising mentality since they still believe in bad omen and superstitious stories. Their belief is influenced by hearsay and some villagers' stories. This is similar to the concept of the color blue being an evil color of the evil envious eye invading their village.

The theme of the tree is a crucial one to the *hortus conclusus* representation: "A tree appears beside Mary in the Castelsprio fresco... This motif [the tree] is often found on icons of the Annunciation... [the tree] would represent images of the future Paradise from the Apocalypse, with which the new, second creation beginning with the Incarnation, is contrasted with the first creation which succumbed to death," just as the apple tree in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* contrasts with the only cedar tree in Ehden (see fig. 8). It is a tree that gives fruit similar to the one in the Garden of Eden. However, the everlasting cedar tree which is in itself a representation of the Virgin Mary as the villagers consider, is the tree that is similar to the one found in the representations of

the *hortus conclusus*. It is in this tree, i.e. the cedar tree, or the Mother of God by association, that the Christians seek hope and rebirth rather than death with Eve and the Garden of Eden. It is with the Virgin's acceptance to become the Mother of God that hope sprang again. She is an enclosed garden due to her virginity that was untouched, and she is the new Eve who represents the everlasting tree of life just as the Ehdnians pray for her. She is their hope, and they want her to be their refuge from the danger that they feel is threatening their enclosed community. Hence, the enclosed garden, i.e. the Virgin Mary, saves the lost paradise through her acceptance and that is why the Annunciation theme is important to Christian art especially during the Medieval time (Stewart 42).

Another motif found in the *hortus conclusus* and in the village of Ehden is the motif of the spring. The Annunciation scene in several icons is portrayed at a spring or fountain (Schiller 35-36). As mentioned earlier, Jan van Eyck's *Madonna at the Fountain* shows the fountain of life which signifies rebirth or a new life (Büttner 41). The fountain or the spring is a fresh source of water, water that becomes the water of life. It is not just any water but rather the one with the healing power and the energy to give the human being eternal life.

The villagers of Ehden consider their water which comes from the spring called *Nabi' Mār Sarkīs* as a special type of water. It has a different taste from any water one drinks in other regions of the country. It springs from the core of the Earth cold and untouched by any hand. It is as if it's a virgin water; no garbage or any rubbish can stain its purity. It is very similar to the Virgin Mary who, according to Christian Catholic or even Orthodox thought, was not stained by any man. She is represented as the enclosed garden; she is shown as virtuous, chaste and pure just like the pure water in Ehden (Stewart 37-38). The villagers of Ehden are proud of their

spring just as they are proud of their cedar tree, which are both representations of the Virgin Mary. The people drink from the water of the spring, and they say that this water is a gift from God. The manager of the small café at the *Mīdān* explains to Sāyid that once a man from Saudi Arabia came to his café. When the man tasted the water that comes directly from the spring, he declared that it is really a pity if his lips will taste anything else after this pure and delicious water. The man continued to say that he wished he could take one spring of water from Lebanon to replace all the oil found in Saudi Arabia. The manager continues to comment that our land is a blessed land (El-Daif 27-28). This significant scene at the beginning of the novel shows how the people in Ehden value their precious spring. Note that Sāyid does not comment on the manager's story. Even if he feels that there is an exaggeration in the way the manager related the story, once again he keeps it to himself. He will not upset the man with his suspicious views since the latter already considers the spring and the land as precious and pure and that the people are very lucky to be living there. This is why when the color blue starts invading the land, especially the mountain of the Virgin Mary, the people started to panic. They felt that life as they know it is changing; it is under great and unknown danger. Their enemies are envious of their blessed mountain. Even their precious spring is not giving them enough water since the water started to run out from the houses (El-Daif 68). Their peaceful enclosed community which is far away from the war is now in jeopardy.

Sāyid observes all the incidents silently. He sees the reactions and hears the comments from his mother and other villagers as well. He remains calm and determined. He does not panic or believe in the evil eye. Sāyid is rather objective and knows that some things happen and do not need all this reaction or dilemma. He is rather different from the rest of the villagers. He is a calm enlightened rebel. He

knows that he cannot really change the mentality of the people, since they have been raised and living this way for quite a long time, so he prefers to remain quiet. This is what happens with his mother as seen in chapter 1, and this is also what goes on with the manager of the café as discussed earlier. Sāyid is more open since he went out of the *hortus conclusus* to New York. He has seen a new country with a different mentality and ways of living. The people of Ehden only know their village or what surrounds it as well. They have been living all their lives in this enclosed community and cannot imagine that anything wrong might threaten their peace of mind. If for Sāyid what is going on is not a big deal, for them these are life threatening events.

Sāyid, hence, relies on reason and his rebellion is rather calmer than Edna's. Both protagonists feel that they are suffocating in their enclosed religious communities, but each one of them reacts in a different way. Edna resorts to nature and leaves behind the service at the church, while Sāyid prefers to keep his comments to himself and observe how the people are reacting and feeling towards what they call danger coming to their village. The *hortus conclusus* of both novels becomes insufficient for both protagonists. Edna goes back to the world of mythology, while Sāyid resorts to his own thoughts and beliefs calmly yet determinedly. Edna does not need the pocket culture of the Creole society. She cannot stand the hypocrisy, since these people claim to be religious while they talk about inappropriate matters openly and without any shame. Similarly, Sāyid cannot stand the naivety and close mindedness of the people in Ehden. Their pre-rational thoughts and superstitious stories do not affect him but rather make him run away to his own world. He resorts to his thoughts, as if he is living in a world apart. He is not as rigid as these mountain people who cannot change their beliefs. Their pocket culture is not good enough for Sāyid, just like the pocket culture of the Creole society is not good enough for Edna.

Both protagonists try to seek a way out. They are enlightened rebels who share the same goal which is to free themselves from the fetters of religion and society as dictated by their pocket cultures.

Chapter 3

Sleep, Death, and Rebirth

Chapter two discussed how the protagonists feel entrapped and lonely inside the *hortus conclusus* which represents their society. They are trying to find a way out. They want a new place or a new beginning. They want to feel free to choose the mode of life that best suits their identities. They need to run away from the fetters of society. Edna will resort to the sea where she finds her true self, while Sāyid will resort to his silence and ideas. He will remain living in a world of ideas and thoughts that are far away from what surrounds him. He ends up looking at the open road and wondering. The two characters encounter death during their journey. The two novels discuss this theme and show the various reactions towards it. The mythical theme of death and rebirth is apparent in both works. The human experience of both Edna and Sāyid portrays a winter that might turn into spring. The protagonists, as enlightened rebels, seek to gain a new beginning, a rebirth, and to shed their old habits and thoughts. They want to get rid of the old ideas of their societies and find new ideas of their own. To what extent are they really able to do so?

3.1 Sleep and Death:

As discussed in the second chapter, death is associated with sleep. Hypnos or sleep, according to the Greeks, is a “divine brother” for death as Giorcelli argues (129). The concept of sleep will be related to both novels. The protagonists experience sleep at a crucial point of their lives. They sleep, and when they wake up there is something different in their attitudes and thoughts. Their sleep marks an awakening, as the title of the American novel implies. The connection between sleep

and death will be apparent in both novels hence introducing the theme of death and rebirth in both works.

