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Diversifying Woolf's Room: Private Spaces and Creativity in The Works of Willa Cather, Kate Chopin, Gayl Jones, and Alice Walker

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by

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Abstract

There is a divergence between Woolf's vision of private physical spaces necessary for creating art and that of some feminists of color such as Alice Walker, Ortiz Cofer, and Gloria Anzaldua. Both Woolf and these contemporary scholars agree on the importance of physical spaces for female artists. However, they disagree on the nature of these spaces. Woolf's private physical space is a room with a lock on the door whereas these writers' room is the kitchen table, the bus, or the welfare line. Walker and like-minded writers challenge the narrowness of Woolf's room because her locked room is a luxury that is only available to white wealthy women. This thesis seeks to examine the relation between Woolf's room and that of some feminist scholars of color and explore if their visions of private physical spaces, allowing for and promoting women's creativity, have anything in common. It also aims to resolve the tension between these two parties' ideas of physical spaces by investigating how Woolf's room or an expanded version of it has been reflected in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and provide a possible answer for Alice Walker's question about how a poor, slave woman such as Phillis Wheatley who did not even own herself could write poetry that considered "superior" at her time and today.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Azizah, my father, Mohamad, and my children for their endless support, love, and encouragement.

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Introduction

Almost a century has passed since Virginia Woolf published her popular work, *A Room of One's Own*; however, it is still considered one of the most influential early feminist works. "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" is one of Woolf 's most famous feminist arguments. This phrase ignited my curiosity about the topic of women's empowerment and creativity and their relation to women's privacy and private spaces. In addition, it led to my passion to examine this topic in selected works of two writers that are Woolf's contemporaries, Kate Chopin and Willa Cather, and another two writers, both African-American and writing in the late 20th century, Gayl Jones and Alice Walker. Despite their very different backgrounds, the novels of these writers share remarkable thematic resonance. It is important to note that in my thesis, I am mostly concerned with Woolf's claim about the necessity of having a room of one's own as an essential pre-condition for women to liberate their intellects and release their creativity, and whether this physical space is the only kind of private space that plays a significant role in promoting women's creativity.

Woolf genuinely believes that there is a profound connection between people's access to solitary, private spaces on one side and creativity on the other, as the former enhances the latter. Before moving any further in my discussion of this topic, a brief description of Woolf's vision of a private space should be given, and a general discussion of *A Room of One's Own* should be provided. Tegan Zimmerman characterizes Woolf's spatial vision as "[a] room of one's own, a physical space, a separate area with its own walls or partitions" and remarks that such a room "is not easily attained by poor women" (37). Zimmerman suggests that privacy and money are two interrelated concepts in the life of Woolf and her female upper-class counterparts, as money enables them to pursue the privacy they need. Thus, for these women, rooms are luxurious

private spaces (such as drawing rooms and bedrooms) within private spaces (homes), in which women attempt to fulfill their needs for privacy. The quality and the quantity of these rooms are two features that women of less privileged classes might not be able to afford. For instance, poor women usually live in houses that are constituted of one or two rooms only, and even if some of those poor women presumably have the ability to afford living in larger houses, the extra rooms in their houses may not be appropriate for writing because they are not well-prepared with the basic requirements for writing, including a good lighting system and comfortable furniture. In other words, according to Woolf, talented female writers need 'luxurious' rooms of their own to create unique pieces of literature and these writers, she assumes, are usually upper or middle-class women, because the physical private spaces they have to access in their quest for artistry and creativity cannot be attained by women of other social classes.

It is important to note that even though Woolf and her contemporary women have rooms assigned to them within the domestic sphere, such as drawing rooms, sitting rooms, nurseries, and bedrooms, these female-gendered spaces are invaded by other residents of their houses, including their husbands, children, and servants. Writing about Woolf, Wendy Gan indicates that Woolf "did have her own bedroom but this was a space whose privacy she had incomplete control over, subject as it was to intrusions by male members of her family, even infamously at night when in her bed" (27). Thus, these unlocked rooms neither conform to Woolf's vision of private spaces that promote female artists' creativity nor are they equivalent to those assigned to men inside or outside the domain of domesticity. Woolf's ideal room is what she indicates in this quote: " a room of her own…a quiet room or a soundproof room" (44). Based on that, the 'room' must be a locked or uninvaded space within domestic or public domains.

On the other hand, spaces such as study rooms, libraries, universities, and most public realms were masculine at Woolf's time, and women were not permitted access to them. Casting women out of libraries and study rooms prevented them from having the intellectual solitude necessary for creating art. Feeling rebellious against the way her women were locked out of such rooms, Woolf says, "how unpleasant it is to be locked out," and directing her speech to men this time, "lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (24). Locking women out of libraries is something that men can do because of the authority and the power (physical, economic, social, etc.) they have over women whereas, locking women's minds is something they cannot do because women's souls and minds are not in the hands of men; they are free. In other words, Woolf argues that even though men have control over women's bodies and treat them as their properties and commodities, they do not have control over women's minds and intellect and will never have.

Because the traditional domestic spheres assigned to women by the patriarchal society of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century were not efficient for women in their quest for creativity, Woolf encourages female artists to move beyond them. She specifically encourages women to find new spaces for themselves inside or outside the domain of domesticity or to re-appropriate the old ones, so they can be empowered to pursue more knowledge as well as exercise their creativity. Women's main problem with domestic spaces under patriarchy is that they are not given the right to decide if they want to communicate with other people or not. Female gendered spaces like drawing rooms, nurseries, sitting rooms, and bedrooms do not provide women with the atmosphere needed for writing literature and creating art because they are frequently interrupted by other people, especially the males in their families and children. Interrupting women's physical private spaces "can affect the quality of work the female artist

produces as well as hindering or preventing its execution" (Hite 92). For instance, if a woman retreats to any of the female-gendered spaces in her house, guests and family members can stop by at any time, disturbing her solitude, and she would be expected to stop thinking about whatever she was thinking and get ready to entertain them by initiating a conversation or participating in an ongoing one.

To recap, Woolf's typical private spaces or rooms are physical, uninvaded spaces that provide women with the needed environment for concentration and imagination. However, these rooms "still offer a connection to the outside world and a degree of sociability," as Gan states. She also asserts that private spaces within domesticity should give women the chance to experience "solitude and company" resembling the way this same sphere allows men to access this "duality" (22). As it is important for women to have locked rooms of their own that isolate them from other people physically and mentally, it is also important that women can break this state of isolation and communicate with others when they are willing to. In some situations, writers find it urgent to communicate with other people to negotiate an idea, evaluate a concept, find an answer, look for inspiration, or to merely take a break! Obtaining this type of private space gives birth to women's suppressed creativity similarly to the way "men's luxury and space give birth to dignity, geniality, and philosophical and theoretical reflection, including reflection on women" (Zimmerman 39). Thus, depriving women of physical privacy will not open those many possibilities for them to unleash their creativity.

Woolf indicates that to be able to have a room of one's own, women must have a good private income. Money is a necessity in the life of women artists, as it allows them to maintain their material spaces and have control over them. In addition, the freedom of money gives women the freedom of intellect as well as the courage to express their opinions even if these

opinions are against the mainstream. As Woolf illustrates in her text, "that building, for example, do I like it or not? Is that in my opinion a good book or a bad? Indeed my aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me, and substituted for the large and imposing figure of a gentleman, which Milton recommended for my perpetual adoration, a view of the open sky" (33). She clarifies how empowering money is for women by explaining how her aunt's money enabled her to become the brave woman writer she was and opened her eyes to new ways of seeing and saying things. Woolf's confession reveals a fact about her in the past. She was not courageous enough to articulate her own opinions when she was completely dependent on men for a living, and just like any other woman in her situation at that time, any given attempt to annoy men might result in casting her out of the house and the whole society in addition to cutting off her regular allowance (if she has any). Thus, money facilitates women's access to privacy and helps fuel their genius, while poverty hinders both their creativity and intellectual autonomy.

Women's intellects, talents, and creativity were ignored for many different reasons and men's fear of women's entrance into the competition of writing is one of them. Discussing this issue, Woolf speculates in *A Room of One's Own* what would have happened to Shakespeare's gifted sister and her talent if he had had one. She says, "it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare." She elaborates,

> Any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village…. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people…. she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. (41)

From Woolf's perspective, preventing women from having rooms of their own where they can enjoy the luxury of privacy without interruptions, denying their access to education resembling

that of men, and neglecting their artistic gifts are some of the reasons why there were not so many women writers and poets before the twentieth century.

For many decades, men also believed that women were not qualified to write good pieces of literature, as writing in genres other than letters was beyond their intellectual abilities. Women are quite capable of producing literature that can compete with that of men, Woolf argues, if gifted women were given the privacy they needed and the sophisticated education they were dreaming about. These are two social factors that Woolf describes as "propitious to the act of creation"(43). She also believes that women's negative emotions such as “anger,” "hate," "fear," "resentment," and "bitterness," result from the society's unjust suppression of their talents; this is what makes some of their works sentimental and unreasonable. Thus, Woolf encourages angry female writers to use these feelings as catalysts for their creativity by channeling them constructively and positively to produce excellent pieces of art and literature.

Despite the fact that Woolf was addressing a particular audience (female college students likely to be 20th century middle- or upper-class women, her previous argument) “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction,” has evoked a wide range of ambivalent responses among feminist scholars and critics of all ethnicities, races, and social classes. Woolf’s argument in *A Room of One’s Own* has not been very problematic for white writers such as Jane Marcus, who designates Woolf “the mother of all feminists” (xiii). In the case of female writers of different races and social classes, on the other hand, Woolf’s intellectual freedom and feminist insights are considered an inspiration whereas her race and class-related attitudes are rejected.

A good number of leading feminist scholars and authors of color have responded to Woolf’s belief and paralleled her argument that “A woman must have money and a room of her

own if she is to write fiction" in their works, including Alice Walker, Gloria Anzaldua, and Ortiz Cofer. However, these writers have revised her ideas to match their own real-life conditions as well as those of their mothers, daughters, and whole female communities.

In "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," for example, Alice Walker extends Woolf's assumption of the significant role that material conditions play in releasing women's creativity, though she objects to Woolf's vision of rooms as necessarily luxurious physical spaces "with key(s) and lock(s)." To support her point of view, Walker tells the story of Phillis Wheatley, a black woman poet whose intellect and creativity was considered "superior" by the 18th century white society. Her master and his family, the Wheatley family, gave her a very good education that was not available to most women at her time regardless of their race, and they provided her with the needed support for writing when they noticed her literary creativity. However, the great gift of Phillis Wheatley was ignored by her society, including publishers, because of her race and her less privileged class (the Wheatley family freed her after she published her book, *Poems on Subjects Religious and Moral*). Wheatley died at the age of 31 due to some health issues as well as poverty; she had to work even when she was very sick and could do nothing about her low pay, which helped her to support and provide for two babies.

By telling Phillis Wheatley's story, Walker challenges Woolf's theory, asking how a slave woman such as Wheatley who "owned not even herself" could write great poems (Walker 404). However, Walker is not completely against Woolf's argument that stresses the importance of privacy for women, especially for women writers, as can be elicited from her biography as well as her writings. Showing how Woolf's feminist works of criticism have been an inspiration to her, Walker quotes a paragraph from her text, *A Room of One's Own*, making some insertions so that Woolf's quote matches the situation of Wheatley, who for Walker is a woman who

symbolizes all black female artists whose tough life conditions have obstructed their creativity and liberation:

> Virginia Woolf wrote further, speaking of course not of our Phillis, that "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century [insert "eighteenth century," insert "black woman," insert "born or made a slave"] would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some, lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard [insert "Saint"], feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts [add "chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else, submission to an alien religion"] that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. (404)

Ortiz Cofer supports Walker's assumption that women's rooms should not be only envisioned as ideal or luxurious physical spaces resembling those utilized by upper-class women artists during the twentieth century and portrayed in their fiction. In her book *Woman in Front of the Sun: On Becoming a Writer*, Cofer confirms that "the true artist will use her creativity to find a way, to carve the time, to claim a kitchen table, a library carrel, if a room of her own is not possible. She will use subterfuge if necessary, write poems in her recipe book, give up sleeping time or social time, and write" (85). Both Walker and Cofer argue that having a (physical, locked) room of one's own is not an essential condition for releasing women's creativity and artistic power; talented women can still be artists and creative without owning private physical spaces of their own.

Gloria Anzaldua is one of the feminist scholars of color who seems to be irritated by the whole idea of women writers needing rooms of their own. In her letter, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers," she stresses:

> Forget the room of one's own - write in the kitchen, lock yourself up in the bathroom. Write on the bus or on the welfare line, on the job or during meals, between sleeping and waking. I write while sitting on the john. No long stretches at the typewriter unless you're wealthy or have a patron - you may not even own a typewriter. While you wash the floor or clothes listen to the words chanting in your body. When you're depressed, angry, hurt, when compassion and love possess you. When you cannot help but write. (17).

Again, Anzaldua, another woman writer of color, challenges Woolf's vision of a room and argues that women do not necessarily need rooms of their own to write professionally; they can write anywhere in domestic or public spheres, as long as they are uninterrupted and have the urge and the impulse to write.

Sandra Cisneros has been also inspired by Woolf's feminist argument, but she reevaluates it in her novel *The House on Mango Street*. She specifically enlarges Woolf's vision of a room to embrace Esperanza, a gifted working-class writer, as a member of the literary tradition of women. Esperanza, who lives with her family in a poor area and a modest house, never had a space of her own to do any autonomous activities such as relaxing, contemplating, imagining, or writing. However, her talent can find its way to the world through the small space of the neighborhood in which Esperanza and her friends make their adventures. This small place allows her to recognize her power of observing the small details of everyday life around her and using them in her stories.

In short, Alice Walker, Ortiz Cofer, Gloria Anzaldua, and Sandra Cisneros are all examples of contemporary feminist critics and writers who, similar to Woolf, believe in the importance of private spaces for women to be creative, though they challenge the narrowness of Woolf's luxurious rooms, as these rooms only open their doors to white wealthy women and lock out poor women and women of color. These writers believe that Woolf's rooms should be expanded to embrace new types of residents that are women of all ethnicities, races and social classes as well as encompass new domestic and public places such as kitchens, dining tables, buses, streets, etc.

In fact, this act of enlarging Woolf's notion of private spaces should not be problematic for Woolf herself because in her essay, *A Room of One's Own*, she encourages women to design

new spaces for themselves that differ from those specified for men. She imagines women in spaces that are totally new to them at her time. For instance, she portrays two girls, Chloe and Olivia, in a laboratory, a scientific space that is located within the public sphere. By doing that, Woolf indicates that she has already moved beyond the traditional domestic sphere in her imagination and encourages younger generations of women to move beyond it in reality. Lastly, the action of expanding the boundaries of women's spaces involves renewal to some degree, which as I assume might also apply to the residents of those spaces. It does not necessarily mean replacing them but rather welcoming more residents to the private domain of women's creativity, which reminds, to some extent, of bell hook's space of marginality that I will be discussing later in this introduction.

In the next chapters, I will examine the significance of the different forms of private spaces for women to be creative in literature, whether these spaces are Virginia Woolf's physical rooms, enlarged versions of those, or even newly invented ones. Before moving any further in my discussion, it is important for the purpose of this dissertation to first give a good overview of both 'privacy' and 'space' as concepts and social practices. As similar to many other outdated concepts, the meanings and the connotations of these two concepts have significantly evolved since Woolf's time. What Woolf and her contemporaries refer to as a space in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries differs than what people call a space in the middle of the twentieth and after. Moreover, what Woolf has perceived as private or the only form(s) of privacy over the span of her life might have been considered a narrow conceptualization for people who came later. Answering the following questions in particular will help readers to comprehend my overall discussion and analysis of the four chosen texts: What does privacy mean? What does space mean? What are the different types of both of them? How have people's understanding of

privacy and of the right to privacy, and their sense of spatiality changed since the 19th century and before?

Privacy

People's conception of 'privacy' has changed over the centuries. In the 18th century, the whole concept of privacy was newly introduced to the conservative British society. Psychic (mental) privacy was the only kind of privacy that was available for people who lived then, and it appeared in some of their writings. Patricia Spacks in *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* points out that privacy in its simplest version, the psychological one, was yet a controversial subject at that time. It was believed to threaten the society's order and morality because it could lead to the increase of unaccepted social behaviors such as disloyalty and hypocrisy. Disloyalty happens when people feel more secure and confident to imagine objections, within the hidden spaces of their minds, to social and religious authorities, whereas hypocrisy occurs when people pretend to be individuals whom they are not. Disloyalty and hypocrisy are both practiced when individuals are certain that their ideas are inaccessible and their actions are not detected. Social hypocrisy in particular had already started to prevail in 18th century-British society and by pretending to be the people authorities want them to be, 18th century men and women escape the restrictive social conventions they tire of.

Even though mental privacy, the only form of privacy available to people at that time, has been considered a forbidden thing, women who lived in Woolf's time or one century before her recognized its great necessity for their well-being. They did not mind limiting themselves to its simplest versions even if confined to "the mental interlude stolen between chores" or the inaccessible thoughts they develop through their private reading (Gan 161). Psychological privacy provided these women with the chance to think of something other than their

responsibilities toward their families and society and not to be accused of being irresponsible mothers or wives. Besides, this form of privacy allowed the 18th-19th century women to have a covert space in which they could release their real feelings and affections, as hiding them was a part of the females' social training. In the remote space of their minds, women who have no control over their bodies, as they were considered the property of their fathers and husbands, have absolute control over their thoughts and opinions in a way that does not necessarily conform to prevailing ones.

The idea of physical privacy, or as I also refer to it in this project, ‘solitude,’ was not very popular among people, especially women, before the 19th century. At that time, "few writers in letters, diaries, autobiographies, or fiction concern themselves significantly with the subject [of physical privacy]. Perhaps they assume the impossibility of [it]; perhaps they feel no need for it; perhaps they consider it a matter too trivial for discussion" (Spacks 7). Based on that argument, the significance of having physical privacy on the well-being of individuals and societies was not understood yet except in a few conditions. We can, therefore, assume that the positive correlation between physical privacy and creativity that Woolf emphasizes in her essay was not also conceived or taken seriously, as it was a new idea to many people at her time.

Even though Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* indicates how it is almost impossible for women to produce unique pieces of literature accessing psychological privacy only, she admits that only a few women throughout history were able to do it. Jane Austen was one of these women. Like other women who lived in the 18th century, Austen had not had access to an uninvaded private room of her own. She had to write her novels in "the general sitting-room" that was "subject to all kinds of casual interruptions," and Woolf wonders: how could she do it? (56). Austen must have used some strategies that enabled her to indulge in her innermost

thoughts while being accompanied by other people. She could have pretended to be following the conversations around her while her mind was plotting new novels and composing dialogues between the fictional characters for her next work. Woolf speculates that Austen would have been able to release more complex forms of genius such as writing poetry if she were given a "locked" room of her own. In Woolf's opinion, it is "easier to write prose and fiction [in a frequently interrupted place] than to write poetry or a play, as [l]ess concentration is required" (56). Even though Austen could practice her talent of writing literature in the general sitting room relying on psychological privacy only, other women with potential creativity could not.

New cultural circumstances led to the emergence of new forms of privacy (Eric Berendt, 2017). By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, some cultural and social circumstances, including people's increased awareness of their rights as individuals and their sense of self-hood, urged them to look for more sufficient forms of privacy; the mere reliance on the psychological version of it no longer serves their ends. In the case of women, utilizing physical privacy, especially outside the boundaries of domestic spheres, was not very common in that era. However, the debate about women's right to access this type of privacy started to appear, explicitly or implicitly, in the writings of female writers, and Woolf was one of these writers. Women’s first attempts to create better, more efficient spaces for themselves started with adjusting their material private spaces located in the domain of domesticity; they inhabited new spaces within this sphere or re-appropriated the old ones. For instance, they began with making “explorations of the garden" or retreating into "the study" or any other room in the house after installing "a lock on the door [that is only] controlled by the woman"(Gan 105).

A few decades later, as men became more consumed by their responsibilities outside the house and migrated further from home, women had the opportunity to enter the public sphere

and hold different roles there. Elaborating on the situation of one particular American community, the community of Deerfield, Massachusetts, Deborah Rotman indicates that men's migration to distant agricultural lands and moving to work in places that are away from their households in their quest for better economic status gave women the chance to enter the public sphere. This shift in women's social and economic position empowered them, enabling them to demand more of their rights in voting, education, inheritance, employment and other rights that were exclusive to men, including their right to privacy (49).

As we have seen, people's understanding and practice of privacy have changed over the years. It started as a simple, forbidden psychological state and evolved into a combination of psychological and physical forms that were a privilege only available to social and religious authorities in the 18th century. At the end of the 18th century and through the nineteenth century, male artists noticed the positive role privacy plays in promoting creativity, and they were able to claim both of its known forms at that time, psychological and physical privacy. In the case of women, they were not able to have their right to the physical form of privacy that Woolf, in her essay, encourages women to have until the twentieth century due to their position in the social hierarchy. Women were first able to claim their private spaces inside the domestic sphere and were not officially able to access them in the public sphere, in places such as libraries, universities, and job sites, until the end of the twentieth century.

What does privacy really mean?

In the previous overview of privacy, we can notice that the meaning of 'privacy' has been inconsistent; it has sometimes referred to the psychological reserve while other times to the material, physical retreat, and this inconsistency can be confusing. Giving a good definition of this term will hopefully solve this resulted confusion and will help in basing our later analysis of

the four chosen texts, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Willa Cather's *O' Pioneers*, Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, on a more solid theoretical foundation as well as precisely examining the meanings and the forms of privacy that appeared in each text and writer's autobiography.

It is important to note that privacy as a term is very vague; it means different things for different people in different eras. Providing a definition that is universally agreed upon is impossible, although several scholars have attempted to (Moore & Kemp 58). Thus, for the purpose of this paper, I will stick to the definition of Alan Westin, a law professor specialized in privacy issues, as it fits into my overall argument and upcoming analysis of the female characters' (states of) privacy in the four chosen texts. Westin defines privacy as "the voluntary and temporary withdrawal of a person from the general society through physical or psychological means, either in a state of solitude or small-group intimacy or, when among larger groups, in a condition of anonymity or reserve" (Westin 7). In this definition, Westin outlines four different states of privacy: solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserve by which people choose to distance themselves physically and psychologically from others to prevent unwanted intrusion. Eight years later, a social psychologist named Irwin Altman developed a privacy regulation theory that has many characteristics in common with Westin's theory. Altman defines privacy as "a selective control of access to the self or to one's group" (18). In this definition, Altman argues that people need to regulate their privacy by having an ideal level of social interaction with others. This level of social interaction is subjective; what is considered ideal for an individual in one situation might not be the same for another in that situation. Grounding her argument on Westin's theory—but it is also applicable to Altman's theory—Lisa Austin argues that:

> [the] full definition of privacy tries to put together the idea of privacy as a claim with the idea of privacy as a state and relate it to the need for seeking a balance between too much and too little privacy through the "adjustment process…the individual interest in privacy involves seeking the right balance between too much and too little. This shifts attention to individual choice in seeking that balance, rather than having it imposed, and is the reason why so many definitions of privacy build on some aspect of control, choice, or consent." (58)

There are two important points emerge here. First, people need to be able to balance between having too much privacy, so they do not get into a state of complete isolation, and too little privacy, so that they will always be available to others and to have the right to decide the amount of that balance. Second, people need to choose to be in a certain state of privacy and to be conscious about their privacy. "Beatte Rössler has noted that the individual who falls into a crevice is alone and inaccessible, but few would say that she enjoys privacy" (qtd. in Austin 58). Such woman is forced into a state of permanent isolation that she is unable to break. Imposed privacy imprisons people and restricts their abilities, including their creative ones; thus, it is not the type that Woolf advocates in her essay.

To provide a better explanation and interpretation for Westin's definition, I will apply it to Woolf's essay, so we can practically examine and better grasp his notion of 'privacy.' First of all, privacy in Woolf's essay, *A Room of One's Own*, has meant women's physical retreat in a locked room. In my previous discussion of Woolf's essay, I briefly elaborated on her ideal room and the presumed role this kind of uninterrupted, solo retreat plays in enhancing female artists' creativity and artistry. As stated earlier, the most significant feature of Woolf's room is that it enables women to claim privacy by having the right to decide whether or not they want to break their solitude and communicate with other people. It is also a state that women intentionally choose to experience to boost their personal and artistic growth.

Second, privacy in Woolf's essay also means the personal, psychological space that emerges in the author's furious speech directed at men for the way they treated women in the past and cast them out of masculine spaces: "how unpleasant it is to be locked out, lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (24). In this quote, Woolf argues that men have authority over women embodied in their physical, social, and financial power that enable them to lock women out of their material spaces. However, this same authority will not allow them to lock up the gates of women's minds, obstructing their intellectuality. In other words, she asserts that private physical spaces in domestic or public realms can be controlled by males, as they are usually located in men's properties or are under their authority, whereas the private psychological ones exist in women's minds and souls and are owned and accessed by them only. Psychological privacy allows women to create a free space for themselves where they can wander, liberating their ideas, expressing their genuine feelings, and discovering their suppressed creativity away from strict social expectations and demanding familial responsibilities. Even though this kind of privacy is crucial for female artists, Woolf believes that women's sole dependence on it is only partly beneficial and not enough in their quest for successful literary and artistic achievements.

Third, the word 'privacy' also refers to the metaphorical literary space that women as a collective group created for themselves in the field of literary writing. This intimate, women's literary space is a private sphere that shuts men out; it is created by women, for women. Women's literary writings were treated as inferior and were mostly not read by men in the past. In her essay, Woolf says, "the world did not say to her as it said to them, write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?" (44). Hence the need for a supportive space where women writers encourage each

other, read for each other, guide each other, think together as one group, and pour out the extract of their experiences to light the path for their incoming sisters and daughters, aiming to create a literary tradition for all female writers.

Women's Intimate Relationships as A Form of Privacy.

As Westin's definition suggests, privacy, whether in a theoretical or a pragmatic frame, is not only restricted to solitude but also includes their state of intimacy in small or large groups. Women's intimate relationships are not necessarily sexual ones, as they can include relations such as women's sisterhood and connectedness as well as mother-daughter relationships. For most women, these intimate relationships play a huge role in promoting women's creativity, empowering their personalities, and enhancing their autonomy. In the privacy of their meetings and conversations, women work hand-in-hand to make a positive change in their lives and the lives of successive female generations. For instance, one of the examples that will be discussed in depth later is Mademoiselle Reisz's close friendship relation to Edna in Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, and how their connection empowers Edna and her music and critique foster her creative talent of painting.

As mentioned, the mother-daughter relationship is the other type of intimate relationship that enhances females' creativity that I touch upon in this project. The word 'mothers' can be looked at in two different ways, as literal or literary, to refer to biological or non-biological role-model mothers respectively. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf states that as women "we think back through our mothers" (64). Woolf's statement can be applied to both versions of mothering. Women mostly learn from the life experiences of their mothers; they try to avoid what they perceive as mistakes and feel committed to whatever they believe is right. For example, women who grow up seeing their mothers controlled and oppressed by their fathers may reject the

institution of marriage if they are given the chance to do so. They might prefer to remain single to avoid going through those same experiences. In contrast, women who admire certain aspects of their mothers' lives and personalities may attempt to imitate them, hoping for similar outcomes.

Woolf's mother was a writer, and she must have been inspired by her mother's attempts to write and to publish. However, she died when Woolf was only thirteen years old of age. Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen, wrote a book. "It is not a long book or a great book, but it was published," as Katherine Dalsimer indicates in her article, “Virginia Woolf: Thinking Back Through Our Mothers.” Another example of writers who have been impacted by their mothers and grandmothers is Kate Chopin. Chopin's widowed mother and grandmothers mothered her mind; she was influenced by their logical and liberated way of thinking. Unlike other women in her society, Kate Chopin and her mothers were open-minded, progressive, and ahead of their time. An example of that is Kate’s bold thematic choices in her literary works; they were very controversial for her conventional society. Even though Chopin did not start her writing career until a few years after her mother's death, Chopin's biography reveals how her mother was her only close friend, and was always available whenever she needed her.

The crucial role that mothers play in promoting their daughters' creativity and success has been emphasized also by Alice Walker and Gayl Jones. These two women are an example of outstanding African American writers who have stated explicitly in many of their interviews or works, or both, how their talent of writing had been inspired, directly or indirectly, by their artist mothers. Their mothers lived uneasy lives and went through tough circumstances, but found a way to exercise their creativity, and from their daughters’ perspectives, their mothers’ success gave them no excuse to fail.