Not only according to the Greeks but also according to Christianity, sleep is associated with death. John relates in his Gospel the story of Lazarus and how Jesus raised him from the dead. Before Jesus arrives to Lazarus's house, He declares to his disciples that their beloved Lazarus is asleep, and He is going there to wake him up. Jesus, of course, meant that Lazarus was dead, as the Gospel explains (John 11:11). The relation between sleep and death shows how Lazarus appeared dead in the eyes of all the people but not in the eyes of Jesus. Christ knows what He is going to do, so He refers to death as sleep. Lazarus will rise again physically, but he will also rise again with the rising Christ in the Resurrection, according to the Christian faith. Sleep becomes a transitory period whereby the dead person will be sleeping to wake up at a better place, the Kingdom of God.

In Arabic, the word *al-ruqād* can be used for death or sleep. This word is used for the action of sleeping and the death position as well. This word is the one used to denote the dormition of the Virgin Mary according to the Eastern Church. The Catholic Church and also the Orthodox Church believe that the Mother of God did not die: "According to Orthodox teaching, Mary's soul, upon her death, was carried immediately to heaven; her death is referred to as *koimesis*, her DORMITION or falling asleep. Days later, according to Orthodox tradition, Mary's body was found missing from her grave, giving rise to the teaching of her bodily assumption to heaven" (Katz 96). This concept is represented in many icons of the Orthodox Church according to Temple, where the Virgin Mary is represented as sleeping rather than dead. This celebration takes place on August 15, and it is considered one of the important feasts for Mary (Temple 200). Similarly, the same celebration takes place in

the Catholic Church, but they call the feast the Assumption of Mary: “The belief that the body of Mary, which remained inviolate after she gave birth, never experienced decay in the tomb and was directly assumed into heaven... The great feast of the Dormition was instituted by the Eastern Church in the sixth century. In the West we speak of Assumption, whereas the Orthodox underscore the fact that Mary went to sleep (*Dormitio*)” (Tradigo 153).

For the Maronite Church, the 15th of August is the most important Marian feast, and the Maronite people start preparing for this feast two weeks before. They pray and fast just like they do before the celebration of Easter (El-Jmayel 69). In the Maronite Church, there are three feasts for the Virgin Mary that are taken from feasts for pagan goddesses. There is the feast of plantation on the 15th of January, the feast of harvesting on the 15th of May, and the feast of the grapes on the 15th of August (El-Jmayel 72). These feasts show how the idea of the life cycle (death and rebirth) still exists in Christianity, especially with early Christians who relied on agriculture.

3.2 Sleep in *The Awakening*:

Sleep comes at a turning point in the life of Edna Pontellier. After running away from the ceremony at the church, she sleeps at Madame Antoine’s house as denoted in the previous chapter. When she wakes up, she acts like fairytale princesses markedly Snow White and Sleeping Beauty (Giorcelli 128). She sleeps in a big white bed (Chopin 496). The color white denotes purity. It is the color worn during baptism. Edna will have a baptismal swim at the end of the novel; hence the color foreshadows how she will be baptized in the water of the sea. Furthermore, Edna’s language marks that of Sleeping Beauty. Both wake up after a while to find that everything around them is still the same. Although Sleeping Beauty goes to sleep for one hundred years,

she wakes up to find herself and her surrounding still as they were. When Edna sees that Robert is still next to her, and she is still on the island, she decides to appreciate everything that surrounds her. She wakes up from her sleep appreciating the wonders of nature. Although not a lot of time passed, she pretends that everything is not quite the same anymore. She is seeing everything from a new perspective: ““The whole island seems changed. A new race of beings must have sprung up, leaving only you and me as past relics. How many ages did Madame Antoine and Tonie die? and when did our people from Grand Isle disappear from the earth?”” (Chopin 497). She notices the beauty of the island. Her appreciation to nature foreshadows her close link with the sea at the end of the novel. She spends “a good deal of time sleeping and dreaming” (Gilmore 74-75). She dreams of a better world, a utopia: “The device of awakening from the falsity of the present into a visionary reality is a staple of utopian fiction” (Gilmore 75). Similarly, Snow White also goes to sleep after eating the poisonous apple. The dwarves think that she died, but she wakes up again because of the prince’s kiss. Death here is also related to sleep. Edna sleeps in a bed just like Snow White. She dies of her old self to wake up as a new enlightened rebel seeking change in her life.

Giorcelli also argues that “Edna takes on attributes of Persephone, the queen of the underworld, the goddess who crosses continuously the threshold of life and death: the sceptre (suggesting the regal woman who rules), a tiara of diamonds [at the dinner party]... the pitcher (Edna does not actually pour the libations, but cocktails and champagne enrich and brighten her table), the color yellow” (129). Moreover, the important connection between the fairytale princesses and Persephone is the motif of long sleep. “The two princesses and Persephone, after a period of sleep and isolation, will awake (be reborn) and experience joy and completeness, either with the prince or

with the mother” (Giorcelli 129). Edna’s enlightened journey will begin after she wakes up on the island. She now perceives everything from a new and changed perspective. Sleep marks a notable step towards the theme of death and rebirth in *The Awakening*. Edna is not anymore the Protestant daughter or the Catholic wife. She becomes the daughter of nature and its elements. She wakes up to realize this truth and change her fate.

3.3 Sleep in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*:

In *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*, the connection of sleep to death is also evident. At the climax of the story when the color blue invades the mountain of the Virgin Mary, Sāyid prefers to continue his nap. He asks his mother: “What can I do?” when she informs him of the dilemma, and then he goes back to sleep (El-Daif 103). He does not want to be bothered by the nonsense of the villagers or the nagging of his mother. He knows that nothing can be done to change the situation. He talks to his mother without even bothering himself and opening his eyes so that he will be able to sleep again. Sāyid is the only person who is not alarmed by the situation. He acts in a different way, unlike the rest of the villagers. He realizes that the pre-rational thoughts of the villagers cannot change. They will remain the way they are. Hence, he decides to rest and maybe even dream of a better place. Unlike Edna, he does not wish that the inhabitants would disappear. He knows that they will remain as they are, but they do not bother him anymore. He chooses a different path. He will resort to his inner ideas and dreams.

Ghaflat Al-Turāb describes the importance of Yusuf Beik Karam in the eyes of the villagers. The largest church in Ehdén, which is Saint George’s church, is located in the middle of the *Mīdān*. The statue of Yusuf Beik stands in its yard; he

holds his sword in his right arm and looks towards the south (see fig. 9). The people think that he is looking towards the Valley of Qādīsha, the valley of hermits and saints, and in particular he is looking at the location of the Maronite Patriarchy (El-Daif 17). Meanwhile, the body of Yusuf Beik Karam has a special place in the church. It is placed in the section of the women, since the women, especially during a funeral, do not mingle with the men. The body is placed aside under an arch where saints are usually put (El-Daif 19). Yusuf Beik Karam was considered a saint. He was a very popular hero for the people of Ehden. He is considered Lebanon's savior (El-Bachaalani 489). The place of the corpse inside a glass casket shows Yusuf Beik as if sleeping (see fig. 10). He looks sleeping and is also treated as one, since his granddaughter is described in the novel attending to the body and cleaning it. She changes his clothes and uses incense just like the priest. The incense signifies how they consider Yusuf Beik a saint. The people take the rituals of the granddaughter very seriously that is why whoever is usually at the church leaves it to give her space and serenity (El-Daif 127-128). His sleep marks the step towards resurrection with the rising Christ as in the story of Lazarus, since Christ mentions that He is the Resurrection (John 11:25). He is the virgin saint whose beloved is Jesus Christ. His body does not experience decay, since he lived according to the teachings of the church. The people say that his body remained in a good condition since he lived a holy and pure life just like a saint (El-Bachaalani 600-601). Like a saint, he was imprisoned several times and mistreated during his imprisonment (Khazin 103).

The significant part is the presence of Yusuf Beik's body inside the church of Saint George. Although there are many churches in Ehden, placing Yusuf Beik in this church in particular sheds light on the similarities this hero possesses in comparison with the patron saint of the church. They are both horsemen portrayed as knights

fighting the enemy. According to Frye, the myth of Saint George the dragon slayer shows a quest where death and rebirth are central. The killing of the dragon represents the triumph of Jesus Christ through the resurrection (189-190). The theme of death and rebirth is also found with the story of Yusuf Beik, since the latter does not really die. He is alive in the eyes of the people of Ehden. Propp also explains how the story of Saint George the dragon slayer comes from pagan religions. It was canonized by the church: "The popularity of St. George and of dragon fighting caused the saint's image to merge with that of the dragon fighter; the Church was forced to acknowledge the merger and canonize it" (86). Yusuf Beik has become similar to fairytale heroes. The people of the village admire him and tell stories about his leadership and heroic deeds even if half of the stories are not documented or historically true. They even talk of miracles performed by him like the incident in the novel where one woman claims that he has left his horse, and she cannot see him anymore (El-Daif 127). The narrator mentions how it was very dark and the people could barely see their way around in the yard outside the church, especially that the whole statue is painted black, but they still believed this woman since they consider her pure at heart and can witness a miracle even if they are unable to see it (El-Daif 129). Till now, the people of Ehden pray warmly to the hero, especially when they lose an item around the house. They say that when they pray for Yusuf Beik, they find the lost item right away.

The similarities between Saint George and Yusuf Beik are many. They both fought against evil, and they were both believers in God. They wanted justice, and they were good fighters and horsemen. Both of them were single and virgin. They were pure and devoted their lives to the service of God. Yusuf Beik Karam could be considered the new Saint George, according to the people of Ehden.

3.4 The Natural Elements:

Other than sleep, there is the motif of water which is apparent with the image of the sea in *The Awakening*. In *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*, the motif of the sand is apparent. It is related to the death incident that takes place in the novel and highlights the beliefs of the villagers and contrasts them with those of the protagonist. Both novels portray the theme of death and rebirth. For example, the scene where Adèle Ratignolle gives birth in *The Awakening*, which contrasts to the death scene in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*. The most significant of all will be the last two scenes in both novels. These scenes focus on how the characters Edna and Sāyid stand in opposition to their surroundings.

3.4.1 The Water Motif in *The Awakening*:

The water motif shows “the mystery of creation... fertility and growth. According to Jung, water is also the commonest symbol for the unconscious” (Guerin 161). The image of Aphrodite/Astarte is related also to this motif, since Aphrodite is born from the sea. The sea represents one important element of nature that Edna will resort to in the last scene. It will accept her the way she is just like the welcoming womb of the mother.

Edna goes through a journey of self-discovery. She has been trying hard to get rid of the fetters of society and marriage. She throws a royal party where she resembles Aphrodite/Astarte. She moves to the pigeon-house thinking that she will find her freedom there. Edna even seeks her freedom in leaving the church and the mass and liberating herself in nature at the *Chênière Caminada*. However, even there she still feels entrapped by the dictates of society and the enclosed garden of Grand Isle. It is only through her connection with the sea, i.e. water, that she finds her refuge:

“Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight – perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman.

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!”

(Chopin 477)

This significant passage shows how Edna is wondering about the society that surrounds her. She is trying to find answers, to find something different. At this point and directly after this passage the mention of the sea occurs: “The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace” (Chopin 477). It is as if the answers to her wonderings and questions came in the voice and touch of the sea. She has found her resort and her refuge. She has found her own Muse or Holy Ghost.

Edna starts her relationship with the sea one bit at a time. At first, she is amazed and fascinated by looking at it and imagining that it is like a meadow where she used to run and play as a young girl (Chopin 479). The sea reminds her of her childhood, a time of innocence and serenity. She goes back to her roots and remembers her young and innocent years, yet it is through the sensual experience and the actual swim that Edna feels transported into another world, a world free of rules and regulations. Her first swim is indicative and foreshadows her last: “But that night

she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence. She could have shouted for joy. She did shout for joy, as with a sweeping stroke or two she lifted her body to the surface of the water” (Chopin 488). The image of the child is apparent in this scene. Usually, a carefree child surrenders peacefully to something without thinking of the consequences. Likewise, she surrenders to the sea and allows it to carry all her burdens through lifting her up like a feather. She has become weightless in the water, and this feeling carries her to a beautiful place, since she has never felt this way before.

The sea as a motif represents “the mother of all life; spiritual mystery and infinity; death and rebirth; timelessness and eternity; the unconscious” (Guerin 161). Edna’s wondering shows how she has been questioning the mysteries of life. The impact and role of the sea in Edna’s life are shown in the quotation, since it becomes a focal point in Edna’s life and growth. Water represents fertility and growth. Growing a new seed cannot happen without water. Here, Edna is growing up as a person. She is becoming more mature and responsible of her actions. She walks towards the sea willingly.

According to Jung, the sea is a symbol of the mother, and it can also be related to the “baptismal font” (81). Hence, in both cases it is an indication of birth or rebirth. Edna wants to go back to her mother, i.e. the sea. She goes back to Mother Nature through her last swim in the sea.

Moreover, the sea motif is connected with the color blue. According to Pastoureau, the color’s “semantic field evokes the...sea...” (180). This idea takes us back to chapter one and the connection between blue and the Mother of God. Edna

resorts to the natural mother, i.e., water. She moves away from the religious mother through her escape from the church of Our Lady of Lourdes at the *Chênrière Caminada*. She is unlike the villagers of Ehden who resort to the Virgin Mother with all their worries and problems. She does not even resemble the Creole society which prays and goes to church as part of its rituals and social traditions. In this manner, Edna is contrasted to Adèle Ratignolle who is a typical Creole woman in the eyes of her community.

Adèle gives birth in Chapter 37 of *The Awakening*. This scene paves the way to Edna's final swim, and it shows how Edna and Adèle, although close friends, have different interests, goals, and perspectives in life. Although Adèle is a typical mother in her society, Edna's "voyage of self-discovery" begins with her (Showalter 45). Edna is attracted to Adèle and finds in her an intriguing mother figure. She goes with her to the beach where she "responds to... [her] caresses, the first she has ever known from a woman" maybe because Edna is motherless and "seeks a mother surrogate in Adele" (45). This may be true to a certain extent only since Edna will later leave Adèle and her feeling of entrapment and suffocation is similar to what she felt at the church. Seeking freedom and tranquility, she resorts to the sea and to the womb of Mother Nature.

For Showalter, Edna "identifies with another woman's pain" while Adèle is giving birth (50). Edna "began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered" (Chopin 554). She does not really remember her own experience in giving birth to her two children. She sees her friend in pain, and she begins to feel uncomfortable. She knows that her friend is in pain and that she is suffering, but she is now in another place in her life. Even when Adèle reminds her of her children: "She was still stunned and

speechless with emotion when later she leaned over her friend to kiss her and softly say good-bye. Adèle, pressing her cheek, whispered in an exhausted voice: ‘Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!’” (Chopin 554). Even when she is still in pain and very tired, Adèle does not forget her duties as a mother, and she insists on reminding Edna about her duty towards her children as well. Edna’s kiss and good-bye seem like a farewell. She will not see her friend again. She will take another path just as she did at the island where she abandoned the service at the church to discover nature and sleep peacefully. She has basically abandoned the form of the typical mother-woman represented by her friend Adèle. She has also abandoned Catholicism when she left the church. She does not really abandon the Virgin Mary per se but rather what she represents and stands for in the eyes of the Creoles. The Virgin Mary is part of the dictated religion which Edna resents and is trying to get rid of.