Literary mothers also play a significant role in fostering other women's creativity. In this private space of female literary writing, the souls of the artist foremothers facilitate growing the creativity of their daughters. Dalsimer points out that "Woolf's early writings show her "thinking back through [her] mothers" not only for precedent and for inspiration but also for negative examples, models of how not to live one's life" (2). Woolf's writing ideas and literary style were guided and influenced by literary foremothers such as the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, and Jane Austen. She adhered to what she liked and considered an ideal part of female writers' tradition of writing, and she avoided what she disliked and considered a flaw in the female literary tradition. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf also points out that "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (55). Therefore, Woolf also reaches out to her literary daughters, encouraging them to collaborate to invent a writing tradition for women that competes with that of men in terms of quality and to create literary themes that reflect their situation in the society and their needs as individuals.

In that text, she gives an example of a fictional female writer named Mary Carmichael who all represents female literary heirs. Carmichael's work, *Life's Adventure*, is not as good as the works of her literary mothers such as Jane Austen: "First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well, she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating" (55). However, this young writer is creative because she attempts to invent new writing tradition for women that differs from that of men. In her work, Carmichael also touches upon new topics relating to women's life that have never been addressed in the writings of male geniuses. She depicts two women, Chloe and Olivia, in a love

relationship, presenting the bold literary theme of love relationships between women before the middle of the 20th century when male-female love relationships are the only kind discussed.

The Relationship between Physical and Psychological Privacy

There is a noticeable correlation between physical and psychological privacy, and investigating the nature of the relationship between them can be beneficial. As there is no universal definition for ‘privacy,' there is also no agreement on what type of bond exists between them. In *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self*, Spacks writes about *The Wanderer*, Frances Burney’s novel: "Presumably recognizing that physical privacy for well-bred women was hardly conceivable, she explores instead the degree to which perfect social conformity, the triumphant practice of good manners, can provide its psychological equivalent”(98). Even though Spacks in this quote discusses a text written in the 18th century, she brings together the two states of privacy, the physical and the psychological, in her analysis, and treats them as equal. If the former was unavailable for any reason, the latter can substitute for it. She suggests that the heroine who was deprived of accessing overt withdrawal from social and familial demands, would have been able to make a hidden, psychological withdrawal from them. She could retreat to her inner mind and keep her thoughts private at the same time as she practiced, in an automatic way, her domestic social training as a host, a mother, and/or a wife. Talking about 18th-century women elsewhere in her book, she says, "these women cultivated interior privacy partly because largely deprived of its physical equivalent" (218). Clearly for her, physical and psychological privacy are equal.

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and The Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Collins says:

> But change can also occur in the private, personal space of an individual woman's consciousness. Equally fundamental, this type of change is also personally empowering.

> Any individual Black woman who is forced to remain "motionless on the outside," can develop the "inside" of a changed consciousness as a sphere of freedom. Becoming personally empowered through self-knowledge, even within conditions that severely limit one's ability to act, is essential. (118).

Writing about and for Black women, Collins draws our attention to the important role the covert privacy of the mind, "a woman's consciousness," and its equivalent, the overt privacy of the body, play in empowering women as well as liberating their thinking and bodies from the racist and sexist oppression of both White society and Black patriarchy. Like Spacks, Collins argues that if Black women's access to privacy is prohibited and their exercise of freedom suppressed, they can still be empowered and make positive change in their lives by exploiting their private psychic sphere that no one but themselves can have control over.

In contrary, and based on Woolf's text, *A Room of One's Own*, the relation between physical and psychological privacy is that the former improves the quality and enhances the performance of the latter, which creates the best environment for cultivating women's creativity. Woolf's text suggests that these two forms of privacy are connected, but not equal; psychic privacy always accompanies physical one and is a part of it whereas physical privacy does not necessarily accompany the psychic one, nor is it a part of it.

To recap, even though Woolf's notion of privacy and private spaces is mainly restricted to the physical state of it, other different states of privacy such as the psychological and metaphorical ones also appear in her article. Physical, psychological, and metaphorical states of privacy all play an important role in promoting women's creativity, and their level of importance varies from one person (writer) to another and from one situation to another. It is important to mention that in my discussion of these states of privacy or private spaces and how they enhance the creative side of the female characters' personalities in each text, I do not follow a particular fixed order. I always begin my discussion with the states of privacy that I perceive as most

relevant, logical, and influential in the case of each female character, as each one of them is set in different life circumstances and distinct conditions and the kind of privacy that seems salient in one context might not be in another one.

In *O' Pioneers*, for instance, I begin my analysis of the different spaces influencing Alexandra positively with the intimate private space she shares with her father. It is the first space and one of the most crucial ones that empower her as a young and mature female pioneer in a very conventional society, and it brings out the creative side of her personality that manifests itself in her unique skills for managing the family's business and cultivating the land. Further, according to Westin's definition of privacy, as I have said, privacy not only refers to an individual's state of solitude, but also to feelings of intimacy with another person or within small or large groups. Having provided a useful definition of 'privacy' and discussed some of its distinct forms, I will briefly review some theories of space in the next section, and I will end with my own definition for the term 'private spaces' and what it means in this project.

Space According to Lefebvre, Soja, and hooks

My discussion of space and spatiality relies heavily on Edward W. Soja's book, *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places.* In this text, Soja examines the work of a number of remarkable scholars and critics who have notably contributed to the field of social, cultural, and geographical spatiality. In his introduction, he states explicitly that the main purpose of his book is to encourage his readers to expand the scope of their old ways of thinking about space and spatiality particularly the geographical one and perceive it in a broader, more creative way.

Interestingly, there is a cause-effect relationship links Soja and Woolf's discussion of space. While Soja encourages people to reconsider or expand their old ways of thinking about space in

his book, *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Woolf in her text, *A Room of One's Own,* encourages women, in particular, to reappropriate their old spaces located in the domain of domesticity and create new ones for themselves outside it. In order for women, especially of later generations, to execute Woolf's advice in altering their traditional spaces or become more creative in forging new ones for themselves, they should be informed of the updated broader ways of perceiving space, such as the ones Soja laid out in his book.

Soja begins his text as well as his "intellectual journeys of discovery" with what he called an "alternative reading" of Henri Lefebvre's most influential book *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre's book, as Soja claims, is "arguably the most important book ever written about the social and historical significance of human spatiality and the particular powers of the spatial imagination"(8). He is, as well, the first scholar to introduce the idea of space as a social production and "argue forcefully for linking historicality, sociality, and spatiality in a strategically balanced and transdisciplinary 'triple dialectic' (6). Thus, understanding Lefebvre's notion of space and in particular his 'triple dialectic' is essential in reviewing space literature. Summarizing and demonstrating Lefebvre's 'triple dialectic,' Jen Gieseking, William Mangold, Cindi Katz, Setha Low, and Susan Saegert in *The People, Place, and Space Reader* write:

> Lefebvre theorized a tripartite production of space that exists in dialectical tension: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. *Spatial practice* describes the cohesive patterns and places of social activity. It can be perceived in the everyday acts of buying, playing, traveling, and laboring, as much as in the everyday spaces of the home, office, school, and streets. *Representations of space* are how space is conceived by engineers, cartographers, architects, and bankers through plans, designs, drawings, and maps. It is a system of signs and codes that are used to organize and direct spatial relations. *Representational spaces* are those spaces that the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. Usually dominated by the other modes of spatial production, these are clandestine and underground spaces lived by artists and others who seek to describe alternative spaces. (285).

Thus, if we are to apply Lefebvre's 'triple dialectic' to Woolf's bourgeois room or scientific laboratory, two private spaces she pointed to in her essay, we will probably place them under the category of 'representations of space.' Because even though these two spaces are supposed to be real physical sites that have their geographical dimensions, they were conceptualized sites in the case of Woolf's and her contemporary women writers, as they had never attended them or been a part of their reality. Both Woolf's envisioned room and scientific laboratory were examples of spaces that middle class women attempt to reappropriate or create for themselves in their endeavor to move beyond traditional spaces that hinder their creativity.

Lefebvre's social theory of space represented in his 'triple dialectic' has been adopted widely over the last century among scholars from different fields, as Soja indicates. However, they mostly tended to think of space as either a 'Firstspace' perspective—a term Soja uses for spatial practice—that is mainly based on real and perceived material forms of it or 'Secondspace' perspective — Soja's term for Lefebvre's representations of space—that is built on conceiving space in cognitive, imagined forms. What Lefebvre refers to as 'representational space' or 'lived space;' on the other hand, has been usually comprehended as a "combination" of 'Firstspace' perspective represented in its real perceived structures or 'Secondspace' perspective represented in its imagined, conceptualized forms (Soja 10).

At the end of the 1960s, new, creative modes of thinking about space have arose. Improving Lefebvre's spatial triad that involves thinking of social space as one of these three perspectives Firstspace, Secondspace, and lived space, Soja introduces the concept of spatial trialectics. It is "a product of a 'thirding' of the spatial imagination, the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning." Lefebvre's perspective of

representational space—what Soja identifies as lived space—is characterized by its lack of dogma; hence, Soja comes up with this creative term in an attempt to introduce people to a broader and more extended- but firmer and more stable- way of thinking about space that encompasses both real and imagined forms of space and *more* (11). It is important to note that there is no fixed definition for Soja's Thirdspace since it is "a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings" (Soja 2). Based on that assumption, Thirdspace, as a concept, is open to varied interpretations and applications, which is a notion I built on and utilized when I fashioned my own definition of the term 'private spaces.'

Soja's Thirdspace, in short, can be perceived as real either because it is a site that has geographical dimensions and can be located on the map, or it can simply indicate a space that feels real to us because of "our actual experiences of space and place" (spatial imagination). Thirdspace is also a space that we conceptualize and imagine due to our previous experiences, whether these experiences are real, lived ones or conceived through the things we read or hear about. An example of this space is the space that is represented through art, including painting and literature. Lastly, Thirdspace can be both real and imagined and *more/also* and the words *more/also* in particular can mean varied things for different people, as Soja suggests. One possible interpretation of them is that Thirdspace is the space we assign a meaning and emotions to, and they change continually based on our lived experiences. The words *more/also* will always remain open for further exploration.

Through his journey of exploration and crystallization of Thirdspace, Soja examines the writings of a number of contemporary scholars and the notable feminist cultural critic and theorist bell hooks is one of them. bell hooks has been remarkably influenced by Lefebvre's

social theory of space and has already taken the pathway to the Thirdspace that she refers to in her writings as the chosen marginality. Just like Soja and other critics, hooks "advances" and "reconceptualizes" Lefebvre's 'lived space' "through creative inquiries into the connected spatialities of race, class, and gender" (Soja 12). Since hooks lived experience of discrimination is different than that of black men who have the privilege of gender and white women who have the privilege of race according to the hierarchies of race, gender, and class, she forges a space for herself and other black women in her community as well as people of less privileged groups that she describes as a space of "radical openness" (hooks 206).

The idea of hooks' space of marginality is that those same 'lived spaces of representation' that have been used by the hegemonic power once as a site of oppression are "reconstructed" and "recomposed" by the counter-hegemonic power, represented by hooks and her fellows, as "potentially nurturing places of resistance, real-and- imagined, material-and-metaphorical meeting grounds for struggles over all forms of oppression, wherever they are found" (12). It is an open and free space where people of less privileged groups feel empowered and nurtured to resist the hegemony of other groups of social, political, and economic power. Yet, it does not exclude people and critics from other groups of society, it rather invites them to come together to exchange ideas and opinions. In these real and imagined spaces of marginality, people have the right to be different and diverse, and their "issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other" (Soja 5). In hooks' space of marginality differences are celebrated and considered a force of strength and brilliance that opens wider possibilities for them to be creative and make a positive change. Making a positive change, or as hooks calls it "the process of re-vision," is "difficult yet necessary" (hooks 149). Even though hooks' space of marginality seems very promising, it is not always safe since it is a

strategic site that groups of less power exploit for resistance against oppressive, dominating ones to promote their sense of subjectivity.

There is an apparent difference between the marginality people choose for themselves as a central site for articulating their subjectivity and announcing their resistance and the one that is forced on them and determined by the hegemonic groups, as hooks indicates (Soja 98). Chosen marginality, which hooks advocates, usually empowers and boosts one's creativity whereas forced marginality hinders it and restrains it. A good example of the difference between these two types of marginality appears in Alice Walker's text, *The Color Purple*. Being marginalized and forced to live in an oppressive environment most of her life, Celie has grown up as a powerless and helpless child and young woman. However, after she establishes a strong sisterhood relationship with both Sofia and Shug, she learns how to shift her mentality and to look at this same repressing environment as well as other metaphorical and non-metaphorical spaces around her as sites for resistance, radical possibility, and empowerment. When she consciously takes the decision to stay in her husband's house with the intention of taking it as an initial strategic site for resisting oppression and making a positive change, her voice is finally heard, and her life conditions start to improve.

As this section shows, scholars have distinct ideas and perspectives about 'space.' Lefebvre thinks of space as one of the following three terms of his triple dialectic: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space (lived space). Soja, on the other hand, thinks of Third space as real and imagined spaces and *more.* Lastly, hooks thinks of her space of marginality as mainly a site of resistance and making a positive change. The spaces I discuss in this dissertation and refer to also as 'private spaces' are sometimes a part of Lefebvre's

previously discussed triple dialectic. They seem, at other times, to be more on the side of Soja's Third space or bell hooks' space of marginality.

Being influenced by the previously reviewed literature of 'space' as well as Westin's definition of 'privacy,' I have fashioned a definition that is customized to suit the meaning of 'private spaces' I am trying to communicate in my analysis of the four contemporary texts. Thus, 'private spaces' in this project are: physical, psychological, or metaphorical, real and imagined sites that are empowering, nurturing, healing, supporting, liberating for women. These are spaces in which they have the chance to resist their oppression, sustain their subjectivity, express their creativity, and explore their potential as human beings in a state of solitude or small- or large-group intimacy. These sites can be conventional or newly invented.

As this definition indicates, these private spaces are unique sites that enable women to improve their lives and the lives of other women and express their real identities and suppressed talents. My notion of private spaces in this project, as I perceive it, is broader than Lefebvre's space as well as hooks' one, as the former mostly thinks of space as either real or imagined whereas the latter seems to be more on the metaphoric side of space and is mainly found to confront racial and masculine hegemony and make promising changes in the life of oppressed people. My idea of space and private spaces is also narrower than Soja's one, as his space is open and encompasses all other spaces while the 'private spaces' I discuss here are (modified) for women and their needs only.

Lastly, before moving to the next section, one more idea need to be highlighted. A common pattern arises when the female literary characters in the four analyzed texts take advantage of their private spaces and start their journeys toward personal and artistic growth.

Each protagonist gets first empowered and then has her creativity unleashed. A strong correlation between empowerment and creativity manifests in the case of each female character in each text.

Research Questions and Methodology

As the early section of this thesis reveals, there is a divergence between Woolf's ideal room necessary for creating art and those of many contemporary feminist critics such as Walker, Cofer, and Anzaldua. However, it seems that very few scholars have offered a way to mediate between Woolf's vision of a private space and those of the other contemporary scholars when they suggest a reconstruction of her room. Also, almost no scholar has directly answered Alice Walker's question: if having a space of one's own is a fundamental condition for unleashing women's creativity and power, then how were poor or slave women able to exercise creativity at all? Further, even though many scholars have sought to investigate how Woolf's original theory has been reflected in modernist literary works, very few people have examined how Woolf's enlarged vision of a private space are reflected in the works I am discussing in this dissertation. The tension between Woolf's vision of ideal rooms promoting female artists' creativity and those of other women writers has motivated me to investigate how 'private spaces' have been perceived by some women writers from different eras, races, and classes; under what conditions they wrote; and how is the idea that a woman must have a room in which to practice her art portrayed in their literature? The debate about the relationship between private spaces and women's creativity encouraged me to study how significant it is for fictional female figures to have spaces of their own in order to be empowered and creative, and hopefully to provide a direct answer to Walker's neglected question by analyzing and comparing four novels by four different female authors.

This thesis seeks to examine the following research questions: What is the relation between Woolf's room with a lock on the door and Cofer's or Anzaldua's "room" which is actually the kitchen table or the bus or the welfare line? Are they contradicting her, saying a physical room with a door you can lock is not necessary? Even if they are disagreeing with her, do Woolf and her critics have anything in common in their views? How has Woolf's room, or an expanded vision of private spaces, been reflected in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Willa Cather's *O' Pioneers*, Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purpl?* What does this literature say about how significant it is for women to have rooms of their own or private spaces in order to be empowered and creative?

For the purposes of this research, I chose to discuss these novels because they have many themes in common: women's empowerment, gender inequality, the gendered division of labor, patriarchy and women's oppression. In addition, the female protagonists in these works are all empowered female artists. Moreover, for all the female characters, Alexandra (*O' Pioneers*), Ursa (*Corregidora*), Edna (*The Awakening*), and Celie (*The Color Purple*), access to varied types of private spaces at different points in their lives plays a significant role in strengthening their personalities and releasing the artist within them. The previous research questions will be answered by examining the four indicated literary texts from a feminist perspective. I will attempt a close reading of the female characters' ways of utilizing their private spaces as a condition for boosting their real, powerful and creative personalities.

Each one of these female characters has a different kind of artistry. In *O Pioneers*, Alexandra is an artist in the way she succeeds in manging the farm and increasing its productivity and transforming the wild prairies into beautiful gardens. She is visionary, creative, and imaginative, which are traits that artists have and she uses her land as a medium to express

her art. In *The Awakening*, Edna is a talented painter; however, her creativity not only shows in her attempt to express herself through the art of painting, but it also appears in the quest to find her real, unconventional identity and to live as an untraditional woman in a very traditional society, and the opportunity to experience musical sublimity that not every fond listener to music can have. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's artistry manifests in her ability to design perfect pants of different sizes and models. As a creative and a talented pant designer, Celie spends a lot of time dreaming about and imagining the designs she plans on making. Her pants are unique not only in the way they are customized to fit people's bodies, but also their personalities. Lastly, in *Corregidora*, Ursa is a blues singer who creatively uses her music as a space for healing and documenting the history of abuse that she and her female ancestors have gone through from a new perspective, a perspective of powerful women.

This introduction presented an overall demonstration of the scope of the dissertation where I briefly illustrated the main ideas and discussed at length *A Room of One's Own* as well as some of the works that responded to that essay. In addition, this section reviewed some literature about 'privacy' and 'space' and provided definitions of these important terms. In each of the next four chapters, I provide a brief discussion of what the authors of the novels have said about what women require in order to write or create art, and what they or their biographers have said about their own access to private spaces in which to produce their own work, followed by an in-depth analysis of the authors' texts. It is important to note that even though in this project I explore private spaces in both the lives of the authors and their female fictional characters, I am mainly more concerned with investigating these spaces in the lives of the latter: how the varied forms of private spaces appear in the literary texts, and how they have been exploited by the main female characters and used as boosters for their creativity. The conclusion attempts to

answer Walker's question: if having a space of one's own is a fundamental condition for unleashing women's creativity and power, then how were poor or slave women able to exercise creativity at all? How could a slave woman such as Phillis Wheatley, who "owned not even herself," write great poems? In addition, it discusses the significance of expanding Woolf's vision of private spaces and the implications of this expansion for all female artists.

Private Spaces and Alexandra's Pioneering Spirit in *O Pioneers!*

The idea of utilizing private spaces to enhance women's creativity is of great importance in the life of the writer Willa Cather as well as that of her fictional character, Alexandra, in the novel *O Pioneers!*. To unleash and release their own creativities, Cather and Alexandra exploited varied kinds of private spaces that were available to them and compatible with their life situations and needs. The metaphorical space of emotionally supportive people and the physical space of retreating to the prairies of Nebraska are examples of two kinds of private spaces that positively influence both Cather's and Alexandra's creativity. This chapter will start with an attempt to investigate the main private spaces that Cather could exploit or create for herself during her life to enable her to develop her talent of creative literary writing. A close reading of Cather's biography tells us how physical spaces such as the open prairies of Nebraska and locked rooms and attics as well as supportive spaces like strong friendships all helped Cather to grow as an individual and artist. After examining the private spaces necessary for creating art in the life of Cather, the argument will shift to examining those same private spaces as well as different ones in the life of the female protagonist in O *Pioneers!*. As this chapter will reveal, private spaces such as the emotionally supportive spaces of Alexandra's relationship with her father and Carl, and her unique bond with her land, as well as the physical and psychological space of Alexandra's solitude on her land have all helped her to thrive and prosper as an artist and female pioneer.

Alexandra is perceived and referred to as an artist in many places in this chapter, and it is important to explain why I see her as an artist and what her medium is before moving further. Alexandra is thought of as an artist because she is visionary, creative, and imaginative, which are traits that artists have. She uses her land as a medium to express her art. Her artistry manifests in

the way she daydreams about the projects she conducts in her farm, has the courage to experiment with new ideas, challenges her society and herself, succeeds in manging the farm and increasing its productivity, and transforms the wild prairies into beautiful gardens. The varied private spaces that will be discussed later in this chapter allow her to envision the future, new ways to make the land productive and beautiful and enable her to release these aspects of her artistry.

Privacy and Willa Cather's Creativity

Throughout Willa Cather's life, various private spaces played a significant role in boosting her creativity, whether those spaces were physical, locked rooms that conformed to Virginia Woolf's vision of private spaces or more open, untraditional ones in accordance with the vision of the contemporary feminist scholars discussed in the first chapter. Other emotional, supportive, and inspiring private spaces, such as the space of her intimate relationships with a number of female friends and the space of her literary collaboration with other female writers such as Sarah Orne Jewett, also played a role in supporting her writing creativity.

The Nebraska prairie is the first kind of space that influenced Cather's creative imagination. The Cather family moved to Nebraska when Willa, their oldest daughter, was only nine years old. Adapting to the wild land and the new life was not easy for the family and it was hardest for Willa and her mother. She felt as if the open prairie of Nebraska was threatening to her defined personality, causing her to lose herself in its vastness; she first perceived it as a "kind of erasure of personality" (Woodress 36). In this new place and among its population, she no longer knew who she really was and what she truly wanted.

A few months later, however, this same land Cather had initially feared and hated had become a source of liberation and inspiration for her. Indulging in solo activities in this place

such as walking or wandering across the boundless land gave her the chance to enjoy uninterrupted physical and mental privacy in which her real feelings and ideas about life and people started to form. Besides, her long sitting on the plains contemplating the crops, the harvest, the farms, and the surrounding neighborhood supplied her with countless precious memories and with the writing material for several of her best novels: *O Pioneers!, My Antonia,* and *The Song of the Lark*. She describes this feeling in *O Pioneers!:*

> There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness. The wheat cutting sometimes goes on all night as well as all day, and in good seasons there are scarcely men and horses enough to do the harvesting. The grain is so heavy that it bends toward the blade and cuts like velvet. (25).

As this passage shows, Cather has turned her early memories of the Nebraska prairies into vivid images in *O Pioneers!* The nature of Nebraska and its landscapes, the people and their hard work in the wild land, and the fields and their crops are all elaborately described in that work. Perhaps Cather's solitary existence in this open space inspired her creativity more than locked rooms could have. The new land worked as a private space for Cather because her days there, especially early ones, were always lonely. In one of her interviews, Cather describes the prairie of Nebraska and her early days there:

> this country was mostly wild pasture and as naked as the back of your hand. I was little and homesick and lonely, and my mother was homesick, and nobody paid any attention to us. So, the country and I had it out together and by the end of the first autumn, that shaggy grass country had gripped me with a passion I have never been able to shake. (Cather 32)

In this quote, Cather highlights the fact that she was "lonely," which means that she had no company, no close friends to talk to or spend time with, particularly during the first autumn season her family and she were there. Pairing the word "lonely" with the word "homesick" gives the impression that this kind of loneliness and imposed privacy has been unwelcome. However,

Cather learned to enjoy and appreciate them when she established a strong relationship with the land and noticed their positive effect on her creative mind.

In contrast to the open space of Nebraska, closed physical spaces such as locked rooms and attics also played a crucial role in nourishing Cather's creativity. As Willa, the oldest child and daughter in the Cather family, got older and her need for privacy increased, the family set aside a new space for her in their house in Red Cloud: "an ell-shaped gable wing of the main attic was partitioned off to give her a private room" (Woodress 47). Cather was quite fond of her new space and to make it more convenient and luxurious, earned her own money to plaster the walls and get a pretty wallpaper. This attic in Red Cloud was the first locked place that Cather had had in her life, and it instantly became her own retreat: the place where she spent long hours reading, studying, and writing undisturbed. From that moment on, Cather's appreciation for privacy had manifested.

Cather's desire for privacy grew throughout her college years and beyond. She established her career as a writer in college. Studying for college and writing for magazines as a freelancer demanded a considerable amount of solitude, dedication, and concentration, which would not have been possible if she had not had a space of her own. A few years after her graduation, Cather was invited by her friend Isabelle to live with the McClung family. Cather shared a bedroom that overlooked the beautiful garden with Isabelle, but "for her writing an attic sewing room was transformed into a study where Cather, far from the bustle on the lower floors, could enjoy the solitude on which creativity thrives" (Gerber 40). Having a luxurious, isolated space to work in allowed Cather to devote herself to her writing and to carve her way as a professional writer. By working consistently at least five days a week, Cather started to feel more satisfied with her work, which meant that her hard work in her retreat in the attic had paid off.

Among other physical locked rooms, the attics were some of Cather's favorites; she was "fond" of them (Homestead 435). Because the attics are located on a separate floor, the top floor, they are quiet, isolated, and sometimes large. Their features allow artists to indulge in the creative act undisturbed by family members, guests, or maids. Like other lockable rooms, attics prevent communication with other people- to some extent- when it is unwelcome; they also allow it when it is needed, as artists, including writers, sometimes need to break their solitude in a quest for inspiration, rest, etc. Furthermore, attics fit into Woolf's vision of new private spaces, as these spaces are untraditional and were not commonly assigned to women in the 19th century.

By the time Cather's career as a writer had prospered, her choices for privacy and solitude went beyond what they had before; her quest for them became more inventive to support her artistic creativity. To illustrate, when Cather sought inspiration or new creative ideas, she did not restrict herself to physical rooms with walls and locks on the doors such as sewing rooms, attics, and studies. Rather, she would walk long distances, ride horses, sail on boats, and explore deserts and other new places. "Travel became an integral part of Cather's creative cycle" (Homestead 411). Her attempts usually succeeded, and she returned from these trips "with such a head full of stories that she was dreaming about them" (Woodress 11). Even though Willa Cather and Virginia Woolf lived in the same era, Cather's idea of the private spaces necessary for creating art seems to have been more progressive than Woolf's. Cather does agree with Woolf on the importance of having a space of one's own as a condition and pre-condition for creating art. She also seems to believe that as long as the spaces are inspiring, nurturing for one's creativity, and not interrupting the process of producing art, regardless of whether they are locked rooms or open spaces, they fall under the category of the private spaces necessary for creating art.

The older and more mature Cather grew as a writer, the more "obsessed with privacy" she became (Woodress 141). Staying away from interruption or distraction is one important component of any individual's privacy. When she was working on her novels and stories, any interruption of her work was unwelcome, even if that interruption was a call from her employer or a fan. Constant disturbance holds her back from progressing and weakens her ability to connect with her creative self. In one of her letters to her friend Elizabeth Sergeant, a writer whom she met when she was working at *McClure's* magazine, Cather indicated that "she would like to nail up her front door and have done with it" (Woodress 255). Cather eventually had to withdraw from social events as much as she could because her professional career as a writer needed dedication, and according to Philip Gerber, "dedication is equated with loneliness, but such loneliness is the freedom to follow one's star undistracted" (137). Even though Cather was a woman that many people at her time would die to befriend, she chose to sacrifice a great deal of her social life to her art.

Physical and mental privacy are not the sole forms of privacy and private spaces that helped to boost Cather's literary creativity; metaphorical ones such as emotional, supportive private spaces represented in her intimate relationships with a number of dear female friends also did so. Female figures such as the Bohemian, Swedish, and German immigrant women in her Nebraska neighborhood, as well as some female friends such as Isabelle, Edith Lewis, and her mentor, writer Sarah Orne Jewett, had either supported or influenced her positively at some point in her life. The intimacy between Cather and each one of these women created a unique supportive space that helped to strengthen her intellectual abilities and spark her writing creativity in many ways.