In chapter 39, the last chapter of *The Awakening*, there is the description of Edna’s last swim: “The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude” (Chopin 558). The description is very similar to that found on page 477 discussed previously. Edna is observing the sea the way she did the first time she laid eyes on it. The sea still captivates her and takes her breath away. She wants to be free and one with this body of water. In order to do that, she has to get rid of all the things that slow her down. She is no more like a royal queen in her golden dress. She takes off all her clothes to feel free and be one with the water: “but when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that

beat upon her, and the waves that invited her” (Chopin 558). She becomes naked and vulnerable in front of the sea, yet she is not afraid but rather satisfied and calm. She has finally found her true resort and comfort. Taking off her clothes is a significant gesture of casting away all the things that still bond her with the society. She does not even want to wear the appropriate swimming attire that women were supposed to wear during her time. For Edna, swimming is an intense emotional and psychological experience. She wants to swim naked which contrasts with “the range of patterns provided [which] suggests stockings, corsets and the avoidance of ‘clinging stuffs’” (Beer and Nolan 31).

Edna’s last swim has been much debated. Some critics consider it a suicide while others think of it as a rebirth. Dingleline argues that although Edna is connected with Aphrodite at the dinner party, she did not find herself totally even with a bunch of “personally selected friends” (6). Edna’s last swim, according to Dingleline, was echoed in her first swim. Her final fate was obvious from the way her first swim was described, since when she looked back at the people, she saw a “quick vision of death” (7-8). In Dingleline’s opinion “Edna must drown”(8).

As for Elaine Showalter, Edna can escape from “confining traditions only in death” (52). Showalter argues that drowning is related to femininity, since the “female body is prone to wetness, blood, milk, tears, and amniotic fluid, so in drowning the woman is immersed in the feminine organic element. Drowning thus becomes the traditionally feminine literary death” (52). Dingleline and Showalter agree that Edna had no other choice. She needs to face death, and she cannot run away from it. For them, she has drowned in one way or another.

Other critics disagree with these interpretations. For Gilbert, “Edna’s last swim is not a suicide – that is, a death – at all, or, if it is a death, it is a death associated with a resurrection, a pagan, female Good Friday that promises a Venusian Easter” (327). Basically, Venus or Aphrodite does not resurrect. She is immortal according to tradition. Hence, speaking of resurrection does not really suit Edna’s swim or her resemblance to Aphrodite. What Giorcelli explains is rather more satisfying. She argues that the ending of the novel is “ambiguous because it is ‘open’ and technically ‘circular.’ We do not actually ‘see’ Edna drown but see her instead surrounded by and bathed in symbols of fertility and immortality (the sea, the sun, bees)... There is the implied suicide, but Edna may have begun to live at another level of existence” (109). The idea of the ending being debatable is valid, and many interpretations of Edna’s fate occur. Giorcelli also adds that:

“By divesting herself of all garments – her bathing suit, but also her ‘outer’ fictitious self, her past experiences and her wrenching emotions – she frees herself from her physical life, logical thoughts, and subconscious perceptions, as well as from external hindrances, in order to enter a condition of authenticity and joy in the water under the sun. Through a baptismal immersion in the sanctifying waters of inner grace, and in the face of immortality symbolized by the bees and the sun...” (124)

Edna is all alone, and she is discovering the natural elements of the universe all by herself. This is part of her “super-natural awakening” (124). This awakening starts after her long sleep on the island and reaches its peak at the last swim.

For Yaeger, Edna is a troubled protagonist. She is trying to have her own language, and, hence, her own identity: “Edna’s own awakening begins with and returns at her death to the rich and painful lure of desires that are still outside speech and beyond the social order” (414). What Edna seeks and wants is not really found in her society and its customs. She tries to find it somewhere else, in a different context, that of nature and its elements. This basically occurs during her last swim.

Gilbert argues that “Swimming immerses Edna in an *other* element – an element, indeed, of otherness – in whose baptismal embrace she is mystically and mythically revitalized, renewed, reborn” (324). Through her swim, Edna abandons not only the shore but also her society and her husband (324). She swims towards a new type of paradise, “a female paradise” (324). She is not satisfied with the *hortus conclusus* of Grand Isle or with the Biblical Garden of Eden, but rather she wants to seek and find a new type of paradise. Gilbert goes on to say that it depends on how one perceives Edna’s last swim. Some critics who looked at the text “realistically” considered it an act of “defeat” (327). Thus, “What critics have called her ‘suicide’ is simply our interpretation of her motion, our realistic idea about the direction in which she is swimming. Yet as Chopin’s last words tell us, that direction is toward the mythic, the pagan, the aphrodisiac” (Gilbert 327-328). Edna is not seen actually drowning. Her motion is towards the water, but this is not enough to sentence a verdict saying that she has drowned or committed suicide; hence, the ending is open, especially because Edna has the tendency to rise from death like the phoenix, as Giorcelli remarks. In the first chapter, Léonce exclaims that Edna is “burnt beyond recognition” (Chopin 469). For Mr. Pontellier, this is reckless behavior, but Edna was not really affected by his comments since she was enjoying herself. Giorcelli argues

that this scene foreshadows the end of the novel, since a “new, phoenix like identity was about to rise out of her ‘ashes’” (113). Even if she dies, Edna will rise again.

The phoenix is a mythical bird. In his index, Thompson puts it in the category of mythical birds (code B32, 366-367). According to Garry and El-Shamy, this category found is ‘linked generally to concepts of resurrection, immortality, and cyclic resurgence’ (83-84). Van den Broeck discusses how the phoenix could stand for “Christ [and] Mary” (Garry and El-Shamy 85). This takes us back to the beginning of the chapter with the discussion of the Assumption or Dormition of the Virgin Mary. The church believes that Mary’s body did not experience decay but that she rose to heaven in body and soul. Edna’s body did not experience death in the physical sense since she is not really seen drowning. She has taken this quality of apparently being immortal from the goddess Aphrodite and from the Virgin Mary, who is the post figuration of the former. Edna’s last swim carries all the meanings of the novel’s title, as she struggled throughout her life to attain liberation. The phoenix symbol shows how Edna can fly to another place and renew herself. But is this rather a defeat, or a success? Edna finds what she really wanted, peace with herself through her connection with nature. She has risen to a mythical condition: “How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known” (Chopin 558). The reference to “creature” rather than “a new woman” or a “new human being” is significant. Hence, Edna could really be the image of the phoenix, since the text also uses the pronoun “it” to discuss the idea of the creature rather than he or she as pronouns. She is not herself anymore, and she feels great about it.

Edna does not hesitate this time. The first time she swims back to the shore, to her family and her society, but now she does not look back. She thinks of her husband

and children, but she neglects Adèle's advice. "She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end" (Chopin 558). Feeling no regrets, she is no longer afraid to leave the *hortus conclusus*, but now she is liberated from the shore and all that it represents. She wants to move forward to a new life in this sea that becomes like a green meadow. The water is fertile and fresh like a green meadow. The natural elements are everlasting from a mythical point of view. Edna feels that these elements and this mythical road is an open road that has "no end." The interpretation of her death/rebirth when related to mythology will show that it, in turn, is open-ended as well.

3.4.2 The Sand Motif in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb*:

The motif of death and rebirth in *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* links this novel to *The Awakening* even more. Just like Edna, Sāyid seems to be fed up with his society's ideas and beliefs. He resents the way they practice religion, especially the way they mourn the dead. The contrast between death and life in the novel is very significant and intricate. The death of two villagers and the motif of the sand stand in contrast to the villagers' beliefs in Christ and resurrection.

Towards the middle of the novel, a death shakes the peaceful community of Ehden. Boutros is a twenty-five year old contractor who works day and night on a project that he wants to finish before his wedding next Sunday. Boutros was working in the trench assisted by Miḥsin and his son Charbel. When an avalanche of sand keeps Boutros buried, Charbel comes to his rescue with a ladder. But then more sand

runs down on both of them, and they were totally buried. Mihsin and the villagers who heard the shouting run to dig them out. They kept on asking Mihsin: When did it happen? How long have they been under the sand, and his answer would always be: “now, now!” (El-Daif 75-78). While pulling Boutros from the trench, one man takes his gun and shoots in the air, a critical gesture of resentment towards God because of what happened to the two young men (El-Daif 82). The narrator repeats the phrase: “towards the sky” for emphasis, then all the villagers start shooting towards the sky until the doctor arrives (El-Daif 82). It is as if they are blaming God.

The two young men were pronounced dead one hour later. Is it possible that sand can kill two men? (El-Daif 84). Sand is usually used for plantation and growth, just like the water in *The Awakening*. That is why the people are astonished. How can the source of life be a cause of death? Boutros’s family laid his body on a bed with a clean white sheet in the middle of the room. Like Edna, Boutros lies on a white bed. His death is not like that of Snow White. He is not even “sleeping” like Yusuf Beik. In disbelief, Boutros’s mother starts crying and hitting herself and shouting that her son will never die. However, her wailing indicates that he is dead, and he is unlike Lazarus who has a hope of resurrection in the eyes of the grieving family. One woman tells her to be quiet and keep herself together since this is the will of God. She tells her to pray to the Virgin Mary to accept him with her love in heaven (El-Daif 86). Boutros’s family turn the funeral into what looks more like a wedding, dressing him in his wedding suit (El-Daif 88, 93). He is a groom, but they treat him as a dead man with no hope of resurrection. They do not treat him the way they treat Yusuf Beik or the way they celebrate the Annunciation of the Virgin. While the barber is shaving him, the women dance around the body (El-Daif 94). The way they face death and dance while wailing and lamenting and ululating is very important. These simple

villagers pray to God and His mother, but when their son dies, they seem to forget all the teachings about the rising Christ. The teachings explain that if one believes in Christ and in His Resurrection one shall not perish but shall have eternal life. When a tragedy occurs, some people blame God and others go in denial.

The villagers of Ehden take mourning to an extreme. They are rough mountain people who abide by their traditions no matter what. They are more rigid than the Creole society Edna lives in. Mountain people take things more seriously. People who live by the seashore like the Creoles can be considered more easy-going and lenient. They joke and have fun, while we see the villagers in Ehden more concerned and serious about their fate. They are even very serious about their superstitions such as the concept of the color blue and its relation to the evil eye.

The sand motif indicates the mortality of the human being. The people are reminded of this on Ash Monday. The priest tells them while drawing the cross: Remember oh human being that you are made of dust and to the sand you shall return. This is what happens to Boutros and Charbel. They are not asleep as Jesus indicates about Lazarus but rather dead and buried under the sand. They are dead in the eyes of their family and friends.

Sāyid has a totally different opinion. He is sad because the two young men died, but he cannot understand the obsession of the Ehdenians, or all Maronites, or even the Arabs who are sad to mourn all the time (El-Daif 97). According to Sāyid, these people's songs, poetry, and rituals are depressing, their writers are like ravens who lament and cry all the time, and at their best, they are romantic weepers. They all dream of writing about a tragedy. Even when these people laugh, they will say: May God deliver us from the consequences of all this laughter! Sāyid would like to found a

party against such negative emotions, a party celebrating reason and intellect and stamping out this stupidity of the naïve people who are buried in sadness and mourning. To Sāyid, happiness is an ally to reason (El-Daif 99-100). Sāyid's thoughts are subversive. He is totally different from the people in his village.

The villagers dance and sing when they are sad, but they rarely celebrate their happiness. They tend to wear black and lament all their lives. They are different from the Creoles who spend their summers at the resort having fun and attending parties. Hence, for Edna to rebel against such a pocket culture is rather easier than what Sāyid is facing with the serious villagers who even fear laughter and what it might bring onto them. Thubron discusses the idea of mourning the dead according to the Orientals: "Mourning for the dead was frowned on by the Greeks and exaggerated by the orientals" (28). Moreover, the Greeks are more logical and reasonable while the people of the Orient are more emotional, according to Thubron. Sāyid seems to say the same thing. Having lived in New York for six months, he notices the disparity between the reactions of the people in the west and the people in the east. He feels that the people of his village exaggerate their feelings and reactions. Even when they learn about the invasion of the color blue, they all run to the church and then form five troops to investigate, while he prefers to continue his nap. He is not like the villagers and understands the way of life from a different perspective. He continues sleeping and dreaming because he realizes that changing his fellow villagers is quite impossible. He usually keeps his liberal thoughts to himself, where he lives in a world of his own. He has more difficulty rebelling and trying to find his own path than Edna, due to the nature of the culture he lives in. Although the Lebanese novel takes place during the 1980's while the American one takes place during the 1890's, the Creole society that lives next to the sea tends to be more modern and open as it allows

Edna to find her space. Sāyid cannot do this. The villagers think that he is a sinner since he has a mistress, and they do not really hear him properly or take his ideas seriously.

At the end of the novel, Sāyid and his friends sit and wait for the singer who was supposed to perform at the party to come their way. They sit and look at the open road. When they see a car coming their way, they think that it is the singer. Sāyid utters the last words: “This is his car” (El-Daif 143). However, the novel ends and the reader is not quite sure whether the protagonist will eventually get his party or not. The last page in the novel explains that one witness swears that there is still a blotch of blue at the south end of the Virgin’s mountain facing the church. People say that this color blue that covered the whole mountain once started to reduce in size until it settled on this spot only (El-Daif 144). This last short page shows how the color blue of evil according to the villagers is still there. It did not disappear completely. The color blue shows how the people will not be able to change their mentalities and their rituals. They are still stuck and some residue of this is represented in the blotch of blue found near the Virgin’s church. Sāyid wants to change the society’s thoughts and blind practices. He tries to insert his ideas amongst them, but he feels that it is of no avail. The expectance of the singer at the end shows how he still has hope in them, but this hope is faced by the blue blotch and what it represents.