As a curious little child, Cather was drawn to the richness of the immigrant women's cultures and experiences. This turned her into a sharp observer and a thoughtful person, as she "[threw] herself heart and soul into the fight these people were making to master the language, to subdue the soil, to hold their land, and to get on in the world" (Woodress 37). Cather's experience of growing up in that multi-cultural place and her close observation of the immigrant women's life struggles allowed her little active mind to absorb all the related details that appeared years later as characters, places, and events in her creative works. Elaborating on her relationship with these immigrant women and its effect on her, Cather in one of her interviews says:

> I particularly liked the old women; they understood my homesickness and were kind to me . . . . these old women on the farms were the first people who ever gave me the real feeling of an older world across the sea…. I have never found any intellectual excitement any more intense than I used to feel when I spent a morning with one of these old women at her baking or butter-making…. I always felt . . . as if I had actually got inside another person's skin." (Woodress 38).

As Cather indicated, these women not only opened her eyes to new worlds and cultures unfamiliar to her but also showed a deep understanding of her struggle to cope with her new life in a new place. They welcomed her in their houses and immersed her in their generous feelings of trust and love. Perhaps these immigrant women noticed her creative intelligence that showed up through her apparent curiosity, and that is why they shared their cultural arts with her in the first place.

Other women such as Cather's friends Isabelle McClung and Edith Lewis also played a part in Cather's success as a creative writer. The intimate friendships that Cather shared with these two women functioned as a space of emotional and social support. Isabelle and her family welcomed Cather at their house and gave her an isolated physical space, the attic, to work in for free. Their generosity relieved Cather from worrying about saving money and domestic tasks

such as cleaning and cooking; it enabled her to devote herself to her career as a teacher (at that time) and her craft as a writer. Even though there is no direct evidence to support the following claim, Isabelle must have believed in Cather's ability and creativity as a writer and that is why she chose to support her and give her the chance to pursue her own dream.

Years later, Cather moved out of the McClung family's house and lived with another supportive friend, Edith Lewis. Lewis was not a mere friend of Cather, but also a partner in her work. Even though many scholars indicate that Lewis worked as a copy editor for Cather, some believe that her role was more influential than that, as she has been thought to have a significant impact on "Cather's creative process" (Homestead 409). They went on many trips together, escaping the crowd of New York city into more isolated places to give Cather the solitude she needed in order to unleash her creativity. Cather usually did "the initial drafting and typing" while Cather and Lewis both did the "editing typescripts and reading page proofs." At other times Cather became an "observer and hanger on" while Lewis did the other tasks (Homestead 411). This collaborative space that Cather shared privately with her friend, Lewis, helped to boost her writing creativity and resulted in a number of excellent literary pieces such as *The Professor's House* and *Death Comes for The Archbishop*.

Lastly, Cather's friendship with the well-known writer Sarah Orne Jewett impacted her as a writer significantly. By befriending Sarah Orne Jewett, "Cather experienced something akin to a conversion into female creativity-that is, into conceiving of art as collaborative" (Rosowski 133). As there were not many female writers in Cather's time, Cather longed for a professional mentor to read her work and to constructively critique it from a female point of view, another female writer who was well acquainted with the writing struggles that female writers encounter. Cather's collaboration with Jewett constitutes a collaborative literary space resembling the one

that Woolf encouraged in her book *A Room of One's Own*. It is the kind of space that promotes women's creativity and helps establish a unique writing tradition for female writers.

When Woolf emphasizes female artists' need for solitude in uninvaded physical spaces, exemplified primarily in locked rooms, as a condition and pre-condition for enhancing creativity and promoting the process of creating art, she only talks about having one person in each locked room. On the other hand, when she discusses metaphorical literary spaces as another space promoting women's creativity in another place in this same text, she specifically talks about collaborative efforts; she says, "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (55). In this quote, Woolf invites all women writers to enter into a collaborative literary space and work together to create a writing tradition for generations to come of female writers.

According to Westin's definition of privacy, this metaphorical literary space is still a private space even though it can host a lot of people because -as I indicated earlier- for him, privacy can be achieved "in a state of solitude or small-group intimacy or…among larger groups" (Westin 7). This collaborative literary space is a space that is created by and for women, in which they share intellectual and emotional intimacy or enter into private conversations. Woolf seems to agree with Westin's definition that privacy is not restricted to solitude, but also can be a state of intimacy in small or large groups when she suggested that both spaces, the physical and the metaphorical, are private.

The existence of many female figures in Cather's life was necessary for her growth as a writer and an artist. Each one of these women supported Cather in her own way. The old immigrant women provoked Cather's imagination and triggered her curiosity for exploring

unknown worlds. Isabelle provided her with emotional support and offered her a convenient and luxurious writing space for free. Lewis was a travel and a home mate as well as a collaborator in Cather's creative process of writing. Lastly, Sarah Orne Jewett was the literary mentor and critic that Cather felt desperate for.

The Cather family experience of moving to the open space of the Nebraska prairies provided Willa with a new kind of physical and psychological privacy that she had not been used to. The solitary setting of the plains and her long, distant contemplation of the farmers working in the fields, cultivating and harvesting the crops, strengthened her talent of observation and extended her imagination. Cather resented this kind of privacy at first when she perceived it as an imposed one. However, a few months later, she learned to accept it and love it, and that is when her privacy in Nebraska became a preference and blessing. Further, her later physical and psychological solitude in the attic, locked rooms, and her travel to different places have all contributed to her success as a prominent writer. Lastly, having strong friendship relations and work relationships with several supportive women inspired her literary writing and empowered her as a female writer in a patriarchal society.

Private Spaces in *O Pioneers!* and Their Influence on Alexandra's Creativity

Different kinds of private spaces help to unleash and enhance female artists' creativity. These private spaces usually fall under one of these three main categories: physical private spaces, psychological private spaces, or metaphorical private spaces. It is especially important for female artists to exploit one or more of these private spaces because they are empowering, nurturing, and inspiring for creativity. As indicated in the introduction, these spaces can be thought of as real, such as the physical spaces of houses or lands, or imaginative, such as metaphorical spaces of emotionally empowering relationships. Women's privacy within these spaces can be in the state of solitude (being alone) or intimacy within small or large groups.

In *O Pioneers!*, Alexandra, a pioneer woman, has been able to empower herself and release her latent creativity in a sexist society by exploiting all three main forms of private spaces. The metaphorical private space of the emotionally supportive relationships Alexandra has with her land or with people such as her father and Carl empower her and liberate her creative talents of managing the family business and creating beauty in the farm. As indicated earlier, empowerment and creativity are two interrelated personal traits; female characters become first empowered and then creative. Economic, social, and personal empowerment encourage women's creativity, as they feel more independent and confident to take more responsibility for their lives and safer to express their true, creative selves.

The metaphorical space of supportive relationships that she shares with supporting people is considered private because of the intimacy Alexandra and her close circle of people and friends have with one another, represented in the way they understand each other, support and empower each other, and feel a sense of connectedness with each other. Also, non-supportive people or other people in her community with whom she has a formal relationship are

excluded from this space. Feeling emotionally supported by her unique bond with her father, the people in her small community such as her household members, and some neighbors, including Carl and Marie, Alexandra feels empowered to stand in the face of her patriarchal society and practice her creativity in places and jobs that were prohibited for women.

In her quest to enhance her own creativity, Alexandra also benefits from the physical and the psychological privacy that her land provides her with. Alexandra spends many solo hours in her land imagining new projects for farm improvement, connecting with her inner creative self, and expressing herself in the beauty and order she creates there. Even though the physical and the psychological private spaces are two separate spaces, it might be more appropriate to discuss them together when examining how they influence Alexandra's creativity positively because of the significant correlation that occurs between them. In the introduction chapter, I discussed the relationship between the physical and the psychological forms of privacy from the perspectives of different writers, including Virginia Woolf.

In her text *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf seems to perceive these two private spaces as separate, but related. They are related in that psychological privacy always accompanies the physical one and is a part of it whereas physical privacy does not necessarily accompany the psychological. Also, physical privacy usually improves the quality and increases the efficiency of the psychological one, so they work best together side by side. In her text, for instance, Woolf indicates that like other eighteenth century upper/middle class women, Jane Austen had no access to an uninvaded physical privacy. Thus, Austen had to plot and write her novels in the general sitting room that was subject to all kinds of interruptions and hide her manuscripts when somebody entered that room. As physical privacy was obstructed in her situation, she had to rely mostly on the free private space of her mind (her psychological privacy). Jane Austen's physical

space, located within the domain of domesticity, could always be invaded by the residents of the house and was controlled by the men in her family, whereas the space of her psychological privacy usually was not; as Woolf says: “there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (24). Austen utilizes both kinds of privacy to write literature; when the physical one gets invaded and interrupted when someone enters the sitting room, she relies on the psychological one because it is the only state of privacy that she is in control of. Thus, discussing each one of these spaces separately might be challenging, especially when analyzing Cather’s text.

The Metaphorical Intimate, Supportive Space as a Means of Boosting Creativity

Alexandra’s excellent relationship and connection with her parents and with her father in particular is the first thing that empowers her and frees her creativity as a young female pioneer. Before elaborating on how this emotionally supportive space has contributed to Alexandra’s personal and artistic growth, we need to take a look at the following passage that illustrates the nature of the relationship that bonds her with her father:

> He often called his daughter in to talk to her about this. Before Alexandra was twelve years old she had begun to be a help to him, and as she grew older he had come to depend more and more upon her resourcefulness and good judgment. His boys were willing enough to work, but when he talked with them they usually irritated him. It was Alexandra who read the papers and followed the markets, and who learned by the mistakes of their neighbors. It was Alexandra who could always tell about what it had cost to fatten each steer, and who could guess the weight of a hog before it went on the scales closer than John Bergson himself. (*O Pioneers!* 11).

John Bergson’s relation with his daughter is unique, especially for the early twentieth century. He has never treated her as inferior to her brothers or to himself, especially when it comes to running the family business, nor does he restrict her to certain domestic tasks that she may have not liked. When he observes his daughter’s pioneering traits, represented in her intelligence, ambition, strong-will, wisdom, farsightedness, and love of beauty--characteristics that other

people in that same society may not have noticed in their daughters--he decides to support her so that she can become the successful businesswoman she deserves to be. John Bergson first assigns his daughter her role as his business assistant when she is quite young, younger than "twelve years old." And his dependence on her increases until he appoints her as the farm business manager just before he dies.

For Alexandra, spending so many hours with her father discussing all farm-related businesses and future plans, feeling his unconditional love and support, and sensing his trust and belief in her, functions as a space that allows her pioneering traits to flourish, not only during her father's life, but also after his death. According to the definition of 'private spaces' provided in the first chapter, this unique relationship that bonds Alexandra with her father is considered a private space because it has provided her with the conditions she needs to grow into a creative female pioneer. It particularly falls under the category of metaphorical private spaces. It is metaphorical in that this space is an imagined site, not a real one, and is private in that this relationship is intimate. It includes the father and his daughter only and excludes all other people, including Oscar and Lou, Alexandra's brothers. Their intimacy is represented in the sense of connectedness they feel for one another and the basis of love, acceptance, equality, trust, and caring that their relationship is built on. This private supportive space that her father has shared with her has prepared her for the hardship coming her way as a female pioneer and business manager in a patriarchal society that believes women are incapable of working in jobs assumed to be solely suitable for men. It has also succeeded in boosting Alexandra's creativity and allow her to express it to the fullest through the creative projects she conducts in the farm to improve it and increase its food production as well as the beautiful scenery she creates there.

Before his death, Alexandra's father predicts how his sons would not welcome their father's decision to appoint Alexandra as the head of the family business. Thus, he attempts to provide more support for her by facilitating and ensuring the smooth transmission of the farm's business authority to her; he is proved to be right, as Lou comments years later: "This is what comes of letting a woman meddle in business," he said bitterly. "We ought to have taken things in our own hands years ago" (50). Assigning Alexandra as the manger, Mr. Bergson gathers his sons and asks them to trust their sister and not object to whatever decisions she makes and plans she sets:

> "Boys," said the father wearily, "I want you to keep the land together and to be guided by your sister….. I want no quarrels among my children, and so long as there is one house there must be one head…….. She will do the best she can. If she makes mistakes, she will not make so many as I have made. When you marry and want a house of your own, the land will be divided fairly, according to the courts. But for the next few years, you will have it hard, and you must all keep together. Alexandra will manage the best she can." (19-20)

Being ahead of his time and contradicting the attitude of most men living in that era, John Bergson knows how important the space of emotional support is for young women such as his daughter, Alexandra, to keep evolving and prospering on a personal and public level. His decision to give the lead to Alexandra indicates his deep trust in her and his attempt to provide her with the free, flexible space she needs, as a leader, to adventure with the land and succeed in her quest of managing it "the best she can." John Bergson knows that his daughter has business sense and she will be the best manager of the family's farm after he is gone. In his life, Alexandra's father has given her some authority over the family business and she has never disappointed him: "Before Alexandra was twelve years old she had begun to be a help to him, and as she grew older he had come to depend more and more upon her resourcefulness and good judgment" (11). To ensure that the farm continues to thrive under her management and guidance,

he guarantees her access to this kind of supportive space after his death, the thing that has also helped her later to discover different aspects of her own creativity.

Further, Mr. Bergson has not only given the lead to Alexandra, he has also urged his sons to embrace even their sister's mistakes when she manages the farm, as they are one essential part of their quest for becoming successful farmers and landowners. As a farmer himself, he is aware of the experimenting space he needed in the past to make some success in the land, as he tells his sons: "If [Alexandra] makes mistakes, she will not make so many as I have made" (13). He confesses that he himself made some mistakes in the past, and that is why he urges his sons to embrace their sister's mistakes, so that she can also find her way to success. In *"*A Feminist Analysis of Alexandra in *O Pioneers!,"* Liu Xi and Wu Yi point out that:

> Willa Cather believed that "a pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (Cather, 1987, p. 69) and Alexandra was such an image of a typical pioneer. The task of taming the land could never be accomplished because pioneering in the wilderness demanded flexible mind and dauntless spirit. During the tough process of pioneering, if the pioneers were afraid of making mistakes and making changes, they would never go ahead. Unfortunately, Lou, Oscar, and their neighbors were such people because they refused to accept new ideas and reforms, sticking to the old ways. (960)

This quote suggests that as it is the responsibility of Alexandra's brothers to embrace her mistakes, it is her own responsibility to have the imagination needed to come with new ideas, have the courage to try them, and learn from any possible resulting mistakes, because that is what will make her a successful pioneer. It also suggests that both Alexandra and her father are considered pioneers because they understand that "making mistakes and making changes" are essential parts of the learning and success process. Alexandra's brothers, Oscar and Lou, on the other hand, cannot be considered pioneers because they are very traditional people who are afraid of accepting new ideas and committing mistakes. They are mainly frightened of what other people will say or think about them. This manifests in Lou's response to Alexandra's idea

of mortgaging the homestead: "Everybody will say we are crazy. It must be crazy, or everybody would be doing it" (*O Pioneers!* 52). However, Alexandra, the only pioneer in the family after their father's death, has had to comfort her brothers and convince them to trust the creative plans she sets.

Knowing that she has the final word on how things go and will go on the farm, Alexandra's latent creativity starts to expand and manifest itself little by little through her constant hard work of managing the family's business and setting future plans for further improvement. Among all the poor frustrated farmers who live in wild Nebraska, Alexandra is the only one who decides to stay on the Divide and stand for the country. When she takes this initial decision, she has no clue if the land will cooperate with her, nor whether it will eventually reward her. Thus, to finalize her decision to stay, she goes on an exploration trip with her little brother, Emil, in which she tests the potential of the land in the surrounding area and discusses farming techniques with other successful farmers and landowners down the river:

> Alexandra and Emil spent five days down among the river farms, driving up and down the valley. Alexandra talked to the men about their crops and the women about their poultry. She spent a whole day with one young farmer who had been away at school, and who was experimenting with a new kind of clover hay. She learned a great deal. As they drove along, she and Emil talked and planned. At last, on the sixth day, Alexandra turned Brigham's head northward and left the river behind. (*O Pioneers!* 23).

By utilizing her experience as a manager and her intuition as an astute pioneer, Alexandra processes the information she has gathered during her six-day trip and proceeds by implementing new creative plans for making herself and her brothers rich landowners: "Any one thereabouts would have told you that this was one of the richest farms on the Divide, and that the farmer was a woman, Alexandra Bergson" (*O Pioneers!* 6). She first estimates the situation; down the river there are a "few fine farms," but they are owned by wealthy male landowners in the town and the rest of the land is not suitable for farming, as it is "rough and hilly" (*O Pioneers!* 23). On the

other hand, up the river where the Bergsons' farm is located, there is "a big chance" for success. Therefore, she decides to buy halves of some neighbors' lands and experiment with cultivating different crops such as raising wheat crops at the time other neighbors are planting corn.

Summarizing all of the early steps Alexandra takes to make up her mind on how she will manage the farm, Rula Quawas explains: Alexandra "takes a scientific approach to farming, traveling around, talking to farmers and learning what crops are good on the "high land."…[S]he mortgages her father's farm to buy more land…; she takes in Ivar and trusts his advice…" (244). The good outcomes of the steps Alexandra has taken and the success of her approach both prove that she deserves her position as the farm manager. She wisely and responsibly utilizes the intimate, supportive space her father has surrounded her with before and after he dies; before he dies when he puts his trust on her and encourages her growth as a pioneer, and after he dies, when he paves the path for a better future for her and her family by asking her brothers not to interfere with her plans and to give her the space she needs to experiment with the land and the crops.

A few years after John Bergson passes away, Alexandra has had to expand her space of emotionally supportive people, so that she can stay empowered and maintain her creative spirit. In fact, Alexandra's two older brothers are no longer happy with her "meddl[ing]" in the men's business although deep down in their hearts they know, as do other people in their community, that all the success and wealth they have gained would not have happened without her. Alexandra's brother, Lou, admits to her: "there's no woman anywhere around that knows as much about business as you do, and we've always been proud of that, and thought you were pretty smart" (*O Pioneers!* 50). Thus, after succeeding, her two older brothers start to react to her in a way that demonstrates their unwillingness "to relinquish male privilege and power" (Dyck

165). They have now decided that it is time for them, the men in the family, to take the lead, and for her, the only woman in the family after their mother's death, to step down and not interfere with their future plans, plans that include depriving her of her land and property.

Over the years, Alexandra expands her close circle of supportive people to encompass other people who are nonrelatives such as the three young Swedish girls, Marie, old Ivar, Carl, and some friendly neighbors (Werden 207). The existence of each one of those people in her life empowers her and nurtures her creative soul and mind. They also function as sources of emotional support, each in their own way. Even though Alexandra does not seem to share any of her private ideas with the three Swedish girls, their existence is still crucial in her life, as they are a pure source of joy and entertainment for her, especially when her youngest brother, Emil, is away attending school. Cather indicates that Alexandra does not need somebody to work for her in the kitchen, as she is capable of doing the work herself. However, the girls' noise, laughs, talks and little secrets keep her soul and heart young and scatter the dark shadows of loneliness that she sometimes suffers.

When Alexandra gets sick after the murders happen, Signa, one of these Swedish girls, takes on her shoulders the responsibility of comforting the shocked Alexandra and taking care of her: "When they got home, Signa had a fire burning in the sitting-room stove. She undressed Alexandra and gave her a hot footbath…Signa asked permission to sleep on the slat lounge outside her door" (*O Pioneers!* 206). The three girls are emotionally connected to Alexandra; they enjoy with her her happy moments and celebrate her accomplishments, support her in her difficult days and grieve with her on sad ones.

Marie, on the other hand, is a female "companion [that Alexandra] can talk to quite frankly" (*O Pioneers!* 40). They exchange visits and talk about everything except Marie's

relationship with men, especially her relationships with Frank and Emil, not because Alexandra is not trustworthy, but rather because she is a person who does not understand sexual affection between lovers, nor encourage it. As will be elaborately explained in the later discussion of Alexandra's sexual creativity, Alexandra does not understand these emotions because her affection has been always devoted to her land, and she has never been involved in a sexual relationship with a man. Further, she does not seem to encourage that kind of relationship, as she is used to looking at the men she works with on the farm as merely male co-workers. In the private space they share, however, both Marie and Alexandra feel protected from the intrusions of others. This gives them the freedom and the confidence to express their real thoughts and identities through their honest conversations on all other topics.

The three Swedish girls, Marie, and Alexandra are connected by a sisterhood bond, as young ladies carving their own space in a patriarchal and masculine society. The sense of connectedness and emotional support that Alexandra shares with the girls on one hand and Marie on the other functions as a private space. Perhaps that space does not directly influence Alexandra's creativity the way the emotionally supportive space she shares with her father does, but it still plays a significant role in promoting it. Alexandra is aware that if she ever needed their help and support, she would get them. Further, the entertaining talks and little secrets of the girls as well as the frank discussions and the private conversations she has with them and with Marie all refresh Alexandra's life and give meaning and happiness to it. As Alexandra tells her sisters-in-law, "it was to hear them giggle that she kept three young things in her kitchen…These girls, with their long letters from home, their finery, and their love-affairs, afforded her a great deal of entertainment, and they were company for her when Emil was away at school" (27-8). As Marie and the Swedish girls support Alexandra, make her happy, and bring meaning to her life, she

takes on her shoulders the responsibility of pleasing them as well. Therefore, she continues her creative work in the farm, so that she will be empowered enough to give back to them and support them emotionally and even financially if it is needed.

Alexandra seeks inspiration and empowerment not only from the sense of connectedness she shares with women, but also with sensitive or weak men. There are a lot more men than women in her community, so she has had to draw support from some of them as well. Carl and Ivar, the two men with whom she has a strong relationship, are not as tough as most men in her community and are capable of sensing her emotional needs and responding to them with their advice, in the case of Ivar, and understanding and nice supportive words, in the case of Carl, as Alexandra tells him: "It's by understanding me, and the boys, and mother, that you've helped me" (19). Alexandra's relationship with these two men functions as another supportive space resembling the one she gets from bonding with women such as Marie and the Swedish girls. Unlike her relationship with her brothers Oscar and Lou, Alexandra's relationship with Ivar and Carl is not threatening to her authority nor restraining for her wild "Amazonian" personality, as both Carl and Ivar like her the way she is, understand her, and provide her with their unconditional support (*O Pioneers!* 8).

The metaphorical private space of Ivar's and Alexandra's mutual trust and support allows her creativity. Alexandra always seeks his advice and guidance about the management and care of animals and puts them immediately into work. For instance, she trusts and utilizes the information on husbandry and management of pigs he gives her despite the disapproval of her brothers: "Let the boys haul water to them in barrels, clean water, and plenty. Get them off the old stinking ground, and do not let them go back there until winter. Give them only grain and clean feed, such as you would give horses or cattle" (18). Ivar also trusts Alexandra and takes her

word for everything she says, particularly when she says that she has no intention to send him to an asylum. She comforts him: “You know I would never consent to such a thing. You have been with me now for twelve years, and I have gone to you for advice oftener than I have ever gone to anyone. That ought to satisfy you” (30). This private space of mutual trust enables Alexandra’s creativity, as taking his advice into consideration and benefit from it when experimenting with the farm has led to an improvement in its productivity as well as that of its animals. Also, knowing that she is always supported by Ivar and can always go back to him for further help whenever she needs it or encounters a problem makes her more confident and courageous in trying new ideas. Ivar supports her in her journey of improving the farm and increasing its productivity, and in return she defends him against Oscar and Lou and other people in their community who think he is insane.

Alexandra and Ivar have many characteristics in common, and two of these major characteristics are their love for nature and desire for privacy. They both are bound to nature; she is more herself, at peace, and creative when she retreats to her land, and he is happier when he is around his horses and away from human habitations: “Alexandra has fitted him up a room in the barn, where he is very comfortable, being near the horses” (28). They both like solitude and to constantly have access to physical and psychological privacy, because privacy helps boost and release their creativity. As Cather indicates in the text: “Ivar found contentment in the solitude he had sought out for himself…He best expressed his preference for his wild homestead by saying that his Bible seemed truer to him there” (15). Solitude allows Ivar to creatively contemplate and study the Bible whereas it enables Alexandra to connect more to her creative self and envision future projects to improve the productivity of the farm and enhance its beauty.

Besides providing guidance about the management of animals and "looking after the health of the stock," old Ivar joins her some evenings to "read the Bible aloud to her, for he still reads very well" (*O Pioneers!* 28). Alexandra enjoys the hours she spends with Ivar, listening uninterruptedly to the Old Testament. Even though Cather does not indicate exactly what draws Alexandra to these evenings, we might be able to speculate that, like Cather herself, Alexandra likes to contemplate the wisdom the Bible offers and appreciates its aesthetic value. Perhaps these solitary, contemplative hours have helped cultivate her sensitivity to natural beauty as well as promote her inventive response to it through the fine arrangement and the beauty she creates in her land.

Carl, the family friend who later becomes Alexandra's husband, is another person whose company is always vital to and appreciated by her. The metaphorical private space of Carl and Alexandra's strong friendship supports her and promotes her creative talents of transforming the prairies into gardens. Carl, for instance, has always motivated and encouraged her with his nice words that complement her knowledge about growing crops and her experience in managing the farm and raising the animals, as when he one day declares: "we've all depended so on you," "even father." Then, he explains how his father once sends him to ask "the Bergsons" a question about their "horse [that] had the colic," and Alexandra is the one who helps them:

> I ran over to your place--your father was away, and you came home with me and showed father how to let the wind out of the horse. You were only a little girl then, but you knew ever so much more about farm work than poor father. (19)

In the privacy of their own space and away from the intrusion of others, Carl and Alexandra build a strong relationship that is based on mutual caring, understanding, sympathy, trust, acceptance, and encouragement. Even though Alexandra's brothers do not approve of her relationship with Carl, and her marriage to him in particular, because they do not want to lose her

share of the land, both Alexandra and Carl insist on that marriage. Their mutual harmony affirms that they are both created for one another although he loves her as a man loves a woman while she considers him as a dear friend.

Alexandra knows that Carl is always there for her. He is the only person to whom she has reached out when she has felt weak and discouraged. His sensitive personality has always enabled him to understand her and her sorrows: “It's by understanding me, and the boys, and mother, that you've helped me,” she tells him (*O Pioneers!* 19). The first time Alexandra meets Carl after Emil’s death, she tells him: "I needed you terribly when it happened, Carl. I cried for you at night…. You are all I have in the world, you know" (*O Pioneers!* 82). Losing her youngest brother, the closest brother to her heart, has been a shock that leaves her weak and broken. Even though old Ivar, as well as the other members of her household, have been present for her, their efforts to ease her sorrow have not been enough. More than any time in the past, Alexandra has realized how important Carl’s support is for her, and that without it, she may not be able to get back up on her feet and resume exercising her creativity. She has been sick and not able to get out of bed for many days: “It occurred to her for the first time that she was actually tired of life” (*O Pioneers!* 207). The state of getting tired of life and losing motivation negatively affect an individual’s creativity because maintaining a positive attitude towards life in general is what fuels and sparks it. For instance, when Alexandra has been quite positive about the land’s future prosperity and optimistic about the years ahead, she has succeeded. Her positivity manifests in her reply to Lou when he asks her how the land productivity will allow them to “pay the mortgages” and make them rich, she answers him: “I can't explain that, Lou. You'll have to take my word for it. I KNOW, that's all. When you drive about over the country you can feel it coming" (24)

Carl's support not only assists Alexandra to resume her drive to live life and continue practicing her creative talent for managing the farm and creating beauty in it, but also in paving the way to institute a new type of marriage, the safe marriage or friendship marriage. This marriage was not common among people of the nineteenth century; it was "a new type of marriage, not usually seen in literature," Quawas declares (247). Arranged marriages as well as love marriages seem to be the most two common types of marriages portrayed in literary works. Justifying the purpose of their friendship marriage, Alexandra tells Carl: "I think when friends marry, they are safe. We don't suffer like--those young ones" (*O Pioneers!* 207).

Alexandra believes that, unlike those who are in love marriages, couples who are involved in safe marriages are capable of controlling their feelings and making wiser decisions regarding their lives and the lives of people around them. Also, because Alexandra is a pioneer woman who is free and economically independent, the whole idea of getting into a traditional marriage in which she may feel subordinated and imprisoned is rejected (Werden 204). By marrying Carl, her friend, Alexandra makes sure that she breaks her forced isolation and gets a companion with whom she finds happiness and understanding. At the end of the novel, Alexandra and Carl move to another place where they can begin their life together as untraditional wife and husband. Describing this moment and their movement to Alaska, David Larid says:

> Their gaze now fastens on each other, their new-found intimacy, the future they hope to share. Like that disenchanted hero of an earlier American fiction, they escape from a society in which they are no longer at home, from social practices they can no longer tolerate, "to light out for the territory," in this case, Alaska. (245)

As Alexandra's land, after Emil's death, becomes no longer the emotionally supportive space that can assist her to overcome her sorrow and resume her creativity, she decides to move with her husband to a new land that can replace the old one. Their "new-found intimacy," in this

context, not only refers to the sexual intimacy that they will have as a married couple, but also to the safe and trusting private relationship that they will share as two friends involved in friendship marriage. Heading to Alaska, the promising new place, Alexandra holds Carl's hand and walks with him to a future full of creativity and beauty that involves only the two of them.