Sāyid looking at the open road is similar to the walking of Edna on the water and her last swim. The two endings show how the protagonists still believe in a world that can change or at least their fates can change. Edna resorts to the open sea which is the womb of Mother Nature. She relates herself to natural elements to find a new beginning away from the shore and Grand Isle. With Sāyid, he looks at the open road and hopes that the car is that of the singer who is going to sing happy songs and

change the mood in the village. He wants to achieve his dream of having a party and also of creating a party based on reason and joy instead of the suffering and lamentation that he is surrounded with. He does not lose hope, and his look towards the open road shows that he still has a choice and that he can still dream and wish that one day he will achieve his goal. He still lives in a world of his own, and he can be satisfied with this even if the community in Ehden will not really get out of its rituals and follow his thoughts. Dreaming and hoping is what makes him survive and continue his life in Ehden. He is similar to Edna who hopes to seek a new beginning even if it is in a different form over there behind the waves of the sea. They both sleep, and they wake up reborn in a way. Edna appreciates nature more, and she finds her path through becoming one with the natural elements. She anticipates her freedom through the connection with mythical figures. Sāyid waits for his freedom through his hope that the singer will eventually show up. Living in anticipation drives the protagonists to revive their lives away from trite traditions and thoughts.

Conclusion

The Awakening and *Ghaflat Al-Turāb* possess what Giorcelli calls an open ending: “The ambiguous ending permits an open and intersected interpretation: Death and life may be regarded as phases of a single existence, either of which will be superseded by the other” (126). The critic was commenting on the ending of Chopin’s novel, but one can apply the same quote to El-Daif’s novel as well. Both works can undertake many interpretations. The natural elements of water and sand carry a double meaning. They can be considered an emblem of fertility and growth, but also a representation of drowning (in the case of water) or being buried (in the case of the sand). The protagonists are left in situations whereby a critic or a reader is left to wonder what their real fates were. Did Edna really drown? Was she really reborn again? Did Sāyid get his party at the end? Was he able to form the party that preaches happiness and reason?

From what is known about the two cultures that the protagonists live in, it seems that Edna has had more freedom and a liberal end than Sāyid. She tends to resemble Aphrodite/Astarte who is promiscuous like Edna herself, since Edna falls in love with Robert, leaves her husband’s house, and has an affair with Arobin. She abandons the service at the Catholic Creole Church the same way she abandoned Protestantism when she married a Creole. The pocket culture of Grand Isle does not pin her down or render her into a typical Creole like them. She does not even become a typical mother like Adèle, since she runs away from Adèle while she was giving birth to resort to nature and its elements especially the sea. She is able to defy the enclosed *hortus conclusus* of Grand Isle. At the end, she does not even need her clothes anymore. She wore her best attire at the dinner party. She looked her best and

everyone was surprised with her appearance. They even commented on her beautiful crown. All these did not give Edna satisfaction and peace. She does not want anything to remind her of her old life. She does not look back. She walks with confidence towards the sea. The memories of her husband and children fade away. She becomes a new creature who is one with nature. Whether she dies or she is reborn again in a different form, at least she has abandoned the pocket culture that was entrapping her physically and emotionally. She was brave enough to take the step towards the sea. The latter is not anymore an unknown realm for her, since throughout the novel she has discovered it little by little from her first swim until the last scene in *The Awakening*. The act itself marks an audacity and a change in her fate. She decides her own ending/ beginning in a way. She has left the *hortus conclusus* of Grand Isle without any regrets.

As for Sāyid, he has to face a different type of pocket culture. He is considered more educated than most of the villagers. He traveled abroad, and this fact has widened his thoughts and gave him a chance to discover new cultures. However, he decides to return to Ehdén willingly. He likes his village and wants to spend quality time with his son. Due to the fact that he was in New York, Sāyid realizes the discrepancy between his views and those of the villagers. He has some enlightened rebellious opinions that the villagers refuse. He does not try to face them or argue strongly with them because he knows that they are not going to change. This is the way they have been living for such a long time. They are satisfied and very happy with their life. They are Maronites, but they still have superstitious beliefs that are stuck in their memories. The issue of the color blue, as trivial as it is for the protagonist, is a matter of life or death for them. They are mountain people as they claim although they are basically from Zgharta which is not considered a mountain.

For them, Ehden is their second home, and the mountain is where they come from though Ehden is only their summer resort. They even say that their hero Yusuf Beik Karam is an Ehdenian. These people are rough villagers who stick to their thoughts, and Sāyid knows this fact very well. He chose to come back to Ehden because he likes his village regardless of their trite thoughts. His decision marks the fact that he did not want to separate himself completely from his relatives and friends. He made his decision willingly and that is why he does not argue with his mother about any idea she speaks of especially when she talks about the existence of God.

Sāyid keeps dreaming and hoping even when he knows deep down that the inhabitants will not listen to his views or take his ideas seriously. He hopes that the singer will eventually come to Ehden, and they can all celebrate joyfully instead of spending all their time crying or worrying. At the end of the novel, the narrator mentions that the color blue still exists and did not fade away completely. This is an indication that the superstitious thoughts about the evil eye still find place in the hearts and minds of the people. The protagonist at the end of the novel was not able to change his society, yet he does not want to leave unlike Edna.

The two enlightened rebels free themselves in different ways. Edna leaves everything behind and resorts to nature, while Sāyid remains where he is but looks forward to a brighter future. He accepts his culture the way it is. The mountain people of Ehden could be more rigid than the people of Grand Isle who live by the seashore, since the latter can be more open to merchants and people coming from abroad. The Ehdenians are satisfied with their lives and do not want to change. This is the case since the protagonist tries to talk to them several times about the way they mourn for instance or even about the tales they tell concerning the hidden treasure, but they

never listen to him. They want to do what they believe in. Sāyid does not give up although his society is even more enclosed than the Creole culture.

The credit that can be given to both protagonists is that they tried to find a way to mark a change. They both chose what they want to do in their lives willingly. Though for some critics Sāyid might not have accomplished much or Edna might have drowned, but the fact that they have struggled and tried to change matters. The idea that they are different than their enclosed cultures shows a heroic deed. Facing an enclosed society with subversive views is not an easy task. The protagonists have tried using their own ways.

Kate Chopin and Rachid El-Daif come from totally different centuries and societies. The protagonists they present and the way these protagonists deal with their surroundings mark some common points between the two novels. The themes discussed using the mythological approach show how both works can be similar or different. Both novels contain a type of revolution and sarcasm read between the lines. The protagonists rebel in one way or another and their rebellious views mark an underlying sarcasm to the trite thoughts of the two pocket cultures presented in both novels. Edna and Sāyid signify attempts of revolting against enclosed cultures. The rebellion might not be complete, but the trial is what really counts. The road that the protagonists follow matters more than where this road finally leads to. It is the journey that counts the most.

Figures

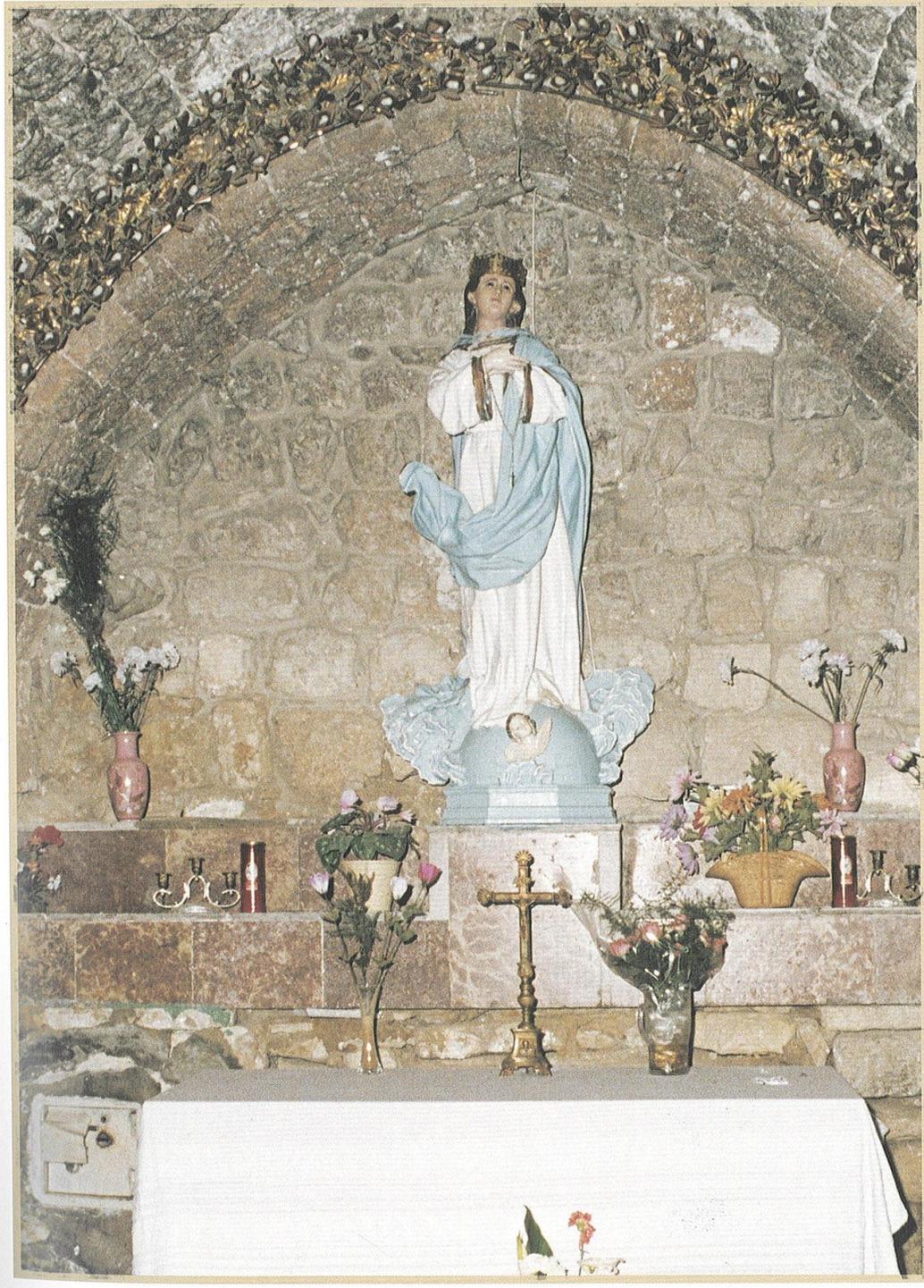


Fig. 1: *Our Lady of the Fort*, Ehden, North of Lebanon.in Boulos Fahed, *The Glory of Lebanon is Given to Her*. Beirut: Chemaly and Chemaly, 2010.

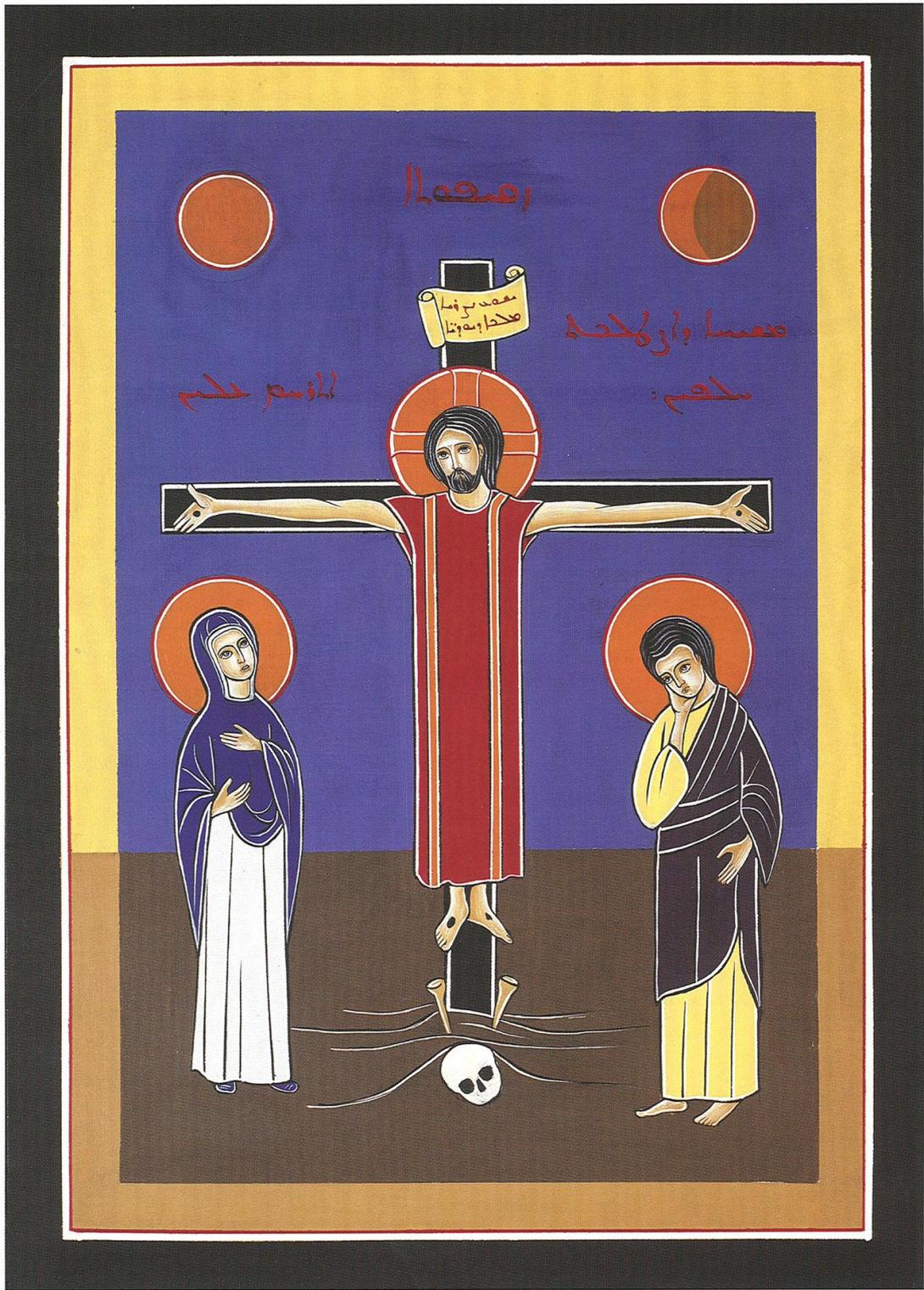


Fig. 2: *The Crucifixion*. in Abdo Badwi, *The Liturgical Year Iconography of the Syro-Maronite Church*. Kaslik: CEDLUSEK, 2006.