Lastly, it is important to differentiate between the two contradictory types of aloneness that emerge in the life of Alexandra. Alexandra normally appreciates the experiences of her lonely solitude in her land; however, she feels terrified of the new form of aloneness she encounters after Emil and Marie's death. While the first experience of aloneness is a choice and a preference that people purposely make to nurture their own creativity, the second is an imposed one that people have no hand in, and it hinders her creativity. The selective solitude is that same state of aloneness that Virginia Woolf encourages in her essay, *A Room of One's Own*. In such a state, people are not imprisoned, but are free to break their solitude whenever they need to. In the case of Alexandra, her later loneliness imprisons her mentally and emotionally in sad memories of her brother, evoking melancholy thoughts about life in general as well, as I mentioned earlier: "as she lay alone in the dark, it occurred to her for the first time that perhaps she was actually tired of life. All the physical operations of life seemed difficult and painful" (*O Pioneers!* 207). At that point, Alexandra resolves that she will "not accept loneliness as a mode of life" (Quawas 247). That is when she decides to marry Carl, in an attempt to end her loneliness and revive her creativity.

Within the metaphorical supportive space of her strong relationships with her father, the Swedish girls and Marie, and old Ivar and Carl, Alexandra's artistry continues to prosper and manifests in the order and the beauty she creates in the farm. The existence of each one of these supportive people in her life is important to her as each one of them boosts her creativity in a

different way, providing her with the feelings of love, trust, encouragement, acceptance, and empowerment that are evoked within the privacy of the spaces she shares with them.

Alexandra's Bond with The Land as A Space for Boosting Creativity

Alexandra is also empowered by her unique and strong bond with her land, which plays a significant role in supporting her and promoting her creative talents. Alexandra's feeling of connectedness to the land functions as another emotionally supportive space for her. She has a deep relationship with the land established years ago when she was a little child, helping her father with his farming responsibilities, and that relationship has continued to grow and firm over the years. In the privacy of their shared physical space, both Alexandra and the land exchange mutual support. The land prospers and thrives, responding to Alexandra's feminine energies of love, empathy, and patience, and Alexandra is empowered to stand in the face of her patriarchal society by the strength she draws from the tough and wild land. Among the other farmers in their neighborhood, Alexandra is the only one who has been able to understand the land and creates order and beauty in it, which means that she is the only one who has been given the privilege to enter into that private space of mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation. Learning a great deal about the land after her six-day trip with Emil, she tells him: "We must have faith in the high land, Emil. I want to hold on harder than ever, and when you're a man you'll thank me" and the land in return decides to respond to her effort and "faith" by becoming productive: "the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breaths across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before" (*O Pioneers!* 23). Being surrounded by the positive feelings of happiness, love, and empowerment she receives from her land, Alexandra's creativity flourishes and manifests through her hard work of transforming the prairies into beautiful gardens.

When it comes to managing the farm and cultivating it, Alexandra follows a different approach from what her neighbors have followed. She "combines intelligence with a new relationship to nature; she is the land's mate rather than its antagonist. In contrast with the men who have seen the land as a wild horse to be tamed, she works it with love and nurturance" (Quawas 244). Alexandra not only considers the land as a mate when "she works it with love and nurturance," but as a female mate in particular. It seems that Alexandra has a duality of thinking about the land's gender; she sometimes tends to think of the land as a male figure, as it is connected to the dream she has "Sunday mornings" of a strong man carrying her through the fields. Other times, she likes to perceive the land as female, a mother or sister, and that is particularly at the times she attempts to grow crops in it and cultivate it. Reginald Dyck suggests that Alexandra "does not work the land herself, yet she has a closer relationship to it than her brothers who are directly engaged in the physical labor of farming" (170). Dyck's suggestion supports my earlier assumption that Alexandra sometimes likes to think of the land as female because the way she feels close to it and compassionate about it resembles the great sense of connectedness she feels for the women in her life. Alexandra's feelings for Marie and the Swedish girls are different from her feelings for her father and the other men. For instance, she is emotionally closer to Marie, and as indicated earlier, this appears in the way she is comfortable in having private conversations and sharing secrets with her, which she does not do with any man. Also, she has a great sense of sympathy for the Swedish girls, which is shown in the way she feels compassionate about their life experiences and concerned about their happiness because their happiness makes her happy as well. These illustrations of emotional closeness and connectedness Alexandra shares with the women in her life resemble the ones that she has for her land. Alexandra's feelings for the land are in contrast to her brothers and other male farmers

working in the farm who feel emotionally detached from the land, and the only language they master is the language of violence and forcing, which receives no cooperation from the stubborn land.

At the time people on the Divide decide to move to another promising place, Alexandra chooses to stand for the land and resolves to stay during drought and the toughest years. She has believed in the land and seen its potential, latent beauty, richness, strength, and glory that other people in the neighborhood have failed to see under its rough surface. When it comes to growing crops in the wilderness, Alexandra "understands the prairie as a growing and vital entity unto itself and honors what it is naturally inclined to grow rather than forcing incongruent production on it" (Carden 41). Also, while people in their neighborhood choose to be ignorant about the kinds of crops that can be grown on the Divide, Alexandra has been learning a great deal about the nature of that land and what it is "inclined to grow" from the people she has met on her exploration trip. When the neighbors have been forcing their lands to grow corn, Alexandra has been trying to understand and promote its potentials. Because she understands the nature of her land and embraces its unique characteristics, the land decides not to disappoint her and responds to her creative efforts by growing new crops such as sweet potatoes, asparagus, rhubarb, and red berries.

Alexandra is a woman who lives only for her land, and her whole life circulates around it. She cares more about her farm than her personal life and educates herself about nothing more than the factors that affect her farm positively or negatively: "her mind was a white book, with clear writing about weather and beasts and growing things" (*O Pioneers!* 154). Her mind is a valuable record of information related to farming that she has gathered over the years from her personal experiences and those of other successful farmers. Moreover, Alexandra's personal

happiness is directly related to what is going on on her land: “there were certain days in her life, outwardly uneventful, which Alexandra remembered as peculiarly happy; days when she was close to the flat, fallow world about her, and felt, as it were, in her own body the joyous germination in the soil” (*O Pioneers!* 154). Alexandra’s emotional connection to the land and strong bond with it allow her to feel as if she “merge[s] physically with the land, feeling its awakening life in her own body” (O'Brien 162). It is an excitement that only a few lucky people can feel; even the workers who directly engage in the physical labor of farming don’t experience it. Lastly, Alexandra feels a sense of a great connection to her land and “treat[s] [it] as herself because she is part of it and will one day return to it” (Rundstrom 220). Just like the new seedlings she observes in her land that will grow into mature plants and return to the soil one day after the end of their life cycle, Alexandra herself is “part” of the land physically and emotionally and will “return to it” when she is buried.

The Private Physical and Psychological Spaces and Alexandra’s Art

In *O’ Pioneers!*, Alexandra’s ability to access physical and psychological private spaces is another factor that contributes to enhancing the creative and artistic aspects of her personality. As a female pioneer, Alexandra appreciates the physical and the psychological privacy her land and property provide her with, and she knows how important it is for her to utilize these two private spaces to thrive as a female artist and pioneer. Throughout the text, Cather provides readers with small details about the nature of physical and psychological private spaces Alexandra accesses.

Alexandra lives on her own in a big white house in the middle of her great farm, distant from other neighbors. There is a sense of contradiction between the indoor and the outdoor spaces of her house: while the indoor space is “unfinished and uneven in comfort,” as some

rooms are furnished and other rooms are not, the outdoor space, which is the "flower garden," is very neat and finely arranged. Unlike traditional women in her society who find comfort within the domestic domain of their houses and possibly freedom resulting from the privacy these houses provide them with, Alexandra does not find comfort nor freedom in her own white house. Even though she has a big house as it is described in the text, she feels uncomfortable and imprisoned in it. When Alexandra hears about Amedee's health condition and the operation that he will have soon, she feels suffocated in her house, so she has to rush to her garden, the only place that gives her the comfort she needs: "But she could not stay in the house this evening. Where should she go? She walked slowly down through the orchard, where the evening air was heavy with the smell of wild cotton" (*O Pioneers!* 69). The privacy that her white house provides her with makes her feel very lonely: the negative kind of aloneness that hinders one's creativity rather than boosting it.

Instead of her traditional house, the domain of domesticity, the garden is Alexandra's real house because it is the only place where she feels at home and can deeply connect with her inner creative self and freely practice her art: "Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors and…it is in the soil that she expresses herself best" (*O Pioneers!* 27). "Rooted not in the domestic sphere but rather in 'the soil,' in an alternate space of female creativity, Alexandra produces not children, but farms and her creative fertility serves no husband, adorns no household" (Carden 283). Alexandra's garden is an example of the untraditional private spaces that Woolf urges women to find for themselves in order to unleash their latent creativity. As Alexandra has an untraditional, private space of her own to retreat to while she exercises her art, she creates untraditional, exceptional beauty in her farm and cultivates new creative crops there.

Alexandra's retreat in her land in general and her garden in particular offers her a space in which she can indulge in imagination and contemplation, two essential elements for pioneer people to be able to play with creative ideas before implementing them, as the narrator says: "[a] pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (*O Pioneers!* 18). In many places in the text, Cather portrays Alexandra standing or sitting in her garden, lost in her ideas. She metaphorically detaches her creative mind and spirit from earth, letting them fly to remote horizons that are only occupied by very sensible people, the artists:

> When Carl Linstrum came up the garden rows to find her, she was not working. She was standing lost in thought, leaning upon her pitchfork… She did not hear him. She was standing perfectly still, with that serious ease so characteristic of her…her eye could follow a hawk up and up, into the blazing blue depths of the sky. (*O Pioneers!* 18-9)

It is as if creating art is a magical act that sometimes cannot be done without her being solo in her garden, and these solitary moments of imagination are what allow her to reach a high level of creativity and inspiration.

Alexandra seeks solitude and quiet in the uninvaded privacy of her farm whenever she has been put in a situation where she needs to make a creative decision. She analyzes the information she has gathered, studies her options, considers her alternatives, and figures out her real feelings about something:

> Alexandra drew her shawl closer about her and stood leaning against the frame of the mill, looking at the stars which glittered so keenly through the frosty autumn air….she felt a sense of personal security. That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it... She had never known before how much the country meant to her…She had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun. Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring. (*O Pioneers!* 25)

That night Alexandra makes the final decision to stay and stand for the land, after coming back from the inspectional trip she took visiting other farms in the neighborhood. More than any other

time in the past, she feels a great sense of connection to the land and overwhelming love for it. Every little detail of her land seems beautiful and unique. Lost in her imagination, she can see the bright future that lies beyond the dark present time.

Also, when Alexandra studies new business projects or farm improvement ideas, she prefers to isolate herself from other members of her family and household, so her ideas can run smoothly without any interruption. An example of this physical and psychological privacy is indicated when Alexandra has been "planning to make her new pig corral." That evening, she seeks a quiet place, "the kitchen doorstep," isolating her physical self partially and inner thoughts fully from her mother who is baking in the kitchen and her brothers and their friend, Carl, who are jumping in and out of the water in the "shimmering" swimming pool (*O Pioneers!* 18). She imagines how the new corral will look and estimates whether it will fit as she hopes in the spot she's chosen. Alexandra mostly keeps her ideas and plans for herself, as when she has been planning this new corral. She would perhaps share such plans with her brothers, Lou and Oscar, if they were open-minded, able to understand farm managing responsibilities, able to follow her train of thought, willing to offer support, etc., but these pioneering traits are unfortunately absent in both of them.

Alexandra's physiological privacy is embodied in her preference to keep her raw plans for herself and not share them with other people, including her two older brothers. A good example of this kind of privacy is portrayed in the event when Alexandra has been studying her decision regarding old Ivar and whether she should trust him and take his advice. From the first time she saw him, she knew that this man holds wisdom and knowledge, which are things her brothers fail to see, as they fail to see the high land's potential; they can see nothing but the old man's weirdness and do nothing but mock him. Lou and Oscar wish that their sister would not go

visit Ivar again, but she "privately resolved that she would have [another] talk with [him]" alone (*O Pioneers!* 18). She does not share her intention of seeing the old man for a second time with her brothers because if she did so, they would force her to change her mind. Alexandra's pioneering traits enable her to sense how Ivar will be a great help to her, and that is why she has decided to keep her ideas regarding him private, and she has never regretted that decision.

Alexandra's Creative Love and Sexuality

During her forty years of life, Alexandra has never been in a sexual relationship with a man due to her personal attitude towards love and marriage. She considers the intimate space of love relationships between men and women a hindrance to women's creativity. Allowing a man to enter her life and be intimate with her may lead her to realize and admit her sexual needs that she has been trying to avoid for years, which manifests in the way she reacts to that reverie with anger that is mostly directed to herself:

"she would rise hastily…go down to the bath-house… prosecute her bath with vigor, finishing it by pouring buckets of cold well-water over her gleaming white body which no man on the Divide could have carried very far" (59). "Acknowledging sexual needs would make her vulnerable and dependent, so to preserve her Amazonian self- sufficiency she must deny herself sexual fulfillment in the real world" (O'Brien 164). By observing other women in her surroundings, such as Marie, Alexandra has been convinced that romantic love weakens women and makes them act irrationally.

Alexandra is an artist and that is another reason why she chooses the space of her love for her land over the space of a heterosexual relationship with a man. She "give[s] herself completely only to nature [her land], just as the poet or painter commits himself to art" (O'Brien 162). Alexandra's act of giving herself to her land indirectly supports the artist within her and

boosts her creative talents of managing the farm. Directing most of her affection as well as attention to the land allows her to enter the positive, supportive space that her land surrounds her with, and from which she draws strength, peace, and inspiration. Unlike some selfish love relationships between human beings that lead to change in the partners and deprive them of higher purposes in life, Alexandra's love for her land and relationship with it helps her to be true to herself, caring for others, concentrated on her higher purpose of giving to the land and people in her community, and being a better artist.

Further, Alexandra has great affection for her land and establishing a love relationship with a man may require her to sacrifice the love she has for her land or a great deal of it for that new lover. Besides, sharing her personal life as well as her land, her space, with a man may distract her from her mission of managing the farm businesses and foreclose any future creative and artistic projects in it, as most men refuse to come next in any relationship and a male lover will want her attention to be mainly directed to him, not to her land. Alexandra's land is her territory, her private space in which all creative ideas have been inspired and come to reality. Sharing that space with a man who does not understand that great love for the land might lead to weakening or losing that bond with it. She would then lose the artist within her and her ability to conduct powerful, creative projects, her land as a source of empowerment as well as inspiration. Alexandra marries Carl, at the end of the novel, because he is the only man who understands her connection to the land and "and is aware that her commitment to him is secondary to her commitment to her land" (Carden 198). He confirms this: "[y]ou belong to the land... Now more than ever" (*O Pioneers!* 84). He knows that he comes second, as her love is first devoted to the land and will always be; the land is her true love, and Carl is a very close friend whose company she appreciates.

Sharon O'Brien suggests that "Alexandra's preference of the land to men is understandable, for Cather's association of the land and its femaleness with birth, growth, and fruition is opposed to her association of male sexuality with violence, destruction, and death" (162). This has been mainly manifested in the way that Alexandra's love for her land resulted in the prosperity of the Divide and the growth of new crops whereas Marie's love relationship with Emil resulted in the death of both of them. Moreover, the success and the failure of love relationships is contagious; these two distinct relationships affect not only the directly involved parties, but also people around them. Alexandra's love for her land has not only benefited her; it has also contributed to the happiness and welfare of her family and many families in the neighborhood. In contrast, the love relation of Marie and her brother has not only destroyed their lives, but also the lives of people around them, particularly Alexandra's and Frank's. After her brother's death, Alexandra leaves the Divide with Carl because she has lost her peace and happiness in this place and her grief is more powerful than those feelings that rooted her there for so long. Also, perhaps the death of Marie and Emil have destroyed the feeling that the land is a private, nurturing space for her, as it has been invaded by violence. She can no longer retreat in her land without being haunted psychologically by the memories of the murders that happened not too far from her place. Overwhelmed by her feelings of grief and loss of privacy in her farm after Emil's death, Alexandra moves into a new land that seems to promise her the privacy and the nurturance she needs to resume and release her creativity that had once transformed the prairies of Nebraska into a wonderful garden.

The only time Alexandra's creative sexuality is awakened is on "Sunday mornings" through her sexual daydreams of getting carried by a man who is different from all other men she has seen or known in her life. He is "much larger and stronger and swifter… She could feel that

he was yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him. She could feel him approach, bend over her and lift her, and then she could feel herself being carried swiftly off across the fields" (*O Pioneers!* 95). This creative sexual "reverie" is sparked in the privacy of her room, as she listens to "the familiar morning sounds" coming from the farm. In her ears, these sounds are music: "the windmill singing in the brisk breeze, Emil whistling as he blacked his boots down by the kitchen door." Such luxurious privacy leads her to indulge briefly in sexual fantasies that she later resents herself for. Alexandra does not like the idea of allowing herself to be physically and mentally controlled by a man who "more often [comes] to her when she [is] tired than when she [is] fresh and strong" (*O Pioneers!* 59).

Even though Alexandra denies her heterosexual feelings, in reality she suppresses them. O'Brien suggests that:

> [Alexandra's] mysterious daydream of a powerful, godlike figure who carries her across the corn fields reveals the persistence of a repressed attraction to the troublesome force of male sexuality and power that her conscious mind rejects…[she] finds this daydream upsetting because it connects sexual expression with succumbing to a superior male force. The man she envisions is more than her match, 'much larger and stronger and swifter' than her neighbors on the Divide, men who could never carry her 'gleaming white body…very far.' (163-4)

While the men with whom she works on the Divide have never attracted her or awakened her sexuality because they are her match or less in terms of power, her daydream about this strong, powerful, and attractive man upsets her. This man is not like any man she has ever known; even though she feels attracted to him, she suppresses her feelings because she perceives his superior power as a threat to her strong personality. Alexandra is quite aware that if she had had to resist him physically or emotionally, she would have failed. As a female pioneer, she refuses to lose herself in a love relationship. She believes that romantic relationships between men and women weaken women and make them vulnerable, resulting from the power imbalance that usually occurs in such relationships. In this respect, Alexandra's tendency to retreat to her land and

spend most of her time there indicates her attempt to avoid confronting this subconscious realization about herself, thereby escaping these pressuring sexual fancies, and proving her loyalty to the love relationship that bonds her with her land.

Alexandra welcomes most kinds of creative fancies except sexual ones, as she perceives them as threatening to her independent, powerful character. By exploiting the emotionally supportive space of her unique bond with her land and her strong relationships with her father, Carl, Old Ivar, the Swedish girls, and Marie, Alexandra feels empowered to fight against sexism and continue her journey of managing the farm that she is powerfully connected to "For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her" (*O Pioneers!* 23). Moreover, the physical and the psychological private spaces Alexandra accesses when she retreats to her property or wanders in her land inspire and nurture her creative talents of taming the land and imposing order on it, transforming the tough wild land of Nebraska into a beautiful garden, and cultivating new crops. Finally, Alexandra, the artist and the female pioneer, has devoted herself to her land because this kind of platonic love is a source of prosperity, power, and creative inspiration. *O Pioneers!* contrasts this love with love relationships between men and women, depicted as a source of weakness, destruction, and death, that not only take women's creativity nowhere, but hinder it.

Private Spaces and Edna's Painting in *The Awakening*

Different kinds of private spaces contribute to the growth and development of women's creativity. These private spaces that are necessary for enhancing women's creativity are physical, psychological, and/or metaphorical sites that women willingly enter to get nurtured, empowered, supported, inspired, and healed. They are perceived as private spaces because they are exploited or created by women and mostly for their own benefit. Creative women use these spaces to sustain their subjectivity, express their creativity, resist their oppressors, and attain freedom. In this chapter, I will examine the different kinds of private spaces that contributed to the success and the prosperity of Kate Chopin's literary creativity by means of a close reading of her biography. Then, I will move into investigating the private spaces that enhance the creativity of her female character, Edna, in *The Awakening*, and how they help release her suppressed creative artistry. Chopin, the author, and Edna, the fictional character, have mainly utilized these private spaces- consciously and unconsciously- to empower themselves and to support and nurture the creative talents of writing in the case of Chopin and painting in the case of Edna.

The Spaces of Creativity in Kate Chopin's Life

Chopin's unconventional creative personality was shaped and enhanced by a number of distinct private spaces. These spaces encompassed the nurturing space of her grandmother, the supportive, empowering space of her mother and husband, the healing space of reading and writing, the private physical and the psychological space of practicing solo activities, the private physical space of her office or writing room, and the inspiring, empowering space of music. Most of these spaces and their positive impact on the creativity of female artists are reflected in Chopin's life and they are highlighted in many of her literary works, including *The Awakening*, which will be analyzed later in this chapter.

The presence of many influential and supportive people in Chopin's life played a significant role in her personal and social growth into a creative female thinker and writer. First, growing up surrounded by well-educated, powerful women opened up a nurturing, secure space for Chopin, enabling her to acquire a unique intellectuality and build an unconventional identity uncommon among girls and women in her society. Chopin had been positively impacted by three generations of brilliant women in her family: her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Her relationships with each one of these women enriched her creativity in a remarkable way. For instance, Chopin's great grandmother was the first person who took on her shoulders the responsibility of educating little Kate and fueling her curiosity for learning. Elaborating on the role that her great grandmother played in developing Chopin's intellectual creativity, as well as other aspects of her creativity, Sara Davis points out:

> Kate O'Flaherty's great-grandmother, Mme. Victoria Verdon Charleville, lived in the O'Flaherty household and directed young Kate's mental and artistic growth until her death when Kate was eleven. She cultivated in the young girl a taste for storytelling, a relish for intimate details about such historical figures as the earliest settlers of the Louisiana Territory, and an unabashed, unhesitant, even unjudgmental intellectual curiosity about life. Additionally, she superintended the girl's piano lessons and her French, the language especially important in their bilingual home. (7)

In the safe, nurturing space of Kate's grandmother's supervision, the little girl found a welcoming site for discovering, questioning, learning, and expressing herself. Because of this space, Chopin gained the confidence to say and to do everything according to what she wanted, not what other people wanted for her as a child or an adult. Unlike many of the nineteenth century women whose genius and creative personalities had been suppressed by their families and their societies, Chopin had been given space by her family and close circle of friends to exhibit her unique way of thinking and show the liberated and creative side of her personality. Emily Toth noted that Chopin had a "gift for saying so many good and witty things" (2). She

grew to be the woman her family and her grandmothers and her mother, in particular, wanted her to become.

Second, Chopin's strong relationship with her mother functions as a supportive, empowering space for her, as her mother had always protected her. Chopin's mother was an independent and powerful woman who raised her children and carried the responsibility of managing the household finances with the help of Chopin's grandmother and great grandmother who both moved to their house after Chopin's father passed away. Throughout the years of Chopin's marriage, her mother had visited her and provided help and advice regarding raising the children. After her husband's death, Chopin stayed about one year in Cloutierville settling her husband's failing business, then she moved back to her mother's house in St. Louis after the latter insisted that she come home with the children. Chopin's return to her mother's house was a great relief for her, as she no longer had to battle life alone as a widowed woman. Besides, having "her mother as a confidante and supporter until she was thirty-five" had always given Chopin an "uncommon sense of security about her own point of view" as an intellectual and a literary writer (Toth 17). In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf claims that "a woman writing thinks back through her mothers" (97). This seems to be true in the case of Chopin and her mother and grandmother(s). Through her unconventional writing and witty conversation, Chopin appears to think back through them, as her progressive ideas and unique way of thinking had been inspired and evoked by these three generations of women in her life. Thus, Chopin's opinions not only represent her, but all of them.

Third, Chopin had also been empowered by her husband. During the nineteenth century, an unconventional wife and mother like Chopin would have not been able to continue living the liberated life she had been used to if she were not married to a man who has in common with her

the same unconventional beliefs. Chopin had been married to Oscar Chopin, and their "relationship was unique in that Oscar Chopin never stifled his wife's impulses" (Fite 9). Unlike most females in general and married women, in particular, living in her very conservative society, Chopin felt free to practice many activities that were prohibited for women in public or private. Chopin did not care about people's disapproval of her behavior. For instance, after moving to Cloutierville, a very conservative town, Chopin acted as if she were still in New Orleans. She challenged the conventions by doing activities that had been perceived as inappropriate for respected ladies, such as taking long, solitary walks late at night and smoking her cigarettes in front of the locals (Toth 16). With the support of her husband, Chopin did not care much about what people might have said about her or thought of her, and she continued behaving the way she wanted to. This supportive and empowering space that her husband had surrounded her with helped her courageous and distinct personality to thrive. The impact of this space had not only manifested in her own creative character, but also in the rebellious, bold female characters she depicts in her fiction and in the unconventional themes she discusses in the novels she wrote later in her life. Commenting on Chopin's characters, Carole Stone says: "she projected [her] desires onto her heroines; these women embodied the feminist ideals of independence, self-assertion, and self- fulfillment" (16). For instance, Chopin, who personally refuses gender expectations, addresses this bold theme in *The Awakening*, showing how these roles are rejected by her rebellious, bold heroine, Mrs. Pontellier, as will be demonstrated later.

For Chopin, indulging in the activities of reading and writing creates a space for healing and consolation. Throughout the years of her childhood and adulthood, Chopin had been used to retreating entirely to this space to seek relief and recover from feeling devastated after certain tragic events. For example, the death of her half-brother, George, had deeply affected her, so she

retreated to the attic, reading most of the time for "about two years," "withdraw[ing] from school, from friends, even somewhat from her family" (Davis 7). Moreover, feeling lonely and "deep grief" after her mother's death, Chopin's doctor, a friend, advised her "to try writing" as a profession (Toth 14). She took his advice and started writing and establishing her name as a writer.

Resembling the main character in her most controversial novel, *The Awakening*, Chopin acts as a 'solitary soul.' She enjoys doing a lot of activities alone, as she finds in those practices the physical and psychological privacy she needs to feed her wit and literary creativity. As her biography indicates, she fills her free time with taking solitary walks and indulging in reading and solitary contemplation (Fite 9). Her own activities and experiences, as well as the stories she had read or listened to, all provided Chopin with interesting materials for her writing.

Just like Willa Cather and Alice Walker, another two writers I talk about in this dissertation, the older Chopin grew, and the more professional a writer, the more obsessed with physical and psychological privacy she becomes. She prefers her own "companionship" over others'; "she is her own best friend," as Heidi Fite indicates (48). Chopin gradually withdrew from social life and found in her privacy and solitary contemplation a way of optimizing her thinking capacity and sparking her own creativity. For example, the Wednesday club, a group of St. Louis women intellectuals who met to study Percy Shelley poetry, had become a source of distraction to her, so she quit to focus more on her writings. Toth indicates that, as a dedicated writer and editor, Chopin had her own room to retreat to while planning her plots and working on her stories and publications, as "her surviving manuscripts show," although she had always denied it. Chopin claimed that "she had no writing studio,…, and preferred to write in the common living room, her children swarming about her. She portrayed herself as a mother who

wrote as an unserious hobby" (Toth 21). She wants to appear as the image of a mother who first, practices writing as a hobby not as a career, and second, writes in the living room where her children feel free to interrupt her physical as well as psychological privacy at any time. Even though Chopin had not cared about what the society think of her as a wife, she very likely cared about what they think of her as a mother because the way people look at her defines the future of her career as a writer. She indirectly wants to get the approval of this conventional society on her work by convincing them that her literary career does not keep her from her children, and they always come first in her life, so that she can gain her community as allies. Having so many allies in a society that does not support women who depart from their traditional roles as wives or "mother-women" promoted her success as a female writer in that society

Lastly, music as an empowering and inspiring space contributes to Chopin's artistic development as well as that of her female fictional characters. As indicated earlier, Chopin had been introduced to music by her great grandmother and continued to gain a special appreciation for it and knowledge about it as she grew up. Chopin wrote two novels—only one of them is famous—as well as about one hundred short stories, and music had often been an important element in many of these works. In her popular and controversial novel, *The Awakening*, both Edna's awakening and her rebellion were first evoked by the music of Mademoiselle Reisz. This space as well as other kinds of influential spaces and their positive impact on female artists' creativity, are represented in the story of Edna, which will be discussed in-depth in the next section.