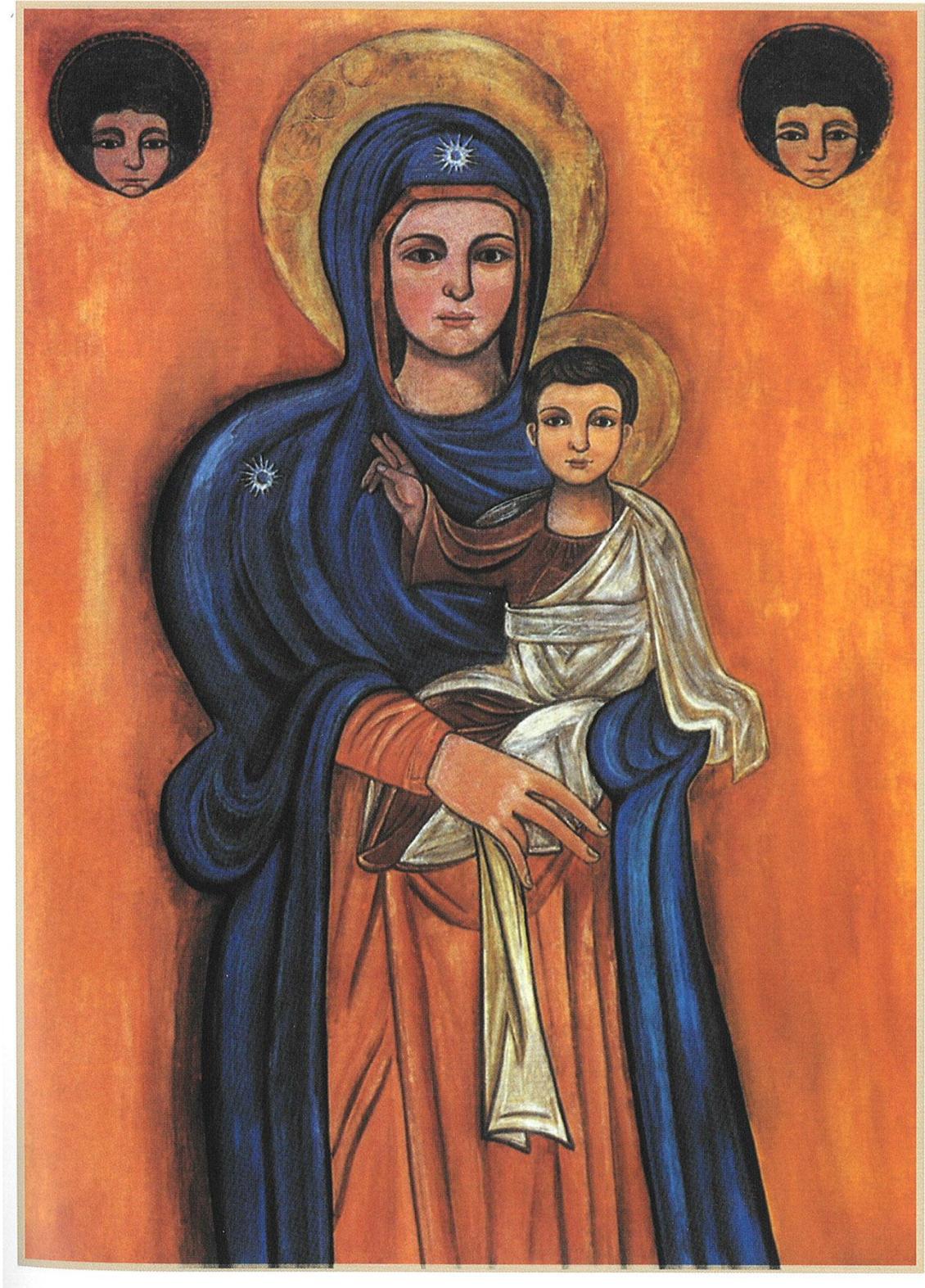


Fig. 3: *Our Lady of Ilige*, Meyfouq, Byblos.in Boulos Fahed, *The Glory of Lebanon is Given to Her*. Beirut: Chemaly and Chemaly, 2010.



Fig. 4: Our Lady of the Fort Church, Ehdén. Personal photograph by author. July 2010.



Fig. 5: Ehden from the mountain of Our Lady of the Fort's church. Personal photograph by author. July 2010.



Fig. 6: Ehden from the mountain of Our Lady of the Fort's church. Personal photograph by author. July 2010.

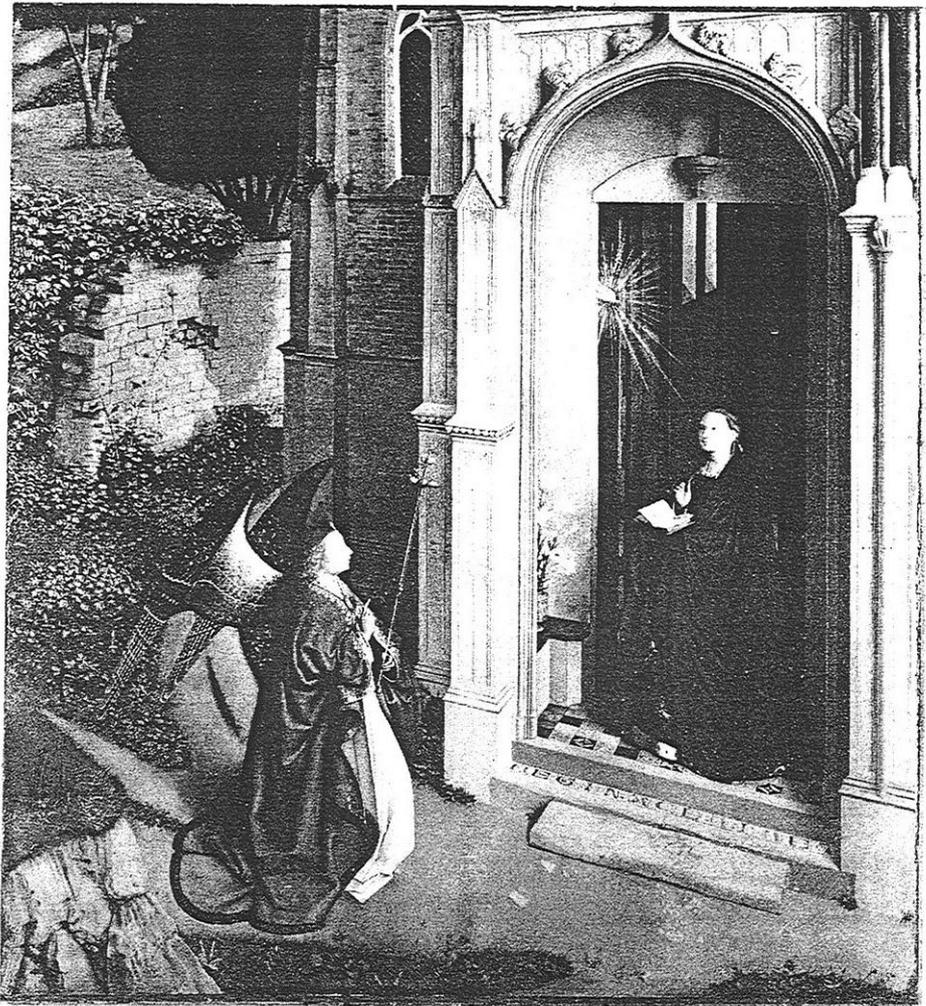


Fig. 7: Van Eyck, Hubert. *The Annunciation*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Michael Friedsam Collection, 1931. in Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1966.



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Fig. 8: *Castelseprio Fresco*. in Gertrud Schiller. *Iconography of Christian Art*. Trans. Janet Seligman. Vol 1. Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1971.



Fig. 9: The statue of Yusuf Beik Karam, Saint George Church, Ehdn. Personal photograph by author. July 2010.



Fig. 10: The corpse of Yusuf Beik Karam, Saint George Church, Ehden. Personal photograph by author. July 2010.

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