The Spaces of Creativity in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Varied kinds of spaces have positively impacted Edna, the main character in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and have played a significant role in the awakening of her personal and social creativity. Edna's (or Mrs. Pontellier, as she is referred to sometimes in the text), creativity has been unleashed through the physical and psychological private spaces of her solitude at Grand Isle as well as her own house in New Orleans, the pigeon-house. Other spaces such as the emotional, supportive space of female friendship and the empowering, inspiring space of music play a no less important role in the development of her creativity. Edna's creativity not only shows in her attempt to express herself through painting, but it has also manifested in other aspects of her life such as the quest to find her real, unconventional identity and to live as an untraditional woman in a very traditional society, and the opportunity to experience musical sublimity that not every fond listener to music can have.

In *The Awakening*, Edna struggles to proclaim her real identity as a female artist in a patriarchal society and goes through significant moments of awakening that summer at Grand Isle and later in New Orleans, after returning from her summer vacation. As a young woman who lives in a society where women are raised to fulfill their roles as 'good wives' and 'mother-women,' Edna's and other women's whole lives rotate around the needs of their families, particularly their husbands and children not their own, whether these needs are essential or luxurious. If a woman puts her effort into something, then that should be for the well-being of her family, and if she is to practice a hobby or talent such as playing music, that should also be to bring joy to her family. Madame Ratignolle tells Edna that '"she was keeping up her music on account of the children,' she said; 'because she and her husband both considered it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive'" (32).

Mrs. Pontellier lives in a big house in New Orleans, her husband's house, that has never felt like home for her. She has no personal space of her own, no private space that is uninvaded by other people and gives her the luxury to do things solely for her own pleasure. As a mother and a wife, Edna is always consumed by her duties as a caring mother to her two little sons and a devoted wife to her socially respected husband. Just like other mothers in her social circle, she is not supposed to practice any of her hobbies nor develop any of her talents unless she uses them as a source of entertaining her family.

Painting is Edna's favorite hobby to practice in her free time, but she is not supposed to paint at home without her husband's approval, especially if he and the kids are in the house. When she starts painting at home, after spending the summer on Grand Isle, her husband criticizes her: "it seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family" (*The Awakening* 73). Mr. Pontellier believes that his wife's art distracts her and keeps her occupied for a long time, causing her to fall short in fulfilling the familial and social responsibilities that her time and effort should only be devoted to. He even exaggerates by assuming that her art of painting causes her to "let the family go to the devil" and wondering if his wife grows "a little unbalanced mentally" (*The Awakening* 73-4). These accusations and similar ones are thrown in the face of women whose only guilt is attempting to carve a space for themselves, so they can practice the things they like, preferably in solitude, within the domain of domesticity.

In many societies, especially those of the nineteenth century, "the role of the woman, and especially of the mother…is to create the nurturing space that her husband and children shall cherish as the primal and symbolically eternal home" as Gaston Bachelard points out (qtd. in

Worton 108). In this respect, women such as Edna are supposed to provide for their families and create that healthy "nurturing" space for them to thrive and grow on all levels, including the personal and the artistic ones. While helping and watching other people around them flourish, these women who are "the head of a household" are doomed to sacrifice their personal space and their own selves for their families, which makes any artistic talent they may have wilt away.

As Woolf argues, without a private space of their own, as well as money to support their privacy, women will have great difficulty to uncover the latent creativity within themselves or exercise it. Edna's artistry and creativity had never had a chance to prosper in her big house in New Orleans before that last summer. "To pursue [her] art," Edna has "to sacrifice her maternal burden and if she desires to act like the Victorian epitome of mother-woman, it means she must resign her artistic ambition" (Khoshnood 576). Good and well-raised women, from their society's perspective, sacrifice their ambition and art for their families while rebellious, irresponsible women put their art and their own desires above everything and everybody else, including their own families.

The complexity of Edna's situation is that she is in a place where the society compels her to choose between her children and familial life on one side and her art and living her life as a liberated woman on the other side. The society in which she lives does not believe in female artists' ability to balance between their familial, social duties and their artistic, progressive endeavors. Edna is so bound to her children; however, she cannot sacrifice herself, her new-found identity, and her art for them, because these things are what give her a sense of deep satisfaction and make her feel alive, and without fulfilling them, she feels miserable.

People in Edna's society do not understand the urge she has to practice her art and the feelings of dissatisfaction and unhappiness with her life she experiences daily. She has always

been envied by other women around her because, in their opinion, she has the best life and her husband "Mr. Pontellier, [is] the best husband in the world." Mr. Pontellier has always been generous with her and his kids; gives her more money than what she needs and sends her boxes of "finest fruits, pates…delicious syrups, and bonbons" when she is away from home (*The Awakening* 11). Even though Edna herself admits that her husband is one of the best in her community, she still feels miserable. However, this feeling of misery is always suppressed by her, as it has not been strong enough to manifest. In her last summer stay on Grand Isle, this feeling finally finds a way to manifest itself despite how hard Edna tries to dismiss it. She has been overwhelmed and unable to interpret it at the beginning; "the beginning of things… is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing," as Chopin's narrator explains (19). Deciding that it is time for her to take her feelings of unhappiness seriously, she resolves to put in some time and effort to analyze them and find a solution to her inner dilemma.

Physical and Psychological Privacy at Grand Isle and The Pigeon House

The physical and the psychological privacy Edna has access to have enhanced the awakening of her real identity and creativity as a female artist. Grand Isle, as a summer stay, and the pigeon house, as a house of her own, are the two main places portrayed in the text that enable Edna to experience privacy and solitude and to hugely benefit from them. In Grand Isle, the ocean and the space outside the cottage in which Edna and her family stay allow Edna to indulge in many solitary moments, which enables her to quietly re-evaluate her life and investigate the reasons of her deep and constant dissatisfaction and unhappiness in life. Also, the uninvaded physical and psychological privacy she accesses in the pigeon house has assisted her to live the progressive life she has been longing for and grow as an artist by giving her the freedom to devote herself to her art and express her real self in her paintings.

The traditions of Edna's middle-class New Orleans society demand that family members, particularly women and children, spend their summers in fashionable resorts; islands and coastal cities are usually favored. Edna and her female friends appreciate this experience because of the temporary freedom from domestic responsibilities and social restrictions they find there (Parmiter 3). In fact, the experience of summer places is supposed to have a deeper and more profound influence on women than freeing them from domestic and social responsibilities. Tara Parmiter emphasizes the crucial role that summer places play in "inspir[ing women's] evaluation of self and home" (12). However, in the 19th century, this "evaluation" and re-evaluation of "self and home" should not exceed the boundaries of social norms and conventions, as it does in Edna's situation. This experience, as Tara K. Parmiter indicates "has a surprising effect on [Edna in particular]: rather than curing her of a physical malady and sending her home refreshed, [it] instead opens [her] eyes to her dissatisfaction with her home life, an emotional and intellectual problem that is far more difficult to cure" (2). In fact, Edna's suppressed feelings of unhappiness are evoked by the effect that this summer place and the people there have on her. For instance, the physical and the psychological privacy she accesses at some nights in the space outside the cottage in which she and her family stay allows these feelings to float on the surface: "An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish" (10). This private space, as well as other ones, gives Edna the chance not only to confront these suppressed feelings, but to tackle them and look for solutions to what has always bothered her. Also, meeting people such as Madame Ratignolle, getting to know her better, and observing her lifestyle, enable Edna to decide what life she wants for herself: "The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing" (72). By observing the conventional role she has

fulfilled in her husband's house performed in front of her eyes by her friend, Adele, Edna realizes that this conventional role and life are not for her and will never be.

Grand Isle, as a whole, is not a private space, but Edna has access to different moments of physical privacy there. The space outside her husband's cottage in which she sits or lies down for hours, and the space by the sea in which she sits with her friend Adele, intimately chatting, or alone contemplating the water, function as private physical spaces. These are categorized as private spaces because they provide Edna with the chance to connect to her real self, empower her to go after her dream of becoming an artist, and inspire her creativity in a distinct way. One such influential solitary moment Edna has had outside her husband's cottage is on one of her early nights in Grand Isle after she has had an argument with her husband about her not taking good care of her children, as mothers are supposed to do. That night, Edna stays outside the cottage alone; sitting in a "wicker chair" (10), "she abandon[s] herself to tears" (19). She acknowledges her dissatisfaction with her conventional life and plants the early seeds of rebellion.

Another experience of an influential solitary moment Edna has in that same space is one she has on the night she learns to swim. That night, she returns exhausted from the beach and refuses to go inside the cottage when her husband asks her to. Overwhelmed with new, strange feelings, pervading her soul, she insists on staying outside "lying" "in the hammock" until the early hours before dawn (42). These private, undisturbed moments of contemplation and self-reflection give her the chance to look for answers for the questions that have always bothered her: who is she really? How does she want to live her life? The answers to these questions come in the form of a deep self-realization: "a certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her,—the light which, showing the way, forbids it" (10). These two moments and other similar ones

begin Edna's journey toward recovering her lost identity and chasing her dream of becoming an artist and painter in a conventional society.

The ocean is the unique feature of this place, and Edna becomes obsessed with it. In the text, we see her most of the time by the ocean, contemplating it: she "kept [her eyes] at rest upon the sea"; swimming in it: she "spent much of her time in the water"; or enjoying its sound: "listening to the ocean's roar" during her stay in Grand Isle (22) (60) (45). When she is in the sea or around it, she detaches from the rest of the world to enter a state of solitude, as the sea: "invit[es] the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation" (19). By entering this state of psychological privacy, Edna is no longer able to notice other people, only her real, bare self, mirrored on this vast space of water. The sea enables her to put her finger on the wound, to acknowledge her potentials and creativity, as a human being and a young woman, and to see what she is capable of doing or being.

Ann Heilmann demonstrates that "one of the reasons for Edna's great attraction to the sea is surely its limitless expanse, which offers welcome release from her feeling of domestic confinement. When she is not outdoors, Edna is at pains to create her own private space" (53). When Edna is near the ocean or in the water, she is best connected to herself. The ocean as a space resembles her and influences her in many different ways. The vastness of the ocean liberates her soul from the social and moral restrictions imposed on her and gives her a sense of freedom, even if that freedom is temporary. The powerful motion of its waves reflects her restless emotions and empowers her to fight for what she wants. Lastly, the magnificence and the beauty of it enhances her imagination and inspires her artistic creativity.

During and after her experience of spending the summer in Grand Isle, Edna goes through striking moments of self-realization that have led her to change her perception of herself

as well as her role as young woman in a conventional society. Edna feels "different," and describing one of these *moments of self-realization, Chopin says:*

> *A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her,—the light which, showing the way, forbids it…In short, 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. (19)

While other women around her, such as her friend Adele, seem to enjoy their lives as dedicated wives and mothers, Edna does not. She finds it impossible to continue living her life as a conventional wife who only serves the expectations of her husband and conservative society by playing her role of a mother-woman. Painting, and meeting inspiring people such as the pianist Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna realizes that she as a young and talented woman is capable of being more than a conventional woman and fulfilling other goals in life, leaving family responsibilities behind. In other words, she realizes that she herself is "different" from other women in her society, and she is even "different" from her old self, and there is a another "different" but exciting side of life that she has yet to discover.

Further, the physical and the psychological privacy she has had access to in Grand Isle lead Edna to realize, for the first time in her life, how much she can get close to other women, such as her intimate relationships with Madame Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, and be impacted by their lives, love, and support. The warmth and the honesty of Mrs. Ratignolle have encouraged Edna to feel free and safe to be herself for the first time in her life:

> That summer at Grand Isle she began to loosen a little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her. There may have been—there must have been—influences, both subtle and apparent, working in their several ways to induce her to do this; but the most obvious was the influence of Adele Ratignolle…….. Who can tell what metals the gods use in forging the subtle bond which we call sympathy, which we might as well call love. (*The Awakening* 20)

Having a chance to hear excerpts of her own personal life articulated and voiced out loud to a trusted and supportive friend assists Edna to have a better understanding of it and notice the gaps that need to be filled. From the time she has spent with Mrs. Ratignolle and on, Edna finds the courage and the will to confront her suppressed feelings of fear, love, desire, and loss, and analyze them.

On the other hand, developing a strong, intimate relationship with her other friend, Mademoiselle Reisz, has also benefited Edna, but in a different way. The free life and the creative artistry of Mademoiselle Reisz have deeply connected with Edna's confined soul and inspired her on how to set herself free and alive: "there was nothing which so quieted the turmoil of Edna's senses as a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz. It was then, in the presence of that personality which was offensive to her, that the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna's spirit and set it free" (*The Awakening* 100). Deprived of being constant in her work of painting and devoted to it, Edna feels very fascinated by the way this unique woman, Mademoiselle Reisz, can dedicate herself to her art of music. Further, among the music played by other pianists, men or women, Mademoiselle Reisz's playing evokes strong feelings in Edna that no other musical performances have been able to.

It is important to note that I talk about Edna's relationship with Mrs. Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz two times in this chapter; here, I mainly talk about this relationship as one of many aspects of self-realization that the private physical and psychological spaces of Grand Isle allow her to reach. The second time, I will elaborate more on Edna's friendships with these two women and talk about these relationships as an intimate supportive space that enables Edna's creativity to thrive. Edna's self-realization of new aspects of her real identity such as her difference from other traditional women and how much she can get intimate and unreserved with

some women have inspired her to take more practical steps to encourage the development and the growth of that newly found identity.

One of the first and main things that Edna decides on doing to nurture her newly found identity is reclaiming her right to privacy and solitude, "to be let alone," as she tells Dr. Mandelet (*The Awakening* 142). Edna's privacy on Grand Isle well as her solo stay in her house in New Orleans, after her husband and children leave her alone for several weeks, has influenced her art and personality positively and given her the space she needs to make the most crucial decision in her life, which is the decision to leave her husband's house and move out to a house of her own, the pigeon-house. Ali Khoshnood suggests that to protect her privacy, "reintegrate herself into a personality which is more in harmony with her needs, [and] develop her newly awakened self," she "moves into the liminal and marginal space of her 'pigeon house'" (579). By moving to the pigeon-house, Edna officially claims her right to privacy and announces her independence.

Julia Kristeva believes that this willingness to preserve one's self and the quest for self-growth should not be perceived as a source of guilt, but rather as "creation in the strong sense of the term" (31). In this respect, Edna is very creative in her decision to take on a different way of living her life, walking on a rocky path that has never been sought by mother-women in her conventional society, and rebelling against the traditionally assigned gender roles: "she wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (*The Awakening* 37). Edna's choice of independence in her personal life is "equivalent to Chopin's claim to independence in her choice of subject matter," as Ann Heilmann observes (87). Chopin, the real woman, finds it difficult to tolerate the social constraints on her intellect and on the topics she wanted to address in her literary writings; Edna, the fictional one, finds it torturous to endure the restrictions imposed on

her personal and social life as a mother who wishes also to be an artist living in a patriarchal society.

Moving to the pigeon-house, Edna also has complete control over her space and feels empowered to pursue the liberated life that she has been longing for. She finds the courage to behave in a way that appeals to her and announces her "economic and sexual independence" (Heilmann 87). Edna has come to a point where she refuses to rely on her husband's money for living because it leaves her weak and helpless: "the house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn't that enough reason [to move out]?" (*The Awakening* 101). Edna begins to provide for herself by selling her paintings. This economic independence empowers her to reclaim ownership of her own body when she tells Robert that she is "no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not" (138). To prove this ownership, Edna has her sexuality awakened, with no feelings of guilt, at the hands of Alcee Arobins who is aware of her sexual needs. In fact, the first seeds of Edna's rebellion against the traditional and moral norms of her society have been planted on Grand Isle and prospered in the Pigeon house.

The pigeon house provides Edna with the solitude and undisturbed privacy she needs to concentrate on her art and enables her real personality to show up through the paintings she works on there. Living alone in this house with no children, husband, or any other residents to interrupt the process of her art making, Edna's painting skills improve, as she becomes more dedicated to her art. Learning from the experience of traditional male genius[es] and artists, Edna notices that the "essence and strength" of their creativity are "derived from solitary contemplation" (Davis 192). This theory conforms to Woolf's one that the reason why there had been more male writers and artists than female throughout history is that men had always given themselves the right to solitude inside and outside their houses; in contrast, they do not admit

that right to their female relatives. Thus, Edna's solitude in the pigeon-house has been reflected in her work as "it grows in force and individuality," as Laidpore comments with delight after examining her late paintings (102). Unlike the old paintings she had worked on in her husband's house, the new paintings she accomplishes after moving to the pigeon house present her real and liberated identity, as her privacy there gives her the chance to connect with and express herself better. The pigeon house is as an example of a private space that supports women's creativity because it is a space that has helped nurture her artistic talent as a painter as well as supporting and empowering her free personality.

Scholars such as Ali Khoshnood believe that Edna does not practice the art of painting "to achieve a sense of self-realization," but rather to support and provide herself with a "meager income, through the sale of [her paintings]" (575). In contrast, I believe that the main reason Edna paints is that she finds in her art a way of connecting with herself and letting her feelings flow, naturally and smoothly, as she moves her brushes. Moreover, Edna's hobby of painting is the language she masters to express herself (Hildebrand 19). She proudly tells Robert, "I have got into a habit of expressing myself" (*The Awakening* 136). Painting has become the main and the most reliable means she uses to express herself. In this respect, the more she grows professionally as a painter and artist, the more she becomes eloquent in expressing herself through this art.

The Pigeon House as A Marginal Space

As the 'pigeon house' is mostly thought of as a private physical space, it can also be perceived as a metaphorical 'marginal' space. bell hooks introduces the idea of conceiving marginality as a space of "power and "creativity" in her article, "Marginality as Site of Resistance." For hooks, marginality is "more than a site of deprivation"; it is "the site of radical

possibility, a space of resistance" (341). This metaphorical marginal space welcomes all people to it and gives them the right to be "different" (343). In the text, Edna describes the pigeon house to her friend Adele as: "a little four-room house around the corner. It looks so cozy, so inviting and restful…I'm tired looking after that big house. It never seemed like mine, anyway—like home" (84). Based on that quote, the pigeon house has many characteristics in common with hooks' space of marginality. Neither space is in the center: Edna's pigeon house is "around the corner" whereas hook's space is located in the margins. However, both are inviting and restful sites that individuals can retreat to in order to cure themselves, draw power, resist the oppressor, nourish their creativity, and have freedom. For hooks and her fellows, this space of marginality, helps them to resist their oppressors, have their voices heard, recover from the consequences of their oppression, and celebrate their difference (341). On the other hand, in Edna's situation, the pigeon house as a marginal space gives her the power and the support she needs to be different and devoted to her art.

As indicated earlier, during her last summer in Grand Isle, Edna has felt that she is different from other people and from her old self:

> She tried to discover wherein this summer had been different from any and every other summer of her life. She could only realize that she herself—her present self—was in some way different from the other self. That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect. (53)

In a conventional society like the one she lives in, straying from the mainstream is not an encouraged or accepted act or behavior. Unlike most women in her community, Edna discovers that her happiness lies in pursuing her art of painting rather than fulfilling her role as a mother-woman. However, her frequent attempts to practice her art of painting in her husband's house have never been accepted; they have been always suppressed and discouraged by him. In

contrast, in the marginal space of her house, the pigeon house, Edna can reveal the real identity that she has been masking for years to please her society at the expense of her own happiness. By moving to this marginal space, she also finds the courage to declare her difference and celebrate it by having the freedom to live her life the way she wants and follow her dream of becoming an artist.

The marginal space of the pigeon house provides Edna with peace and happiness, which are two important elements for the creation act. Describing Edna's feelings toward her new house, the narrator says:

> The pigeon house pleased her. It at once assumed the intimate character of a home, while she herself invested it with a charm which it reflected like a warm glow. There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. (245)

Even though the pigeon house, as a marginal space, is not as big and charming as her husband's house, she likes it more and finds more happiness in it. The reason behind that is, as hooks explains, there is a difference between the marginality people choose for themselves as a central site for articulating their subjectivity and announcing their resistance and the one that is forced on them and determined by the hegemonic groups (Soja 98). Edna is the one who makes the decision to move into that place in her quest for fighting for her rights, proclaiming her real identity, and devoting herself to her art. In Edna's situation, her husband's house is the forced space that suppresses her subjectivity and hinders her creativity by preventing her from being her true self and practicing her art. In that hegemonic space, Edna has been always asked to conform to the norms of her society and play a traditional role, which causes her to lose herself in service to her family and community. It is true that Edna might have "descended in the social scale"

when she has moved out of her husband's house, but her real win is that she has gained her real self, which brings her more happiness.

The marginal space of the pigeon house that Edna decides to enter empowers her and boosts her creativity. The space of marginality welcomes people's differences. It encourages them to celebrate their differences because these differences are one essential part of the creative process. It does not restrict her to a certain way of expressing herself that only pleases her society. Thus, this marginal space of the pigeon house is a private space because it not only empowers her, but also nourishes her artistic creativity by giving her the freedom she needs to manifest her unique self and individuality through her art of painting. From the space of her pigeon house, Edna proclaims her voice and articulates her unique subjectivity through the way she chooses to live her life and the paintings she makes, which as Laidpore notices "grow in force and individuality" after she moves there (102). Lastly, this space is private in that Edna, in contrast to most people around her, men or women, finds the courage to enter this free, empowering, and untraditional space and adopt the mindset of its members. Edna as well as other members of this private, but open, welcoming space share the principles that affirm people's rights to be different, free, and equal to other groups.

The Supportive, Nurturing Space of Female Friendship

In her summer vacation at Grand Isle, Edna befriends two women, Madame Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, who both play a crucial role in her awakening personally and artistically. Edna's intimate friendships with these two women function as an emotionally supportive space that influences her positively. Madame Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz have completely contrasting personalities; however, the entrance of both of these two women

into Edna's life has been necessary, as each one of them supports and nurtures her personality and artistry in a different way.

As noted earlier, the sympathetic, loving nature of Madame Ratignolle, as well as her frank, unjudging character, encourage Edna to confront her feelings of dissatisfaction and to express her emotions and thoughts freely. Also, the Creole community's "freedom of expression" and openness in discussing intimate details and personal information about people's lives have impressed Edna (*The Awakening* 14). Influenced by her earlier life with her father and later one with her husband, Edna has turned into the reserved woman she is currently. As a little child, Edna missed her mother who died when she was very young; she has never had a chance to feel the secure love that mothers surround their children with. Thus, despite her being close in age to Madame Ratignolle, Edna unconsciously perceives her as a "surrogate mother" (Heilmann 96). Adele does to Edna what real mothers do to their children when they sense their insecurity and inner pain; she comforts her and surrounds her with a loving atmosphere that encourages her to talk freely about herself, her beliefs, and her memories. These kinds of intimate conversations give Edna a chance to understand herself better and decide what she wants for herself.

This space of recalling and narrating old memories that Mrs. Ratignolle offers Edna is one of the first things that helps awaken her creativity. Based on the free association technique developed by Sigmund Freud, Carole Stone points out that "the act of recalling memories has been "an important step in the growth of [Edna's] power of free association, necessary in the creative process" (2). Edna's free talk and act of recalling memories enables her to connect with the deep, authentic creativity that is hidden in the space of her subconscious and has not been negatively affected by social constraints.

Further, the praise with which Mrs. Ratignolle showers Edna every time she looks at her paintings motivates Edna and supports her creativity. She sincerely believes that Edna has a true gift: “Your talent is immense, dear!” (71). Edna always looks for words of encouragement from someone with whom she exchanges love and trust, and that person is usually Mrs. Ratignolle, as such a thing “would help her to put heart into her venture” (*The Awakening* 71). The existence of this woman in Edna’s life provides her with the emotional support she needs to continue her art as a painter despite the refusal she sees in her husband’s eyes or hears from his mouth.

Adele’s supportive warmth not only manifests in the open conversations she has with Edna and the words of encouragement and praise she gives to her, but also in the new type of physical intimacy she introduces Edna to, which is physical intimacy between women.

In many places in the text, Chopin gives glimpses of that type of intimacy: they “seated themselves there in the shade of the porch, side by side”; “went away one morning to the beach together, arm in arm”; Adele “laid her hand over that of Mrs. Pontellier,… she clasped it firmly and warmly” (21) (20) (23). “She even stroked it a little, fondly” and “[Edna] had put her head down on Madame Ratignolle's shoulder” (23) (25). As indicated earlier, Edna, who missed her mother early in her life, grew up as a reserved woman. However, with the warm, loving nature of Madame Ratignolle, she learns to open up not only emotionally but also physically to those offerings of intimacy given by the other woman. At the beginning of their friendship, it is Adele who initiates those practices of physical intimacy when she “laid her hand over that of Mrs. Pontellier,” and it takes Edna some time to overcome her reserve and exchange that type of intimacy with Adele, and that is when she feels comfortable enough to “put her head down on Madame Ratignolle's shoulder.”

With the help and the guidance of Madame Ratignolle, Edna finds her lost way towards the supportive space of female friendship and intimacy, though she enters it hesitantly because she has never been so close physically or emotionally to other women. The strong friendship relation these two women share constitutes a private space, a metaphorical site in which they privately meet to love and nurture each other. These two women first meet with each other and enjoy each other's company when they are among other people of the Creole community. However, when their friendship becomes stronger and their trust in and love for each other grow deeper, they develop the tendency and the preference to meet alone in private: "The two women went away one morning to the beach together, arm in arm, under the huge white sunshade. Edna had prevailed upon Madame Ratignolle to leave the children behind…. In some unaccountable way they had escaped from Robert" (20). Also, elsewhere in the text: "they had just strolled down to the beach for a walk and to be alone and near the water" (21). Edna and Adele"s frequent private meetings have strengthened their relationship more and more and brought them closer to each other. The conversations they make become more honest and the opinions they discuss become bolder or 'immoral,' at least in the eyes of their conventional society, as when Edna freely expresses her unwillingness to sacrifice herself for her children or confesses her love for Robert.

When physical privacy accompanies one of the other two states of privacy, the psychological or the metaphorical, it strengthens it and deepens its effect. In Edna's case, the space of physical privacy or intimacy between women accompanies the metaphorical, supportive space of female friendship, resulting in strengthening the positive effect of this metaphorical space, and that is why Edna feels more nurtured and freer during and after her private meetings or walking on the beach with her friend, Madame Ratignolle. This takes us back to Jane Austen's

situation that Virginia Woolf highlights in *A Room of One's Own*. As indicated in the introduction to this dissertation, Woolf seems to believe that the physical form of privacy improves the psychological one when she discusses the circumstances in which Austen wrote literature. As she indicates, Austen did not have access to an uninvaded physical privacy; she wrote her novels in the general sitting room, and her physical space—as well as the psychological one—was constantly interrupted. Austen, as Woolf points out, could have written poetry, as an example of a more sophisticated genre of writing from her perspective, if she were given a locked room of her own (56). Unlike the few female literary writers in the eighteenth century, male writers had given themselves the absolute right to physical privacy within and outside of the domain of domesticity. In this respect, the more complex the forms of privacy the artist can have, the more creative and capable he or she is of producing more sophisticated pieces of art.

Mrs. Ratignolle's friendship with Edna only hinders Edna's creativity when she does not understand the urge Edna feels to practice her art and keeps reminding her of her role as a mother-woman in a conventional society: "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!" (*The Awakening* 14). Adele attempts to remind Edna of her priorities in life as a mother-woman, where children's needs should always come first. Xianfeng Mou argues that Adele has not arrived at the realization that Edna has arrived at since her early awakening moments: how much a woman's deep love for her family and children in particular "enslaves and threatens [a] separate sense of identity, especially that of an artist, for whom a separate space is essential" (112).

Moreover, because Mrs. Ratignolle is not a real artist, she does not understand real artists' urge to express themselves through their art. Artists' endeavor to express themselves

through art is almost impossible to accomplish without accessing a great deal of solitude and uninterrupted contemplation similar to those conditions male artists utilize when they produce varied forms of art. Adele fails to notice that when Edna does not practice her art, she feels miserable. Edna's situation reminds us of Woolf's image of the sixteenth-century woman artist "crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to" due to the social constraints imposed on her. In both societies, female artists are discouraged, mocked, and deprived of private spaces, the spaces that are necessary for any artist, male or female.

Despite their strong friendship, at times "the two women did not appear to understand each other or to be talking the same language" (*The Awakening* 62). Spending the summer at Grand Isle with Mrs. Ratignolle gives Edna the chance to observe these differences and recognize them, which in turn enables her to "learn about selfness" (Worton 111). The more she observes people around her ways of living, the more her vision of what life she wants for herself crystallizes and what path she should take becomes clearer. Edna learns a lot about herself, including the things she despises in other people's lives: for example, the "domestic harmony" of the Ratignolle family, in which Adele sacrifices herself as well as her life for her husband and children, depresses Edna. It has reminded her of her previous life, which she considers a "colorless existence" (*The Awakening* 72). Not missing her old life, a life that resembles Mrs. Ratignolle's, Edna becomes sure of her decision to leave her husband's house in a quest to reclaim her real identity and initiate a new life which she has absolute control over.

Even though Edna decides to live a life that is different than that of her friend, as they have quite contradicting personalities, she has needed this woman in her life, especially at the beginning of her awakening. Edna had not been able to articulate her insecurity, unhappiness, or identity struggle to anyone; she can understand them better with a sympathetic, unjudging

person, such as Adele, to listen to her. Edna's friendship with Mrs. Ratignolle and the emotional connection they share form a space, a metaphorical one that supports and nurtures her creativity. The space these two women share has gradually transformed into a private one when they have excluded other people from it as their friendship becomes more of a sisterly love and support.

On Grand Isle, Edna has been also introduced to another woman, Mademoiselle Reisz, who becomes later a close friend and a female inspiration and role model. Mademoiselle Reisz's personality is the opposite of Mrs. Ratignolle's. Edna has first felt drawn to her music, but as she knows her better, Edna has also become astonished by her personality and the way she lives her life. At the time Edna meets Mademoiselle Reisz, she has been longing for "a new [female] model" that has "a courageous soul," especially that Adele, her other friend, is incapable of understanding her needs for privacy and pursuing her art (*The Awakening* 81). Edna finds in Mademoiselle Reisz's personality what she misses in Mrs. Ratignolle's: the venture, the independence, the freedom, the courage, the ambition, the appreciation of privacy, and the uniqueness. Scholars such as Carole Stone believe that Mademoiselle Reisz cannot be considered as an artistic role model for Edna because she is "unmarried, childless, eccentric in manner and dress, and alienated from society" (2). Mademoiselle Reisz, in my opinion, does successfully fulfill this role, as she has encouraged Edna— directly as well as indirectly—to pursue her art, to move out into a house of her own, to choose her way in life, to support herself financially, and to rebel against the social norms and resist them even if that means losing her life. Also, by leaving her family, Edna acts like a "childless" woman, and by fulfilling her sexual desires with a man of a bad reputation, but aware of her sensitive needs as a woman, she can be perceived as an "eccentric" woman too.

The outstanding artist Mademoiselle Reisz devotes herself and her life solely to her art. To pursue the artistic goals she has set for herself, she claims the masculine right to privacy and solitariness. Mademoiselle Reisz has decided not to trap or lose herself in a marriage, so that she can stay focused on her music without the disturbance of a child or husband. Living in a house of her own helps her to protect herself from being controlled by her father or other family member. Realizing the importance of having a private space to retreat to while producing unique pieces of music, Mademoiselle Reisz encourages Edna to have her own place too where she can focus on her art of painting. In this way, as Michael Worton explains, Mademoiselle Reisz"becomes a privileged interlocutor for [Edna]: not only because of her artistry as a pianist but especially because she makes Edna think – and think differently" (115). Only a few months after their first meeting, Edna has completely adopted the mindset as well as the lifestyle of a liberated artist. For instance, besides creating the ideal environment for herself to work in, she becomes bolder in her art and freer in her life, not caring what other people may say about her art or her life.

Finally, unlike Mrs. Ratignolle, who always praises Edna's work and encourages her with her supportive words, Mademoiselle Reisz encourages Edna's work by criticizing it harshly and confronting her with her own doubts about her ability to commit to her art: "I do not know your talent or your temperament. To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts—absolute gifts—which have not been acquired by one's own effort." Mademoiselle Reisz makes it clear that she is not sure if Edna has the true talent and the required amount of courage to stand for her art in the face of her society: "to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul" (81).

Mademoiselle Reisz's tough critique of Edna's work can also be a hindrance for Edna's creativity and a killer for her motivation. However, "under [her] influence…, Edna begins to take

her own artistic endeavor, previously conceptualized as ‘dabbling,’ more seriously” (Heilmann 98). The older, more experienced artist has been trying to take Edna under her wing, nurturing her creativity and leading her to the professionalism she has created for herself. Mademoiselle Reisz has been trying to equip Edna with the necessary tools and qualities she needs to begin her career or vocation as a female painter in a conventional and sexist society. Thus, it becomes Edna’s role and responsibility to prove her talent and her serious quest to become the artist she has wished to be.

Mademoiselle Reisz’s relationship with Edna is more like that of an artist foremother and a daughter. Working in the art field as a pianist for many years has acquainted her with its demands and how much it costs a woman to be an artist in a conventional society such as theirs where there are only a few female artists. This relationship forms a private metaphorical space where the older artist secretly adopts the talent of the younger one and works on supporting her throughout her tough journey of becoming an artist. After her return from Grand Isle, Edna has kept visiting her ‘alone’ whenever she needs to be emotionally empowered and inspired. As a female artist supporting another female artist, Mademoiselle Reisz first confronts Edna with the harsh reality that awaits her if she is to break the social norms by becoming an artist, which means entering a domain that has been assumed to be a male one for years. Gilbert and Gubar summarize the struggles and needs facing women artists in patriarchal societies: "the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent need for a female audience” (qtd. in Stone 3). Female artists feel alienated and isolated in both social life and professional, and that is why they seek support from their sisters in these two domains.

Because women understand each other's struggles and suffering, they are more likely to help each other. If non-artist women are unwilling to help their artist sisters or too afraid to, then it is the artists' own responsibility to grow "strong wings" to survive and ''soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice," as Mademoiselle Reisz advises Edna (106). Mademoiselle Reisz warns Edna that the same people who have respected her in the past may start attacking her because of the way she chooses to live her life, which is against their norms and traditions. Edna takes the older artist's pieces of advice and wisdom into consideration and proceeds to establish her career as a painter.

The Inspiring and Empowering Space of Mademoiselle Reisz's Music

Mademoiselle Reisz and her powerful music play a significant role in Edna's awakening. Attending Mademoiselle Reisz's piano performance for the first time, Edna immediately feels "swept" by "a thousand emotions" (*The Awakening* 38). It is the first time that a performance has had such a strong power over her. It has evoked fierce feelings that she is not able to comprehend: "it was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth" (*The Awakening* 34). At the time Edna is introduced to the pianist and her powerful performance, she already feels uncertain about her life and her status as a mother-woman. Mademoiselle Reisz's music enhances her awakening and establishes the bold change that she has been ready for.

The effect of Madame Ratignolle's piano playing on Edna is completely different from that of Mademoiselle Reisz. Madame Ratignolle plays piano only to entertain her family while Mademoiselle Reisz plays it for her own joy and out of her deep love and appreciation for the music itself. When listening to the musical performance of Mrs. Ratignolle and others, Edna gets

lost in her thoughts, sees "before her imagination" "material pictures of… solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair" (*The Awakening* 34). Adele's music is very conventional and explaining this kind of the nineteenth-century music, the kind that allows listeners to get lost in fantasies making unconscious connections between different things, John Crowley says:

> Program music gave audiences a comforting sense of familiarity, the impression that they had heard it all before—as in a real sense they had since such music was highly conventional in form and content. It was not meant to challenge 'very fond' listeners... Rather it invited them to drift along gentle swells of free association. (105)

The familiarity of this music makes it hard for listeners to concentrate, as they perceive it on a subconscious level, and that is why they get lost in 'fantasies.'

On the other hand, the music of Mademoiselle Reisz captivates Edna and stimulates strong spiritual and sensual feelings in her that are completely strange to her: "the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her" (34). Edna has never experienced such spiritual elevation and joyful sensuality on a conscious level, and that is her first moment of being introduced to what is called 'musical sublimity.' Going through such experience, Edna loses her interest in conventional music played by other people and gains excitement when listening to Mademoiselle Reisz's playing.

Musical sublimity has a significant impact on Edna as an individual. As noted earlier, Edna meets Mademoiselle Reisz when she has been unconsciously ready for absorbing the empowering messages the pianist sends through her music. This experience "leads her to an increasing sense of inner reflection and awareness of her place in the universe" as a woman who is capable of being a lot more than an ordinary woman, performing conventional gender roles (Pflueger 475). Thus, in the unique music of Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna finds a private space for her that is spiritually and sensually empowering, and by taking full advantage of it, she carves

her way towards making an unprecedented change in her life and reaching self-fulfillment through her endeavor of pursuing her art and proclaiming her identity.

The powerful music of Mademoiselle Reisz empowers its listeners, and particularly the passionate ones such as Edna. The night she attends Mademoiselle Reisz's performance and walks into the powerful realm of it, she feels very empowered to do things she was afraid of doing before. For instance, in her early days at Grand Isle, Edna makes frequent attempts to learn to swim, but she fails all of them. However, the very night she is introduced to the non-traditional piano playing of Mademoiselle Reisz, she feels an impulse of power flows in her veins enabling her to challenge her body by learning to swim. Describing this moment, Chopin says: "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…as with a sweeping stroke or two she lifted her body to the surface of the water" (37). Edna finally succeeds in overcoming her fear of water, which is a new experience to her, and that success symbolizes her awakening and her new recognition of her body's potential.

Another incident that exemplifies the empowering effect of Mademoiselle Reisz's music on Edna manifests in Edna's defiance of her husband's commands, saying 'no' to him for the first time in her life. After attending Mademoiselle Reisz's performance that night, Edna feels overwhelmed with "thousands of emotions" that she cannot understand, as she tells Robert. Thus, she stays outside attempting to analyze them and that is when her husband comes to her and asks her to go inside the house, as it is neither appropriate nor safe for a woman to stay outside late:

> 'I can't permit you to stay out there all night. You must come to the house instantly.' With a writhing motion she settled herself more securely in the hammock. She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted… 'Leonce, go to bed,' she said, 'I mean to stay out

> here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you.' (42)

This time, Edna decides to listen to what her body and soul tell her and to act accordingly; they both encourage her to resist her husband's authority over her body and whole life and to act according to her own needs even if these needs are very simple, such as a desire for solitude or to take a break from the domestic responsibilities of a wife and a mother. In this incident, Edna's empowerment not only manifests in her defiance of her husband's commands and denying his authority over her, but also in the further brave step she takes in demanding his respect for her, the thing that she has never had the courage or the ability to do before.

Moreover, the motivational musical space that Mademoiselle Reisz has created for herself and invited Edna into inspires her to decide what she wants for herself. She has come to the realization that she will reach fulfillment and happiness if she becomes a professional artist and devotes more time to indulging herself in her painting. As soon as she returns to New Orleans, Edna begins to dedicate more time to drawing and to put a "great energy and interest" into it despite her husband's dissatisfaction with it (74). The music of Mademoiselle Reisz also encourages Edna to take more practical and bold steps to pursue her art. Edna has kept visiting Mademoiselle Reisz in her house, drawing strength from her powerful music, the thing that later gives her the courage to move into a house of her own while her husband is away, so that she can work more on her art.

The musical performance of Mademoiselle Reisz not only awakens overt aspects of Edna's creativity that she- as well as other people- is already aware of, but also other latent ones that she herself is ignorant of, such as her capability of feeling sexual desire. Chopin does not provide any explicit details about Edna's sexual relationship with her husband, but given that M. Pontellier has made it clear that he expects his wife to serve his (and their children's) needs

before her own, we can probably assume that their marriage, too, is typical of 19th century relationships, in which satisfying the husbands' sexual needs is the only aim regardless of the wives' own needs. However, after being introduced to the incredible music of Mademoiselle Reisz at Grand Isle, Edna becomes "pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire;" she experiences sensations that are completely new to her (40). She feels sexually passionate about Robert who also feels the same way about her, but they prefer to say nothing about their feelings for some time.

After returning to New Orleans, Edna works on strengthening her relationship with Mademoiselle Reisz and keeps visiting her as an attempt to "feed her sensual passion with the double stimulant of Chopin and Robert's letters" (Heilmann 98). Edna has never felt unmoved by or gotten used to the pianist's unique music; every time she listens to her piano playing, she experiences the same exciting, sensational feelings she felt while listening to her music for the first time at Grand Isle. Besides, Mademoiselle Reisz intensifies Edna's passions for Robert by providing her with the opportunity to read his letters while her favorite music is playing. Perhaps Mademoiselle Reisz's purpose of doing that is that she wants to encourage Edna to confront her growing feelings for Robert, admit them, and do something about them. Mademoiselle Reisz's music awakens Edna's love and sexual feelings in an unprecedented way and introduces her to sensations she has never thought she is capable of feeling.

The music of Mademoiselle Reisz creates a space from which she sends private messages for renovation that only Edna understands. Mademoiselle Reisz welcomes Edna into her empowering musical space and Edna enters it without hesitance, moved by the strong feelings this music evokes in her. The effect of Mademoiselle Reisz's musical messages have manifested in Edna's personal, artistic, and sexual awakening. They empower her and give her the drive to

go after her dream and proclaim her real identity regardless of the complexity of her situation.

Conclusion

Edna, who has had her life and real identity suppressed for many years by the patriarchal society in which she lives, finally becomes capable of taking back control over her life and proclaiming her real, lost self. Finding a way to release her creativity, Edna exploits the physical and psychological privacy she has had access to, mainly at Grand Isle and her own house, the pigeon-house. The ocean as well as the space outside her husband's cottage give her the chance to indulge in different moments of solitude that help her to identify the reasons for her unhappiness and the way she wants to live her life. Also, by moving to the pigeon house, Edna takes more courageous, practical steps to unleash her creativity, proclaim her right to privacy, and announce her economic and sexual independence. The metaphorical supportive space of Edna's friendship with Mrs. Ratignolle and the nurturing one of Mademoiselle Reisz have also been exploited by Edna and played no less important a role in supporting her awakening as well as personal and artistic growth. Lastly, the spiritual, empowering space of Mademoiselle Reisz's music has assisted Edna to discover her body's potentials and have ownership over it. By taking advantages of these highlighted private spaces, Edna develops different forms of creativity represented fundamentally in the way she expands her artistic skills of painting, figures out her real identity and embraces it, and walks in an unconventional path of life that she chooses for herself, one that is not dictated to her.

Private Spaces and Ursa's Blues Singing in *Corregidora*

The idea of utilizing private spaces to enhance and unleash women's creativity has been present in the life and the literature of Gayl Jones. Varied kinds of private spaces allow and enable the creativity of the writer Jones as well as her fictional character, Ursa, in her novel *Corregidora*. The metaphorical private space of mothers' stories, for instance, is one of the most significant private spaces that drastically influences the creativity of both Jones and Ursa. The chapter will begin by investigating the different states of privacy and forms of private spaces that the author, Gayle Jones, could access as a child, a teenager, and an adult based on her few given interviews as well as her biography. The metaphorical private space of mothers' stories has been a great source of inspiration for Jones; these stories provide her with the wisdom, the aesthetic language, the valuable history she needs to consult to enrich her writings. Further, the physical and the psychological private spaces Jones accessed in all phases of her life have enhanced her creativity as a literary writer.

Next, the chapter will shift into exploring the different private spaces that have contributed to the growth of Ursa's creativity. The metaphorical space of mothers' stories has also played a crucial role in the personal and the artistic life of Ursa. As will be explained later, the stories of the past have worked as both disabling and enabling factors for Ursa's creativity. Ursa, the protagonist, is an artist and her art is singing the blues in which she finds a private space for healing and documenting the history of abuse that she and her female ancestors have gone through. The physical and the psychological privacy Ursa accesses at the nightclubs where she works—represented mainly in their stages and the backrooms attached to them—allows her creativity. As will be discussed later, even though the stage is supposed to be a public space as it is a site that is in a public place, it feels quite private for Ursa. Singing on the stage enables Ursa

to connect better with herself and liberate her suppressed sexuality through her performance there. Other private spaces such as the metaphorical space of Great Gram's secret, her mother's private memory, and her dreams have also played an important role in unleashing her creativity and releasing her suppressed sexuality.

Gayl Jones's Perception of Privacy and Its Necessity for Women to Be Creative

The name of the African American writer Gayl Jones evokes enormous feelings of privacy and mysteriousness. Based on her interview with Claudia Tate, one can notice that Jones is a very private person, as when she indicates that she rarely gives interviews. Jones also indicates that she only likes to be known for her contributions to the literary field, not for anything personal. She told Tate, "the writers whom I would most like to be like are those whose works have a reputation, but the person, the writer, is more or less outside of it" (148). Thus, as readers we cannot know more than what Jones herself reveals and wants us to know: a lot about her literary contributions and very little about her personal life.

In a number of interviews, Jones has indicated that when she was a child, the stories her mother was writing and reading for her, the oral-tradition of Black communities, and her own readings in school and at home all equipped her with the necessary tools to enter the world of literary writing at an early age. Even though Jones started to write in second or third grade, she did not show her writings to anybody but her mother. The first time she stepped out of her comfort zone and decided to show samples of her writings to a member outside of her close family was in fifth grade, when she showed some of them to one of her teachers.

These details about her habit of writing stories in her childhood suggest that Jones certainly enjoyed a reasonable degree of physical and psychological privacy that allowed her to practice her creativity, represented in the acts of plotting, drafting, and writing her stories. We do

not know exactly what kind of private physical spaces she was able to access, but it is more likely that she had access to a physical space, perhaps not a locked one, that allowed her to hide her fictional writings and keep them away from the curious eyes of other residents of the house, except her mother, who already knew about them.

Further, the metaphorical space of her mother's stories, the stories of her "other mothers" in Black speech communities, and "people talk" functioned as sources of inspiration and nourishment for her future writing career. The terms "other mothers" and "people talk" signify certain things in Black communities that people there are quite familiar with, especially people who lived in the last century. To illustrate, in Black communities, the "other mothers" is a term that refers to "grandmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins [who] act as [real mothers] by taking on child-care responsibilities for one another's children. Historically, when needed, temporary child-care arrangements often turned into long-term care or informal adoption" (Stack & Gutman qtd. in Collins 178). Patricia Collins demonstrates that the job of these women was to take care of and be responsible for the children whose parents could not fulfill that role for them for any reason. These responsibilities included feeding, clothing, and educating the children (179). On the other hand, the term "people talk," quoted from Jones's interview with Michael Harper, refers particularly to "the heard stories" of previous generations of Black people and the remembered "patterns" and "rhythms" of the way they talk or say things (692-4). As a child and a teenager, Jones had been fascinated by the way old people around her talk; she recorded excerpts of their stories in her mind, with the "rhythms" they used to tell those stories; she had been able to recall them years later, as she was writing her own novels. Jones explains in her interview with Harper: "When I write I can also hear other people talking," which proves the strong effect of these stories on her art of writing whether they were told by her biological

mother, “other mothers,” or heard from “people talk,” and the role they play in inspiring her creativity (694).

Describing how her mother’s stories impacted her, Jones says, “but my mother’s reading the stories--I connected with that. And I connected with the stories people were telling about things that happened back before I was born.” The stories of her mother as well as her other mothers enabled her to relate to and reflect on the history of Black people and be influenced by their styles of narrating events and incidents. Besides, listening to people’s daily conversations in her small community provided her with the vocabulary and the conversational language used by people in that particular culture, so that she can write literature mimicking their real lives and accurately depicting the details of those lives. The word “listening” in this context means a lot more than the simple act of passive listening to the narrated stories; it includes the cognitive processes of observing, noticing, reflecting, and critiquing which are not possible if there was no efficient mental privacy. These cognitive processes are complex, and they require a lot of concentration that cannot be reached if one’s mental privacy is frequently interrupted. Further, the tasks of making reflections and giving critique require a great deal of frankness and honesty. They cannot be attained without a good space of freedom and feeling of security, which are two advantages mental privacy provides.

Jones appreciates her personal space, as it allows her to distance herself from other people and reach a satisfactory level of physical and psychological privacy. As a teen, Jones created an ‘idealistic’ image of herself as a writer. She always had imagined herself as an independent woman who would never marry or have children. Rather, she thought of herself as a single writer and a free soul who would spend her time traveling to different countries, mostly to “Spanish-speaking places” (Jones & Harper 711). Thus, for the teenaged Jones, both marriage

and motherhood seemed as if they would interfere with her future plans as well as her vision of herself as an independent, successful writer, as the responsibilities of both of them would lessen the private, personal space she hoped to enjoy. Jones's fears of losing her physical and psychological privacy manifest in her attitude towards marriage and her concern not to lose herself in mothering like other women in her community had. It seems that she believes that creative women like her mother and other mothers in her speech community could have accomplished more success and independence if they had had rooms of their own, rather than only rooms occupied by their husbands or dedicated to their children.

The complicated cognitive processes of an adult writer require a high degree of undisturbed physical and mental privacy. She wrote two novels—*Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*—short stories such as "White Rat," and poems. To produce such excellent pieces of literature, Jones usually takes a lot of notes and tries to consciously respond to what some critics might say about her work. Even though Jones changed her opinion regarding marriage after she met her husband, Bob Higgins, she does not have children.

Jones said and wrote nothing explicit about how having a space or a room of her own has been crucial for her as an artist. However, in her interview with Harper, she did mention how being an independent woman is very important to her when he asked about her fictional female characters and whether she is a feminist writer:

> I'm not really sure I know what a feminist is. I always write about independent women because that's important to me, and when you see particular women in certain ways, people have a tendency to say that's how you think. Right now, anyone who writes about independent women and/ or from the point of view of a woman that shows the wholeness of that woman can easily be called a feminist. (704)

Based on this response, Jones cannot see herself other than an independent, empowered woman. Autonomy and empowerment are two overlapping concepts. By being independent, an individual feels responsible and free, which are two empowering feelings. Assuming that autonomy is a part

of empowerment, we might be able to claim that Jones is keenly aware of the link that exists between privacy and autonomy (and hence, privacy and empowerment), as the former works as a "shield" to protect and support the latter. Dorota Mokrosinska argues that "privacy protects the individual interest in autonomy because it carves out a space around individuals in which they can direct their lives as they see fit irrespective of social and political pressures" (118). The fact that Jones thought she would never marry or have children suggests that she did not see those as compatible with being a woman artist, and that is why she decided to remain single and not to have children at any point in her life.

Ursa, Jones's main character in *Corregidora,* is an independent artist just like Jones. In the quote cited above, Jones mentions that she writes "from the point of view of a woman that shows the wholeness of that woman" (Jones & Harper 704). In the novel, Ursa seeks wholeness by reconciling with and healing herself, evolving and improving on a personal level, empowering herself financially and socially, and taking control over her own life and living harmoniously. Ursa is only able to reach this state of wholeness and productivity when she has been living alone and apart from her two husbands for more than 22 years. In the novel a private space is necessary for artists.

Private Spaces and Creativity in *Corregidora*

In *Corregidora,* Ursa, the protagonist, is a second-generation granddaughter who has been haunted and dominated by her Great Gram's and Gram's stories of oppression and suffering. To heal herself from the negative influence of her foremothers' narrations of the past on her as well as to release her suppressed creativity, Ursa first needs to understand that past, and then accept it. Her endeavor to reach a reconciliation with it has been promoted by a number of different private spaces that she has had access to. The metaphorical spaces of Corregidora women's narratives, of blues music, of Ursa's dreams, of her mother's private memory, and of her Great Gram's secret have all played a significant role in healing her physically and emotionally and freeing her suppressed creativity. The physical spaces of the nightclubs and the stage have also played a no less important role in supporting Ursa's creativity as well as quest for self-expression and sexual liberation.

The Metaphorical Space of Corregidora Women's Narratives

Jones's novel, *Corregidora,* depicts the harsh sexual and psychological abuse that Black slave women experienced at the hands of their slave-masters in the nineteenth century and how their history of abuse was inscribed on the souls of their daughters. "Through their suffocating narration," the experience of sexual abuse of Great Gram and Gram "becomes transposed across generations as these two women ultimately traumatize Mama and Ursa" (Li 132). The stories of abuse and oppression had been repeated over and over by the older women in the family so that the younger female generation would not forget them. Since Ursa was five years old, Corregidora women started to expose her to their stories, she says: "my mother would work while my grandmother told me, then she'd come home and tell me these stories and I'd go to school and come back and be told" (*Corregidora* 101). Mama and Ursa have grown up as mere

listeners and repeaters for the narrated experiences of the older women, and they do not get to live their own lives.

In *Testimony Crisis of Witness in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman and Tomas Donnelly demonstrate:

> The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels" (57-8)

Being exposed to Great Gram's and Gram's repeated stories, Ursa and Mama have absorbed their feelings of pain, disappointment, and anger resulting from decades of oppression. These older female generations' experiences of oppression and suffering are relived by their daughters, Ursa and her mother, preventing them from living a normal, happy life or building healthy relationships with the men in their lives. As Ursa tells Mutt, "Their past in my blood" (*Corregidora* 45).

The Corregidora women's purpose in narrating their experiences to their daughters is not that they only want them to feel the suffering they themselves went through, but to prepare them, the daughters, to act as witnesses, bear testimony, and remember the history of slavery and oppression represented in all its ugly details. The emphasis that Ursa's female ancestors put on the acts of narrating and transmitting their painful experiences comes as a reaction to Corregidora's, the slave master's, attempt to hide his crimes of abuse and oppression against Black slave women. Gram says:

> They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they didn't burn what they put in their minds. We got to burn out what they put in our minds like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood. (*Corregidora* 72)

Ursa's female ancestors will always keep remembering what they can refer to as evidence of oppression. Specifically, they will always recall Corregidora's sexual abuse and the rape of Great Gram and Gram; the relationship that resulted in three generations of women carrying his genes. Both the old women and their young daughters have been victimized; Great Gram's and Gram's bodies were colonized by the slave master and his men whereas the daughters' bodies are free, but their minds and souls are colonized and haunted by the ugly stories told to them of their ancestors.

The stories of Great Gram and Gram create a metaphorical space that works both to support and to hinder Ursa's creativity. This metaphorical space becomes a hindrance to Ursa's creativity when Great Gram's and Gram's "suffocating narration" leave her and her mother no space to think, act, or live independently. The stories of the ancestors force the daughters to feel imprisoned in the past and re-live the suffering from it even after slavery has been abolished. Thus, in that way, the life experiences of Ursa and her mother have become merely an extension to the ones of the old women. The only experiences that Ursa's mother has been able to narrate by heart for years were her foremothers', not hers. Later in the text, when Ursa asks her mother about her private memory, her mother starts talking until she loses herself in the narration: "Mama kept talking until it wasn't her that was talking, but Great Gram. I stared at her because she wasn't Mama now, she was Great Gram talking" (*Corregidora* 124). Mama and Ursa become obsessed with the past at the expense of their present. "Although Mama and Ursa both have experiences that might supplement the abuses experienced by the older Corregidora women, they are barred from placing their personal stories alongside those of their foremothers" (Li 134). Contrary to her act of passively narrating the past, Mama could have been able to be more

creative in her narration by actively participating in it, the thing that Ursa has been able to recognize and do after her accident, as will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Ursa's and Mama's sexualities have been negatively affected by the narrated stories of the past. Being dedicated to their mothers' lives to the extent that they played the role of sexually abused victims with their husbands, Mutt and Martin, the men they loved, they became sexually dysfunctional. Mama chooses to deny herself feeling "anything" when she has sex with Martin, who impregnated her with Ursa: "I hadn't even given myself time to feel anything else before I pushed him out...I wouldn't let myself feel anything" (*Corregidora* 117–18). Because deep in her mind and heart, Mama has absorbed the idea that all men, including Martin, are abusers, she resisted her feelings toward him and denied her sexuality. From her foremothers' narrations, Mama has been convinced that her main mission in life is making generations to leave evidence of Corregidora's oppression. That is why she got involved with Martin in the first place; she tells Ursa: "my body wanted you Ursa" (*Corregidora* 117). Unlike her mother, Ursa admits her problem and has tried to liberate her suppressed sexuality with both of her husbands, but she has not been able to; she has always felt sexually disabled and psychologically haunted by her ancestors.

Ursa's sexuality is complicated. Describing her sexual situation, Jennifer Griffiths writes:

> With no relief in either private or public life, Ursa feels overwhelmed by a sense of imminent danger related to sexuality. Her sexuality defines her essentially, and very little space exists for other aspects of her subjectivity. The legacy of Corregidora's plantation follows her, and she seems enslaved to others and owned by their desires (357).

In her private life, her sexual relationships with her first husband, Mutt, and second husband, Tadpole, were not satisfying for them or for her because "her mothers' histories thwart her own desire" (Gottfried 566). As a result, Ursa's marriages collapse when Mutt becomes possessive of her and Tadpole becomes unfaithful to her. Even though Ursa, in her intimacy with her

husbands, has had access to a physical private space that is uninvaded by other people and hides her from their curious gaze, in the very privacy of her bedroom she feels psychologically exposed and occupied by the souls and the sounds of her ancestors. "Corregidora, [the slave master who had sexually abused her Great Gram and Gram], haunts the space between their bodies and taints their intimacy, their lovemaking always has a sense of being watched" (Griffiths 357). Corregidora's soul, as well as her Great Gram's, were always present in her bedroom, and that is why her sexual creativity has been hindered.

The whole situation of Ursa's feelings of being haunted by her ancestors in her waking or sleeping times drives her first husband, Mutt, crazy. He yells at her: "Why do you have to remember that old bastard anyway?"(*Corregidora* 154). Also, elsewhere in the text, he tells her: "Whichever way you look at it, we ain't them" (*Corregidora* 151). Mutt who himself has a history of oppression as a Black male, though it is not as much as what Ursa's female ancestors went through, has decided to distance himself from his ancestors' past and live his own life, not theirs. Ursa has failed to follow in Mutt's footsteps for two reasons. First, knowing little or perhaps nothing about her father and the nature of the relationship that brought her parents together has always scattered her inner peace and remained an unsolved matter at the back of her mind. Second, Ursa's continued questioning about her Great Gram's untold secret makes her restless; there is one more important detail to the foremothers' narration and to reconcile with her past Ursa needs to unfold it. Ursa can only break with the chains of the past and distance herself from it, just as Mutt did, once she convinces her mother to open up about her own experience with Ursa's father and solves her Great Gram's puzzle: "what is it a woman can do to a man that makes him hate her so bad he want to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?" (*Corregidora* 173). Reconciling with the past is crucial in

Ursa's situation, as it is the only way leading to her salvation; it will enable her to protect her psyche from the frequent invasion of Corregidora and his women as well as reclaim her restricted sexuality.

Controlled by the stories of the past, Ursa has always believed that men perceive her as a mere sexual object paralleling the way Corregidora and his men perceived her female ancestors. Therefore, she tries to resist them. She always feels trapped by men's gaze; men are attracted to her body and physical appearance, and they drop by the nightclub where she works to entertain themselves with her attractiveness, perhaps more than her brilliant voice. Mutt tries to force her to quit her job right after they got married because he does not like the way men look at her. Ursa says: "He didn't like for me to sing after we were married because he said that's why he married me so he could support me. I said I sang because it was something I had to do, but he never would understand that" (*Corregidora* 3). It is possible that the main reason for Mutt to feel insecure about seeing other men gazing at his wife is because their sexual relationship was unstable and unfulfilling for both of them and for him in particular.

The metaphorical space of Great Gram's and Gram's narrations has become a source of inspiration and a booster for Ursa's creativity when she uses these narrations as materials for her songs. Feeling connected with the past, Ursa "sings out of her whole body," communicating her feelings of anger, disappointment, frustration, resistance, boldness, etc. to other people in a brilliant performance (*Corregidora* 46). Composing songs telling the history of her female ancestors enables Ursa to explore and revive her past in all of its "painful details and episodes of brutal experience" as well as seek reconciliation by '"squeezing from 'one's aching consciousness' a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism"'(Ellison 78). The more Ursa comes to a deep understanding and acceptance of her past, the more deliberate and creative she becomes in

explaining it to other people through her singing. In the novel, her second husband Tadpole visits her in her dream and asks her: “what blues do for you?” and she answers: “it helps me to explain what I can't explain” (*Corregidora* 56). Elsewhere in the novel, Ursa argues with her mother, trying to justify the reason she chooses singing the blues as her career, saying: “yes, if you understood me, mama, you'd see I was trying to explain it, in blues, without words, the explanation somewhere behind the words. To explain what will always be there” (*Corregidora* 66). By singing the blues, Ursa not only narrates stories of oppression and suffering, but also documents a history, and leaves evidence, and communicates strong feelings of pain and anger.

In the intimate metaphorical space of Great Gram’s and Gram’s narrations, “[a]ll three women are [so] obsessed with Corregidora that they cannot step back from the experience long enough to think about how some of their memories might affect Ursa, who is five when they begin speaking to her about him” (Allen 269). Even though the three women’s memories and narrations have forced Ursa to re-live their past by imagining its ugly details and absorbing their pain, it might have benefited her in other ways. Looking at Ursa's situation from a different angle, we might see that growing up in such a space and being surrounded by older women enable her to acquire their wisdom and to be acquainted with the history she sings “out of her whole body” (*Corregidora* 46). Janice Harris writes that “without [the history of] Corregidora [and his women,] “she would have nothing to bear, no past or present to sing about, no notes, no lyrics” (4). These same dominating narrations that have victimized her and silenced her for years, inspire her indirectly to resist and adopt a distinct voice that allows her later to narrate her unique life experience alongside her female ancestors’.

An interesting contradiction emerges when contrasting the role stories of mothers and ancestors play in the life of Jones and that of Ursa, her female fictional character. In both

situations the stories of elders create private metaphorical spaces. However, for Jones, that private space has been always a boosting and inspiring site for her creativity whereas for Ursa, it has sometimes hindered creativity. Deciding whether a certain private space or a form of privacy is nurturing or disabling depends on the state of this privacy—if it is imposed or not. When spaces are imposed on women and not freely chosen by them, they more likely work as a hindrance for creativity rather than nourishing it. Jones's mother did not force her daughter to enter into the metaphorical space of stories that had been always right in front of her with the stories her mother consistently narrates to her; she would rather invite her to enter into that space, and Jones gladly accepted that invitation knowing that she always has the freedom to choose whether to stay or to leave. In contrast, Ursa's mother and grandmothers impose the private space of their narratives—that they repeat over and over—on her and attempt to imprison her there, so that she is always forced to remember them. As a result, for many years, Ursa has felt that the stories of elders in her life are mostly confining and more of a burden that suffocates her creativity. If Ursa were given a choice between joining the space of their narratives or leaving it from the beginning, she would not have struggled to see them as inspiration and figure out how to make them a source of creativity.

Another significant reason why the stories of ancestors sometimes help and other times do not lies in the way these stories are thought about or told. Before elaborating on this point, it will be beneficial to briefly explain how mothers' stories have been employed in Black communities, particularly during the last century. In fact, stories, especially oral ones, had been generally utilized by African American mothers as a means of transferring their knowledge and experiences to their daughters. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment,* Patricia Collins indirectly emphasizes the significant role mothers'

stories play within the frame of mother-daughter relationships. Collins first explains that "The mother/daughter relationship is one fundamental relationship among Black women. Countless Black mothers have empowered their daughters by passing on the everyday knowledge essential to survival" (102). Two of the primary ways Black mothers utilized to pass on their knowledge and wisdom to their daughters are through the lengthy conversations they have with their daughters and the stories they narrate to them. The mothers' knowledge and stories of wisdom "encourage Black daughters to develop skills to confront oppressive conditions" and "survive the sexual politics of intersecting oppressions while rejecting and transcending these same power relations" (184). By employing their stories this way, Black mothers make sure that they are in a position of subjects, not objects, in their narratives, and that they tell the stories from a perspective of heroines, not victims, so that their stories become a call for positive change and a source of pride, not shame, to their whole community. Black mothers are keen to use this medium, their stories, as a nurturing, supporting space through which they empower their daughters, inspire them, and communicate feelings of self-reliance and self-worth to them. When female ancestors' stories are mostly thought about and used as a site of resistance, empowerment, and inspiration, they foster the daughters' creativity rather than suffocating it.

In Jones's case, the stories of her mother and the whole tradition of storytelling contributed to the overall growth of her creativity. Jones learned to perceive those stories, their lessons of wisdom, and their aesthetic language as a rich and valuable cultural heritage and a source of empowerment, which manifests in many of her interviews. For example, in an interview with Michael Harper, Jones had been asked about storytelling and the reason she likes it, and she answers: "When you tell a story, you automatically talk about traditions, but they're never separate from the people, the human implications. You're talking about language, you're

talking about politics and morality and economics and culture" (693). As indicated in Jones's autobiography, the stories of Jones's mother and 'other mothers' played a significant role in inspiring and promoting her creative talent in many different ways. The metaphorical private space of stories allowed her to relate to the history and the culture of her people and touch upon it in her literary works and also to be influenced by the styles and the language that her mother as well as other women in her community use in their stories of the past.

In the situation of Ursa and her mother, the stories of female ancestors have been perceived as a source of shame and the only reason they are narrated is, as indicated earlier, to bear witness to the oppression that the elder women experienced at the hands of the slave-master and his men. The perspective that focuses only on the victimization of Black, slave women from which Great Gram and Gram narrate their stories leads Ursa and Mama to perceive their female ancestors mostly as weak and helpless women. The older women's way of narrating the past and thinking about it not only affects them negatively, but also their granddaughters, particularly Ursa. To make those stories a source of inspiration and pride, Ursa makes some adjustments within them. For instance, after discovering her great grandmother's secret and realizing that the old woman had always had power over Corregidora, Ursa decides to depict her in a position of power rather than weakness in her songs: "what is it a woman can do to a man that makes him hate her so bad he want to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?" (173). This realization enhances her singing and is one of the things that helps cure her sexual distortion and release her suppressed sexuality.

Moreover, to make the narratives of the elder women inspiring and enhancing for creativity, Ursa decides to reject the role of a passive narrator of their stories of victimization that the older women have tailored for her. Thus, she starts to participate in the narratives by

incorporating her life story side by side to theirs. Ursa's participation in the narratives enables her to come up with more creative songs that portray the suffering of her grandmothers as well as hers from a new and different perspective—the perspective of a strong, empowered woman: "I wanted a song that would touch me, touch my life and theirs… A new world song" (59). In one of her early songs after recovering from her accident, she creates a song that touches upon her life with her ex-husband Mutt, and that song suggests Ursa's adoption of a stronger personality: "'Come over here, honey.' 'Naw.' 'I won't treat you bad.' 'Naw.' 'I won't make you sad.' 'Naw'" (98). The song portrays Ursa as a courageous woman who refuses to tolerate any further verbal or physical abuse and who is aware of her self-worth and in control of her life. It takes Ursa twenty two years to forgive Mutt and accept to be his wife again.

Lastly, the space of the grandmothers' stories is not only categorized as a private metaphorical space, but also as a space of marginality like the space bell hooks writes about in many of her articles, including "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" and "Marginality as Site of Resistance." As Ursa mentally and artistically matures after her accident, she decides to make several adjustments to the space of her grandmothers' narratives, so it becomes an enabling site, not disabling for her creativity. Just as hooks suggests, sites of oppression or places thought of as sites of oppression need to be "reconstructed" and "recomposed" by the counter-hegemonic power, in this case Ursa and her mother as they are the ones who have been forced into that space of grandmothers' narratives (qtd. in Soja 12). The way Ursa "reconstruct[s]" and "recompose[s]," the space of the elder women's narratives to make them sites of empowerment, resistance, and pride is, by first, turning it into a positive space that promotes positive change. As indicated earlier, she has particularly altered the perspective from which these stories are told and the role her great grandmother and grandmother play in them.

Instead of depicting Corregidora women in a position of victimized objects in their own life stories, Ursa starts to perceive them as heroines and to portray them as powerful women in her songs as well. Second, she makes the space of their narratives positive by modifying the way she looks at it from an imposed space into a chosen one. The chosen marginal space, the one that hooks advocates, usually empowers and boosts one's creativity whereas the forced one hinders it and restrains it. This is the main reason why hooks encourages her fellows to think of their stay in the space of marginality as a choice that creates a site of "radical possibility," "resistance," and empowerment— not "deprivation" and victimization (qtd. in Soja 98). As Ursa consents to stay in the space of her female ancestors' narratives, she makes the decision to shed light on the power her Great Gram had had over Corregidora, so that the old woman no longer appears a weak, helpless woman, and her past becomes a source of pride.

The Blues as A Healing Space

Ursa's decision to sing the blues is her first serious step toward locating her voice. The blues, whether it is a performance or lyrics, does not fall in the category of singing approved by her mother, which is mostly the category of worship songs; Ursa's mother believes "that songs are devils….the voice is a devil….Unless your voice is raised up to the glory of God" (*Corregidora* 53). However, Ursa decides to sing the blues to adopt an attitude and take a route that differs from that of her mother(s). In fact, the blues is a musical genre that was invented by Black people and is directed mainly to them. This kind of music explicitly discusses the topic of women's sexuality, including their sexual relations with men, which clashes with her foremothers' attitude towards sexual relations and talking about sex openly. Demonstrating "the women's blues of the twenties and early thirties" and its presumed message, Hazel Carby writes:

> [it] is a discourse that articulates a cultural and political struggle over sexual relations: a struggle that is directed against the objectification of female sexuality within a patriarchal

> order but which also tries to reclaim women's bodies as the sexual and sensuous subjects of women's song. (333)

Thus, Ursa's indulgence in the act of singing the blues is a plain departure from her female ancestors' attitude towards sex and the first practical step she takes toward releasing her sexuality as well as creativity.

The blues music, in itself, is another metaphorical space that helps Ursa unleash her creativity. By singing the blues, Ursa becomes creative in the art of manipulating men and appearing in the image of the seductive, elusive woman. Men attend the nightclub where she sings, nearly every night, because they are drawn to her irresistible, alluring image expressed in her songs and performances. When she sings the blues, Ursa is capable of shifting her status from a mere sexual object into a sexual subject; this contradicts her position in real life, with her two husbands. Ursa assumes a persona when she is in public or performs her songs. When a big band from Chicago comes to Dixieland, Mutt and Ursa attend their performance and go out on the dance floor. Dancing together, Mutt has had his hands on her “behind,” which embarrasses and angers her; as she yells at him later “You didn’t have no right to put your hand on me, though, not where people could see” (164). Ursa mainly feels angry with Mutt because he attempts to threaten the false image she has created for herself by harassing her in front of the other attendants of the club where the band sings, claiming authority over her body.

The metaphorical space of Ursa's music heals her emotionally and physically and provides her with an alternative, creative way of leaving evidence after her accident of falling down the stairs that leaves her sterile at a young age. Ursa relieves her sorrow creatively when she chooses to use her negative feelings of sadness and depression as a catalyst for her singing. Ursa says: "every time I ever want to cry, I sing the blues. Or there would be glasses of tears" (46). After her accident, Ursa rushes to get back to work because singing helps her understand

what has happened to her and why, and accelerates the process of her physical and emotional recovery.

Ursa miscarries her baby and has her womb removed. Thus, she is no longer able to have children with Corregidora's genes to bear witness to his oppression and sexual abuse of her Great Gram and Gram. As Ursa indicates in the text, since her early years she had been taught that her main purpose in life is “making generations.” She says: "what my mama always told is Ursa, you got to make generations" (10). However, despite her inability to have children of her own to bear witness, she does not accept that she is doomed to be a failure. Donia Allen explains:

> As Ursa heals emotionally and physically, she realizes that she can respond to the call to "make generations" by singing blues. Ursa comes to understand that "making generations" has different kinds of meanings: that while it is a literal call to make babies, it is also a call to pass on important history about slavery to others, which she can do with or without a womb. (268)

Ursa's personal crisis of losing her ability to have children forces her to think creatively, to find an alternative way of documenting the history. Thus, she resolves to leave testimony by "relocat[ing] her creativity from her womb to her throat" (Gottfried 568). Even though she can no longer have children with Corregidora’s genes to bear witness to his sexual oppression of her Great Gram and Gram, she can document that abuse in her songs for years to come. Narrating those experiences, she brings all the associated feelings of pain, anger, and resistance, to the public in the club where she works. Before the accident, Ursa’s main purpose of composing songs and singing the blues was to express herself and reclaim her sexuality in the art of blues singing whereas after, her main focus shifts to leaving evidence, an oral record of slavery and the slave master's oppression of her Great Gram and Gram.

Mama does not like Ursa to narrate the Corregidora women’s experiences to the public through the blues. To convince her mother, Ursa reminds her that her Great Gram liked the

blues. Mama replies that “listening to the blues and singing them ain't the same” (103). Her mother's response suggests that for her, “there is a profound difference between acknowledging the difficult experiences of someone else and articulating one's own pain. Mama is accustomed to absorbing stories of abuse that do not belong to her” (Li 137). She grew up as a mere listener to Corregidora women’s narratives and a passive participant in them. Even though Mama herself has gone through different experiences of oppression, she has never tried to incorporate any of them alongside those of the elder women. For instance, she has never narrated to Ursa the details about how she got involved with Martin, her father, and how they broke up until Ursa begs her to open up about those memories as they are one essential element in the healing process Ursa goes through. Also, unlike Ursa, Mama has never attempted to change the perspective from which the stories of Corregidora women have been told— she narrates them the exact way she heard them. As a result, the narratives of the past have never become an inspiration to Mama because of the way she holds on to her passive role of narrating them and perceiving them as a mere record of victimization. Mama’s passivity and attitude towards the narratives could be attributed to the way she is deeply consumed in them; she cannot think outside them or perceive them as a disabling factor in her life.

Ursa is lucky that she finds this artistic space and tradition of the blues ahead of her when she needs to express her feelings and reflect on her life in touching songs. Neither Ursa nor other blues singers in the text has initiated this tradition, but they participate in it in their own ways. Unlike many female artists, these singers have many artist foremothers before them whose experiences and arts they refer to when they need guidance. As Woolf has observed, having an artist foremother(s) paves the success path for the daughters. When Ursa's voice changes after the accident, she is afraid that this change in her voice might affect her singing negatively, but

she is comforted by Cat who compares her to her foremother singer, Ma Rainey. Cat says: "Like Ma, for instance, after all the alcohol and men, the strain made it better because you could tell what she'd been through. You could hear what she's been through" (*Corregidora* 44). The tough experiences in Ma's life, as well as Ursa's, helped to mature their voices and empower their messages. After her recovery, Ursa becomes even more creative when her voice becomes harder and stronger. Ursa's own experience of pain and struggle makes her voice even more attractive and moving as the owner of the second club comments: '"strong and hard but gentle underneath…The kind of voice that can hurt you…Hurt you and make you still want to listen"' (98). Also, as indicated earlier, she has not only narrated the history of her people as it is; she has also revised it and narrated her own experiences, and that is when she climbed the stairs leading to her liberation from the strains of the past.

According to Woolf, women's social and economic empowerment grants them many privileges. As she indicates in *A Room of One's Own*, the economic and social empowerment she gained from her aunt's legacy gave her the privilege to be bolder and more liberated in expressing her opinions therefore becoming more creative. Resembling Woolf, Ursa has gained a lot of privileges, as she becomes empowered by her career and the money she earns from it. Unlike many women around her, Ursa owns private physical spaces of her own and has complete control over them in domestic domains or public ones.

The Nightclubs and The Stage as Private Physical Spaces

Ursa is obsessed with her privacy because of the way it helps her to connect with her real self and deal with her own problems as well as supports her quest for self-expression and sexual liberation. Ursa first decides to distance herself physically from the plantation of Corrigedora and his women, the site of his abusing her female ancestors, as well as her mother's house, the place

where the suffering of her grandmother is kept alive by narrating and re-narrating the stories of Corrigedora's women. She moves into a house of her own, before getting married, in a new place so that she can have an identity differs than that of the other Corregidora women— such as the identity of a heroine not a victim. Being away from the plantation, Ursa becomes capable of following her dream of becoming a singer and channeling her contradictory emotions into her art of singing and composing songs.

Another example that demonstrates how Ursa's privacy assists her to heal from her emotional wounds and express her real feelings is revealed at the incident when she discovers her second husband, Tadpole, cheating on her. That night, she refuses to show her vulnerability and weakness to him as well as other people. Thus, she waits until she checks in at a hotel, and in the privacy of her room, Ursa allows her feelings to come to the surface, as she says: "I'd kept from crying until I got in the room, and then I couldn't keep from crying" (89). Ursa ends up spending many days at that hotel room, so that she can collect herself and regain control over her feelings without disturbance.

Further, Ursa maintains and enjoys a great deal of privacy at the nightclubs she works for. The stage and the backroom attached to it enable her to distance herself physically and psychologically from other people, including her husband, Tadpole, and later her employer Max, the owner of the second nightclub. Whether she is singing or resting, Ursa usually enjoys uninvaded privacy. Ursa's reason for resigning her first job as a singer at the Happy nightclub could be attributed to her feeling that her very privacy has become threatened by Tadpole, her second husband and the owner of that nightclub. Thus, she takes the decision to work for another nightclub, the Spider. Being accompanied by her husband at home and in the club restricts her

privacy, as Tadpole always has the exclusive right to break her solitude and invade her space based on his status as both her husband and the owner of the club.

At the Spider, Ursa likes to retreat in the backroom between her singing sessions, resting and having coffee. She has been so appreciative of the solitary moments she accesses there until Max, the manager, develops the habit of interrupting her solitude by coming over more frequently: “I was in the back room having coffee when he came in. It was between the shows” (92). When he one day finally clarifies his intension of becoming more than a friend to her and attempts to progress things further between them, she strictly stops him. Ursa also demands that he never invade her physical or personal space again or she would quit her job there: “Don’t come over here no further, Max…Otherwise, I’ma go walk out” (95-6). Max also transgresses people’s personal space—to some extent—when he gets physically too close to them while he is talking, which makes them uncomfortable, as Ursa describes: “he like[s]to get right up in [their] face[s]…I didn’t like him so close…[I] felt awkward” (93). When Max finally understands that Ursa is not interested in having an intimate relationship with him, he accepts her desire and promises that “there won’t be no more [harassing]” (96). Sticking to his word that he would respect Ursa’s personal and physical space at the club, he makes that work environment ideal for her on a personal level and enabling for creativity on the artistic one, as a singer, a performer, a song composer, and a piano player.

The privileges Ursa gains at her work are noticed by other people. Admiring Ursa's work and its many privileges, Cat tells her that she is so fortunate that she can keep her own hours and do what she likes: "you are doing something you like doing. You got a talent. A talent or a craft, that's what I say, and don't have those sons of bitches hanging on your neck all the time..." Ursa replies: "Yeah, I like it…There's always something you can do to keep your own hours"

(*Corregidora* 29-30). By having fixed work schedule—she works the same number of hours and days every week, Ursa also has the advantage of having the same, undisturbed times and forms of privacy at her work.

Beside the backroom, the stage is another private space that influences Ursa's creative performance. Describing the stage where Ursa performs her songs, she says, "it wasn't like a theatre stage, but more like a reserved space on the floor, with a piano" (*Corregidora* 158). Even though the stage seems as if it is quite public, it is a private space for her. It is quite true that the stage can be seen as a public space because it is located in a public place, the nightclub, but it is not freely accessible by other people attending the nightclub, particularly during the artist's singing sessions. Thus, when Ursa sings, the stage becomes her own space that gives her a reasonable expectation of privacy. This physical space has never been invaded by anyone during her singing sessions, as the text suggests in many places. People would always wait for her to finish singing then they start talking to her or asking her questions, as in the situation in which Max offers her a job at his nightclub: "One evening after I'd finished singing, a man come up to me and offered me a job singing Saturdays nights at the Spider" (85). Also, elsewhere Ursa explains Jim's surprise to see her singing for the Spider, as he is used to seeing her at the Happy and attending her performances there: "when I finished Jim came up to say something to me" (86). As is apparent in these two examples, Ursa most of the time states that she "finishe[s] singing" then people come talk to her. This also suggests that people respect the state of privacy she indulges in when she sings on the stage and never attempt to interrupt it. In this respect, the stage, as a psychological private space promotes Ursa's creativity by providing her with the advantage to connect with her innermost self, releasing her feelings in beautiful, moving songs. On the other hand, as a territory, a physical private space, the stage enables her body to wander

freely, liberating itself from the stereotypical image of women's bodies as attainable sexual objects for males' desires. It also allows her to temporarily reconcile with her history of sexual abuse as well as liberate her suppressed sexual desires.

Working at the Happy, the first club, she used to share the stage with a piano player, but that had not prevented her from singing beautifully. When she later works for the Spider, the second night club, she does not share the stage with anyone else—at least at the times she is performing her songs; she is the one who sings and plays the piano. Having the whole stage for herself fuels her creativity even more, as it also helps improve the quality of her psychological privacy. Accessing a higher degree of both physical and psychological privacy strengthens her singing performance and makes it more distinct.

The stage and the attached room to it in which Ursa rests between her singing sessions are the main physical spaces she retreats in at her work. Both of these spaces contradict partly Woolf's vision of ideal private spaces necessary for producing art, as they are open spaces with no lock on them. However, they can still conform to her ideal vision of private physical spaces in the way they permit the artist’s act of socializing and communicating with other people when she wants to and prevent it when she needs to be let alone. When Ursa does not appreciate the company of other people, like when she does not want to talk to Jim, she remains on the stage or goes to the private room prepared for her in the club. In contrast, when she feels the urge to break her solitary state and communicate with other people, seeking inspiration or enjoying their company, she leaves her spot on the stage and walks around the club's tables conversing with them, as when she onetime goes over to Jim's table between sessions and starts talking with him. In this respect, the stage falls into Virginia Woolf's category of the new, private physical spaces

she urges women to create for themselves away from the inefficient traditional domestic spaces they were restricted to in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Being physically and psychologically away from her two husbands for years has also allowed Ursa to have the time and the space she needs to rethink the past, reconcile with it, and heal her soul and body from its negative influence on her. At the end of the novel, we see that Ursa is finally able to break with the chains of the past and to follow in Mutt's footsteps; the ancestral experiences will be always valued and remembered, but not re-lived. In their separation, Ursa has become more successful in her career as a singer and a more creative composer when she finishes writing the lyrics of her new song. The song is built upon the history of Corregidora and his women: "a Portuguese song, but not a Portuguese song." At the same time, it opens up a space for new experiences from the present as well as promising ones from the future in which everyone's distinct experience is appreciated, “A new world song. A song branded with the new world” (*Corregidora* 59).

The Metaphorical Space of Ursa’s Dreams, Mama’s Private Memory, and Great Gram’s Secret

Accessing the metaphorical and psychological space of her dreams, Mama’s private memory, and Great Gram’s secret helps Ursa to accept her past and use it as a source of inspiration. It also enables her to know more about her mother’s and Great Gram’s sexual relations with the men in their lives, so that she can heal and release her sexual creativity. Ursa’s dreams are a rich land for both self-exploration and inspiring creativity. As mentioned earlier, Ursa's singing of the blues allows her to express herself; however, it is important to note that this act of self-exploration and expression starts first from her dreams and seeps into her waking moments. Sigmund Freud argues:

> That dreams can continue the intellectual activities of the day and carry them to a point which could not be arrived at during the day, that they may resolve doubts and problems, and that they may be the source of fresh inspiration in poets and composers, seems, in the light of numerous records, and of the collection of instances compiled by Chabaneix, to be proved beyond question. (48-9)

Ursa explores in-depth the events of the past and her complicated feelings about them in the private space of her dreams when she imagines herself conversing with both Mutt and Cat. After she understands the past in all of its painful details, she works on replacing her attitude towards it from one of shame into another of full acceptance. The problematic memories and feelings become later "the source of fresh inspiration" for the songs she composes and sings at the place of her work.

Ursa's entrance to the psychological space of her mother's private memory has helped her to reconcile completely with her past and reclaim her sexual desire. Ursa first decides to spend some intimate time with her mother, so that both of them have the chance to talk about their "lived" experiences, not the "spoken one[s]" (*Corregidora* 108). She is specifically thrilled to explore Mama's 'private memory' and to investigate the nature of the relationship that brought Mama together with Martin, Ursa's father. Ursa might find great relief to know that her parents genuinely liked each other, and their relationship from which Ursa came to life was not one of oppression or abuse, but of love and passion.

Stephanie Li claims that Ursa also needed to "know that it is possible for a Corregidora woman to experience emotions and states of being outside Great Gram and Gram's dominating narrative," so that she herself can release her suppressed sexuality (136). When Mutt asked her to stop having those dreams about Corregidora and his women, Ursa replies that she will not stop having them until she "feel[s] satisfied that [she] could have loved, that [she] could have loved you, till [she] feels satisfied, alone, and satisfied that [she] could have loved" (*Corregidora* 103).

Ursa is willing to explore her soul's and body's capability of giving and receiving love in her future relationships with men.

After getting the information she longed for from her mother, Ursa proceeds to go the last step towards healing her sexual distortion, which is finding out her Great Gram's secret, the missing information within her foremother's narrative. Ursa has been thinking about this question: "What is it a woman can do to a man that makes him hate her so bad he want to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?" (*Corregidora* 173). Ursa has come to realize that her Great Gram was not a submissive victim in terms of her sexual relation with Corregidora, as she had imagined; instead she exploited his sexual vulnerability to practice power and aggression over him.

Ursa meets Mutt after 22 years of separation, and in their intimacy, she performs fellatio on him, and that is the moment when she finally reaches to an answer to the question that has been haunting her for years and discovers her Great Gram's secret (Harb 127). Ursa assures herself that "it had to be sexual, I was thinking, it had to be something sexual that Great Gram did to Corregidora. . . . In a split second, I knew what it was, in a split second of hate and love I knew what it was. . . . A moment of pleasure and excruciating pain at the same time…" (*Corregidora* 184). Ursa's meeting with Mutt at the end of the novel suggests that she finally overcomes her sexual problems and liberates her sexuality.

Ursa's creative decision to exploit the narrated events of the past after revising them and using them as a source of inspiration and materials for composing songs turns the metaphorical space of Ursa's Great Gram's and Gram's narrations into a boosting factor for her creativity. Ursa's act of immersing herself in the healing space of singing the blues allows her to recover emotionally and physically from her accident of falling down the stairs, to understand her past,

and to document history as well as to leave evidence in a creative way. The private physical space of the nightclubs and stage enables her, the artist, to feel more liberated and connected to herself as she maintains her private personal space and becomes more creative and successful in her singing career. Lastly, figuring out her Great Gram's secret, entering the metaphorical space of her unconsciousness through her dreams, and exploring her mother's private memory have all helped Ursa to release her suppressed sexuality with her husband, Mutt, twenty-two years later.

Private Spaces and Celie's Art of Designing Pants in *The Color Purple*

Several private physical and metaphorical spaces shape the personalities and unleash the creativity of Alice Walker and her fictional character Celie in her novel, *The Color Purple*. Both Walker and Celie have experienced tough childhoods, and certain incidents in their life urge them to look for real and imagined spaces to retreat to. The private spaces the author and her female character exploit enable them to heal and empower themselves, developing their identities and liberating their creative talents: literary writing, in the case of Walker, and designing and sewing pants, in the case of Celie. This chapter will begin by investigating the main private spaces that enable the creativity of Walker as a child and an adult. Walker's room and the field are the main private physical spaces she accesses as a child and benefits from in developing her intellect and writing skills. As a successful writer, Walker has become more insistent on guarding her privacy, as when she escapes the crowded big cities to retreat to summer houses. Metaphorical spaces such as the space of spirituality and the space of motherhood also play an important role in empowering Walker and inspiring her creativity, as will be discussed later.

Next, the chapter will explore the private spaces enabling the creativity of Walker's fictional character, Celie. The main physical spaces that contribute to shaping Celie's identity are her mother's house, Albert's house, and Shug's house. Moving among those houses, Celie's personality and artistry grow gradually until she reaches her dream of becoming a confident, independent woman and successful, creative pant designer at her final return to her mother's house. The private metaphorical space of connecting to God and understanding Him has been also crucial to Celie's empowerment and ability to stand in the face of patriarchal oppression. Finally, the space of Celie's friendships with other women in the house and her emotional bond

with them works as an empowering and inspiring metaphorical site for her. In the privacy of their space, Shug and Sofia educate Celie directly and indirectly about the importance of resisting oppression and waking up her potential as a powerful woman and human being. Shug significantly supports Celie's creativity. She provides her with the two key factors necessary for freeing women's creativity that Woolf has discussed in *A Room of One's Own*: access to a nurturing physical space that allows inclusion and exclusion; and financial support. In Shug's house, Celie has been given the dining room as a small factory to work on her pant designs and the money to supply her business and make it successful.

As noted in the introduction, fictional female characters first get empowered, then they become able to free their creativity. This is quite true in the case of Celie; she first gets empowered by the metaphorical space of spirituality and connection to God as well as the metaphorical space of bonding with women before she can unleash and practice her creativity. Celie is an artist and her artistry manifests in her ability to design perfect pants of different sizes and models. As a creative and talented pant designer, Celie spends a lot of time dreaming about and imagining the designs she plans on making. Her pants are unique in the way they are not only customized to fit people's bodies, but also their personalities.

Private Spaces in The Life of Alice Walker

Time spent in physical and psychological private spaces, such as Walker's solitary moments in her room and wandering in the field as a child, help to develop her intellect and sharpen her imagination. As an adult and a writer, Walker's choices of physical and psychological privacy become more varied and luxurious. These spaces enable her retreating to summer houses and performing solo activities. Other kinds of metaphorical spaces, such as the

spaces of spirituality and motherhood, play a no less important role in fostering Walker's creativity as a writer.

Alice Walker's exceptional relation with solitude started at a very early age: "I have always been a solitary person," she states in her interview with John O'Brien (1). Walker's quest for solitude was first an urgent necessity that became later in life a choice and preference. When Walker was merely 8 years old, she was accidentally shot in one of her eyes by her brother with one of the family's guns, which resulted in blinding that eye. After this accident, Walker started to experience feelings of shame and embarrassment because of the way her eye scar looked. To survive and protect herself from being stared at by curious people and bullied by cruel kids, including her classmates, she managed to retreat within her family's house, or to the fields at the times she needed to escape the noisiness of the crowded house.

In her childhood, she used to spend those hours of physical or/and psychological retreat reflecting on things she saw or heard around her, and learning from them. Walker learned a lot from her own experience as well as the experiences of other people. Speaking about her solitariness during that period, Walker says:

> I believe, though, that it was from this period--from my solitary, lonely position, the position of an outcast--that I began to really see people and things, to really notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about how they turned out. I no longer felt like the little girl I was. I felt old, and because I felt I was unpleasant to look at, filled with shame, I retreated into solitude, and read stories and began to write poems. (Walker & O'Brien 1)

As she demonstrated, the moments she spent alone and the privacy she accessed as a child had a great effect on her intellect, personality, and her whole life. Walker's long hours of reading and observing helped her to become the successful thinker and writer she is today. She was fond of the classical literary books that had been introduced to her by her mother. Her mother thought that reading would help her daughter find an alternative space for healing, as she was not able to

see a specialist doctor at that point in her childhood. Being exposed to such sophisticated reading, Walker began to form her own opinions and establish her literary voice as a poet and novelist. Further, Walker's solo wandering in the fields contributed to the development of her imaginative skills and turned her into a sharp observer of people and things around her, which enhanced her ability to create powerful and authentic fictional characters, settings, and events as a professional writer later in life. For Walker, her mother is one of the first people she started to observe closely and whose valuable experience she learned from, which she writes about in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens."

As a child, Walker exploited a metaphorical spiritual space in order to continue learning and evolving. Walker was introduced to this space after her childhood accident when she was praying to God to make her look beautiful again. Walker's spirituality and feelings of being connected to God kept her motivated and consistant in her reading, writing, and all of the other activities she sought as a way of investing in herself to be the creative person she would become later. The little Alice trusted God and knew that one day, she would be able to go back to school and to look confidently at people. At the age of 14, Walker finally saw her prayers answered when her brother took her to a doctor and she got the scar tissue on her eye removed.

The spiritual space is also reflected in her literary writings. In *The Color Purple,* for example, Celie, Walker's main character, is a confused, scared girl who is not able to tell anyone about what is happening to her except God, through the letters she writes to Him. Just like Walker's, this spiritual space is what allows her to endure her painful reality, though Walker's reality is totally different than Celie's. Celie has been experiencing sexual abuse and oppression at the hands of her stepfather, Alphonso, and her husband, Albert. Walker's vision and

understanding of God have been articulated by Shug, the blues singer who later becomes Celie's best friend and the one who assists her to reconsider her understanding of him.

Walker also became empowered and creatively inspired by the space of motherhood, the second kind of metaphorical space I will discuss. She shares a special bond with women such as her biological mother and her literary foremother Zora Neale Hurston, both of whom have a positive influence on her art. Even though Walker was not able to spend a lot of time with her mother because she was busy working two jobs, looking after her own kids and house, and raising plants and flowers in her garden, she could learn many lessons from her. In her article, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," Walker sheds some light on the life experience of her mother and describes her mother's work in the garden as art. Her mother had the talent of growing plants and flowers in any kind of soil, including rocky ones, and turning them into beautiful, astonishing gardens. Observing the beauty her mother created by her hard and constant work in the garden, she learned that art needs dedication and devotion in addition to talent. Despite her tough living conditions, her mother was able to become an artist by performing her aesthetic work in the garden. Besides, her mother encouraged her to be independent and creative at an early age when she bought her "a sewing machine, to make a prom dress; a suitcase, so that she could travel if she liked; and a typewriter with a typing table" (Gale). Supported and empowered by her biological mother, Walker found the confidence and the will to explore her potential talents and write as a professional career.

Walker's writing has also been influenced by her foremother, Zora Neale Hurston, the African American writer. She was specifically inspired by the way Hurston's novels embrace the language and the culture of African American people. Like many female writers, and female African American writers in particular, Walker longed for writing conventions that are created

by women to serve their purposes, and she found them in Hurston's writing. For instance, in *The Color Purple*, she "revise[s]" Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; "Celie's written voice to God, her reader, tropes the written yet never uttered voice of free indirect discourse which is the predominant vehicle of narrative commentary in Hurston's novel" (Bloom 34). Walker wanted to meet Hurston, but she could not because when she arrived at the area where she lived, she discovered that Hurston had already died.

Walker's Privacy after Success and Fame

After becoming a successful writer, Walker became more appreciative of her privacy and more concerned about the nature of the physical spaces she retreats in. If she is busy working on one of her books, she tends to escape big cities and retreat to smaller ones, creating a quieter writing environment for herself where she can think more clearly and write better. For instance, when she was writing her essay collection, *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light in a Time of Darkness*, she resolved to move from Brooklyn to California, into a small home in Mendocino. After she divorced, she chose to strictly refuse to share her own private space with partners, including lovers. When she moved to Mendocino, Walker's partner at that time, Robert Allen, "moved out west [too] and took an apartment in San Francisco." Walker did not invite him to her space, but she "divid[ed] her time between the two places" (Gale). Walker's condition of living by herself allows her to free herself from any kind of responsibilities toward the other person and devote more time to herself as well as her art.

Walker's vision of the private spaces required for creating art, like Willa Cather's and those of many other female artists, has widened, and her choices of them have become more luxurious and creative. For Walker, a deep state of thinking can be reached in a summer house or a locked room as well as when performing solo activities such as meditation, gardening,

swimming, dancing, playing drums, etc. (Frey). These kinds of solo activities seem to coincide with writing, as if they assist her to dream about what she is writing exceeding the boundaries of time and place. Also, involving herself in such activities might help to keep her energy levels up, as she moves back and forth between these different forms of solitude and privacy.

Celie, Walker's fictional character and the protagonist of *The Color Purple,* goes through a transformative journey from a poor, confused, scared, weak, untalented girl into a rich, confident, courageous, strong, and talented businesswoman. Her real identity has been distorted and her unique creativity has been suppressed by the oppression she experiences at the hands of her stepfather as well as of her husband and his kids. Celie's utilization of and transition among varied nurturing, empowering, and supportive spaces assist her to unleash her creativity and relocate her real identity.

Private Spaces in *The Color Purple*

Physical spaces such as Shug's house and Celie's mother's house are the main sites that contribute to the growth of Celie's personality and creativity. Shug's house is the house that welcomes Celie after she fights with her husband and leaves his house, rejecting his oppression of her. This house provides Celie with the space she needs to start her business of designing pants. She has been given the dining room as a small factory where she has the luxury and the privacy to experiment with assorted fabrics to make pants of different sizes and models. Even though Celie's mother's house is the house that witnesses the early years of her oppression as a child and a teenager by her stepfather, it is also the place that allows her to announce her personal and social independence as she returns to it as the owner after he passes away. The metaphorical spiritual space of connecting to God helps Celie to endure her painful reality early in her life and empowers her to resist oppression later when she reconsiders the way she perceives Him. Finally, the private metaphorical space of Celie's friendship with both Sofia and Shug helps her reclaim and develop her real identity and support her creativity as a pant designer.

Physical Spaces and Their Relation to Celie's Creativity

Celie's mother's house, her husband's house, and Shug's house are the three main physical spaces that play a crucial role in shaping Celie's identity. These houses also have functioned as either enabling or disabling— or both in the case of her mother's house and her husband's—for her creativity as an artist and a pant-designer. The house of Celie's mother witnesses her suffering at the hands of her stepfather. As a little child and a teenager, Celie lives in this house with her mother, stepfather Alphonso, and her sister Nettie. Celie and Nettie share a bedroom and that bedroom is their only private space. They feel free and secure there, away from

their stepfather's lustful gaze which they had initially been unaware of. However, when their mother's health condition worsens, she becomes no longer able to notice what is going on in the house and falls short in protecting her two daughters. Alphonso takes his wife's inability to fulfill his sexual desires as an excuse to rape Celie, his step-daughter.

Celie is only fourteen years old when he starts invading her very private space, her bedroom, and committing a series of rapes, which causes her to grow into a silent, fearful, confused, and unconfident teenager and adult. The first time Alphonso rapes her, he tells her, "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (*The Color Purple* 4). Celie does what he tells her, yet in order not to lose her mind, she begins to write letters to God telling Him everything going on and how scared and voiceless she is. Abusing her even more, Celie's stepfather forces her to quit school, and he justifies his action by convincing her that she is ugly and not smart like her sister, Nettie, as well as other girls attending the school. In fact, Alphonso's decision to take her out of school is an attempt made by him to protect himself by hiding his awful crimes of rape, especially when she becomes pregnant twice.

Celie's "stepfather's ploy to isolate her in order to further her victimization is successful" (Martin 28). This observation suggests that this kind of isolation is intended, leading Celie to live in a state of imposed privacy. This is not an actual privacy because it is usually interrupted by the person or the party who imposes it. In the case of Celie, the privacy Alphonso imposes on her aims to imprison her and distance her physically as well as emotionally from all other people but him, enabling him to oppress her and invade her body whenever he wants. Imposed privacy does not usually provide women with the space they need to thrive and become themselves; instead, it seizes their rights to that by limiting them to certain roles and activities, which in turn, restrict their personal and artistic growth. Being verbally and physically abused,

locked inside the house, and prohibited from talking to others about anything in her life, especially about her painful reality, Celie's personality and creativity are hindered.

As indicated earlier, the isolation that Alphonso forces on her in conjunction with all the oppression he practices cause her to lose her sense of identity and grow into an unconfident, passive, and voiceless woman. At some point in her life, Celie has been convinced that she simply has to accept and endure all the oppression she encounters: "I don't say nothing. I think bout Nettie, dead. She fight, she run away. What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (13). She has absorbed the idea that fighting oppression inevitably leads to loss and death and never to accomplishment and living a better life.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Virginia Woolf and bell hooks are two examples of contemporary writers who explicitly touch upon the topic of imposed privacy and its negative effect on women in their writings. They both discuss this topic from the perspective of women who have been forced into certain spaces during periods in their life. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf talks about how she and her contemporary women have been physically restricted to particular domestic spaces and cast out of most public spaces. Examples of spaces that were assigned to Woolf and other women who lived in that era are drawing rooms, sitting rooms, and bedrooms, and all of them belong to the domain of domesticity. On the other hand, these women were excluded from public spaces such as universities and libraries. In that same essay, Woolf declares how annoyed she feels at being locked out of libraries: "how unpleasant it is to be locked out" (24). Woolf critiques those domestic spaces and the isolation imposed on women there because the kind of privacy they access there suppresses and disables women's creativity, she believes. This is why she urges women to forge new spaces for themselves in and out of the domain of domesticity, ones that allow their access to a chosen privacy—the real, effective

privacy. To be empowered and creative, women need to have the right and the ability to include and exclude other people from their own private spaces.

On the other hand, in "Marginality as Site of Resistance," hooks discusses how people of less privileged racial and/or social classes are pushed to the margins—or the "space of marginality," as hooks calls it—to be mentally colonized by the hegemonic groups and socially deprived of their privileges. People of color such as hooks and her fellows are examples of people who are forced to live in that marginal space. Thus, she encourages people, including herself, to think of their stay there as a choice and the privacy they access there as chosen, not imposed. This way, the space of marginality becomes a "site of radical possibility, a space of resistance." She explains: "it was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just founds in words but in habits of being and the way one lives" (341). She invites people from all races, ethnics, and social classes to come together, to "enter that [welcoming] space" that encourages freedom, celebrates differences, and promotes creativity (343).

Many years later, Celie's mother's house—the house that has once allowed her oppression and victimization—becomes the site that enables her personal, economic and artistic independence. Celie succeeds as a businesswoman and decides to return to her mother's house, but this time as the owner. Even though she has initially felt scared of the idea of leaving her best friend Shug and moving into a house of her own, she eventually resolves to take on that opportunity, as it will assist her to "forge a functioning identity of her own" away from her friend (Russell 206). Celie is finally able to proclaim her real identity, the identity of a free, confident, and independent woman. Albert, her ex-husband, notices the change in her identity and asks to marry her again after falling in love with the new Celie, as she says: "And then, just when I

know I can live content without Shug, just when Mr. done ask me to marry him again" (124). After regaining her right to that property and succeeding in her business, Celie feels empowered; she possesses a private physical space of her own and has an income from selling the pants she designs. Celie later decides to share the house with the people she loves, so that she boosts her creativity to the maximum by surrounding herself with a supportive, nurturing community (LaGrone xxxi).

Celie's decision to go back to her mother's house and stay in it as the owner provides vivid evidence of her psychological healing and readiness to get past her old memories in this house. Celie's healing is necessary for unleashing her creativity. This time, her mother's house becomes the private space that allows her to access a new, different kind of physical and psychological privacy, a chosen privacy. As indicated, inviting the people whom she loves to live with her in her house makes this place even more empowering and nurturing. As an artist and a designer, Celie needs to selectively isolate herself from other residents of the house in order to work and focus on her designs. She breaks that solitude only when she chooses to.

The other house that plays an important role in shaping Celie's identity and liberating her creativity is her husband's house. For Celie, this physical space starts as a site of oppression that leaves her almost no room to grow as an individual or to free her suppressed creativity as an artist. However, it later transforms into a supporting, empowering environment after Sofia and Shug have come to live in it. Celie marries Albert and moves into his house, starting a new chapter of her life. When she first moves into this house, she is not sure if her tough life conditions will improve or not. Unfortunately, with the disrespect and the violence she suffers at the hands of her husband and his kids, as well as the burden of domestic duties she must perform every single day, her early days in this house do not seem promising.

Celie's feelings of being unworthy and valueless increase every moment during her early days in that house, and she resolves to do nothing about them because she has a loss of identity and no love and appreciation for herself. In fact, Celie's value as a young girl in her mother's house and as a woman in her husband's house has been restricted to her ability to clean, cook, and look after the kids, and that is the only reason Albert marries her. Before he marries her, Celie's stepfather inconsiderately previews her qualities as if she is a commodity: "She ugly. He says. But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her" (*The Color Purple* 7). Commenting on that point, Jennifer Martin indicates that Alphonso and Albert,

> the men in Celie's life, are using the oldest form of exploitation of Black women available to them to suppress Celie – the role of the mammy. This role is so engrained in Celie's mind that she does not see how she is being exploited or even identify her need to rise above the exploitation. (29)

Sadly, Celie accepts the role of a servile, obedient woman who submissively nurtures every person in the house but herself. Her condition of growing up as an abused child confuses her real identity and reshapes it in a way that conforms to what the oppressive men in her life want her to be. Also, as noted earlier, Celie's fear of losing her life like her sister, as she has been thinking, is another reason that makes her absorb the oppression and accept it with no objection.

Celie's attitude towards this role begins to change slightly when Harpo's wife, Sofia, comes to live with Celie and the rest of the family in Albert's house. Watching and observing another woman who stands in the face of oppression and does what she wants and enjoys, not what is dictated for her, makes Celie jealous at first; however, her feelings shift into admiration of Sofia's strength later. A situation that exemplifies Celie's jealousy of Sofia is when she advises Harpo to beat her upon his complaining about her disobedience of him. In that incident, Harpo has been trying to exercise his patriarchal authority over Sofia by preventing her from visiting her sister for no reason, except to claim his masculine control over her: "I tell her one

thing, she do another. Never do what I say…I tell her she can't be all the time going to visit her sister. Us married now, I tell her. Your place is here with the children" (18). However, Sofia insists on visiting her sister and goes to her, refusing to listen to her husband's commands or allow him to control her. Her attitude and behavior of rejecting men's control and resisting their oppression of her open Celie's eyes to a totally different way of living life that is only available to powerful, courageous women like Sofia. Even though Celie has reacted passively to physical and verbal abuse her entire life and demanded none of her rights up to this point in her life, deep inside her heart she has actively started to reclaim her real identity, one that does not resemble her current one in any way. As indicated, having Sofia as a powerful and inspiring member in the family, Albert's house becomes a site of education, where she gets direct and practical lessons of resistance and empowerment based on the lived experiences of other Black women.

Albert's house becomes an even more empowering site when Shug comes to stay with the family until her poor health condition improves. Throughout the days of her sickness as well as her wellness, Shug proves herself as a woman of high self-esteem and power. She displays her bright personal characteristics as a woman who loves herself, enjoys her life to the fullest, and appreciates beauty everywhere, including in her own self. When she joins Celie and Sofia's collaboration by making some stitches on the square Celie handed her, Celie likes the way her stitches look and perceives the irregularity of them as one facet of her creativity. She encourages Shug: "real good, for first try, I say. That just fine and dandy" and Shug confidently replies: "Everything I do is fine and dandy to you. Miss Celie" (27). Living with a woman with such personal traits, Celie learns that just like Shug, she is quite capable of loving herself and doing more than cleaning the house, combing the kids' hair, and cooking the meals.

In the past in general and in Albert's house in particular, Celie has had almost no physical space of her own; her privacy has been always restricted or interrupted by the residents of the house. She has been able to access varying degrees of psychological, emotional, and spiritual privacy, but not a physical one. Albert's house does not give her solitude but, as noted earlier, it gives her the chance to observe powerful women and to be psychologically able to reflect on the observations she makes as she watches them. This house also enables Celie to unite with both Sofia and Shug intimately, accessing the metaphorical supportive space of sisterhood that will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Celie realizes that as a woman and a human being she has unlimited talents that await discovery; yet, "as long as she stays under the roof of a dominant male figure as her husband, she cannot realize her creative potentials" (Bayindir 218). Thus, with the help of Shug, she seizes the first opportunity coming her way to confront Albert and voice her thoughts, drawing courage from her rage at him for hiding her sister Nettie's letters. Celie tells him: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (90). As soon as she decides to move out of Albert's house into another, safer place, she finds the courage and the strength to speak up. The opposite is also true; if she were to stay in his house, she would not have the courage to articulate her objection to and rebellion against his patriarchal rules. Celie's real identity begins to manifest: a woman who refuses to be invisible to him or any other human being and demands her rights to be heard, respected, and accepted as she is. This positive change in her identity needs to be promoted in a different environment. Grounding his argument on the essays of "The Spirit of Space," by Dan Paich, Kheven LaGrone says: "Celie's newly transformed language and self need their own supporting home or space" (xxi). Thus, Celie

leaves for Memphis, retreating into Shug's house in an endeavor to have more freedom, privacy, and support, taking her life and creativity to the next level.

Shug's house, the third house Celie moves to, has functioned as an enabling private physical space for Celie's creative potential. Confirming Woolf's idea that women need a room of their own as well as money to be able to create art, Shug has made sure that Celie can access those two necessary elements to feel comfortable professionally and financially, not worrying about anything else. In this new place, Celie has been given a private bedroom that fits with her routine as well as her personality as a morning person; her room is "a big back bedroom overlook[ing] the backyard and the bushes down by the creek" (90). And because the sleepy atmosphere and the crowdedness of bedrooms are not usually suitable for working on serious projects, Celie takes the dining room as a small factory, a space for freeing her imagination to design creative pants and bring them to reality.

Describing the work environment in the dining room and her persistent efforts there, Celie says:

> I sit in the dining room making pants after pants. I got pants now in every color and size under the sun. Since us started making pants down home, I ain't been able to stop. I change the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg. I make so many pants Shug tease me. I didn't know what I was starting, she say, laughing. Pants all over her chairs, hanging all in front of the china closet. Newspaper patterns and cloth all over the table and the floor. (92)

As Celie describes it, the dining room seems to be a big, wide room that allows easy movement within it, which is a feature that adds more comfort and luxury to her space as well as her overall experience of sewing. Before she sews, she takes her time dreaming about the designs she intends to create for the different people she knows and imagining how the pants will look on them: "in my mind [I think] what a pair of pants for Jack would look like. Jack is tall and kind and don't hardly say anything …I dream and dream and dream over Jack's pants. And cut and

sew" (*The Color Purple* 92-3). It is clear that when Celie is busy thinking of new designs or sewing them, her space is uninvaded and her solitude is uninterrupted; she has been capable of imagining a wide range of designs, experimenting with assorted fabrics, and sewing many pairs of pants in a short period of time in an endeavor to reach the final desired products. By having all the conditions necessary for unleashing her creativity, Celie has been able to create a unique, 'perfect' pair of pants for Shug as well as her other customers.

In fact, moving out of Albert's house into Shug's house has not only provided Celie with the support she needs to evolve as a designer and artist but also to grow as an individual who attempts to stand on her feet and relocate her real identity. The period in which Celie lives with Shug and under her supervision functions as a crucial transitional phase; it removes her from male dominance, equipping her with the necessary tools and the survival skills she needs to live on her own in that community, and preparing for the next promising chapter in her life. When Celie becomes mentally, socially, and financially independent and ready to carve her own path, the opportunity comes to her in the form of business success and a house of her own, as she reclaims her right to her mother's property after her stepfather's death.

Lastly, Celie's mother's house, Albert's house, and Shug's house have all significantly influenced Celie's creativity and contributed to shaping her identity. Early in her life, her mother's house worked as an oppressive site that enabled her stepfather to isolate her and rape her. However, that house later becomes the site that empowers her most, as it is the one that allows her personal, economic, and artistic independence. Moving into Albert's house after marrying him, Celie goes through another, but different, cycle of physical and verbal abuse. This site starts to make a positive impact on her personality and creativity only when Sofia and Shug come to live in it. Watching two powerful women defending themselves against oppression and

demanding respect from men enables Celie to acknowledge women's latent power, including her own, and to recognize what they are capable of doing. She finally feels inspired and empowered to stand up to her husband and reject the passive, weak, voiceless woman she has been. After fighting with her husband, Celie accompanies Shug, who welcomes her into her house, and assigns her two private, luxurious rooms, one to sleep in and the other to use as a work place. With Shug's emotional and financial support, Celie's identity strengthens, and her creativity finds its way to prosper and manifest itself through the perfect pants she imagines, designs, sews, and sells for both men and women.

The Spiritual Space of Understanding God and Connecting to Him

The physical and the verbal abuse Celie experiences at the hands of her stepfather leads her to start writing letters to God. Celie's decision to write the letters is necessary during this time in particular because "it serves a need to communicate her feelings—feelings that she is unable to share with anyone else" (Andujo 66). If she had not written those letters as a way of expressing her feelings when she was a victim of her stepfather's rape, she could have not survived and endured that painful reality. The writing is a means that assists her to channel her anger and frustration in a more productive and creative way.

Many years later, Celie passively marries Albert and becomes his good, obedient wife. Exploiting the privileges that his patriarchal society provides him with, Albert believes that beating his wife is one of his rights as a man, and that it will make her even better. Thus, he beats Celie with a reason or without, and to be able to bear the ongoing oppression in her life, Celie keeps on writing letters to God. The novel gives no details about what kind of privacy Celie has been able to access to write those letters. She is perhaps able to write them in the privacy of her room when Alphonso (before marriage) or Albert (after marriage) are asleep, or at night when

she finishes her domestic tasks of cleaning, cooking, and putting kids to sleep. Without accessing this kind of physical and psychological privacy, however, she could not keep writing to God.

Celie's act of writing letters to God and communicating her feelings to Him create a private metaphorical space—a spiritual space. This space is private; it only includes God and Celie, and excludes others. God is the only one with whom she shares her suffering, and the reason Celie chooses to write those letters to Him is "because she has no one else to write [to]," as "she knows she must never tell no 'body'" (Ross 69). The oppressive experiences she has been going through lead her to feel ashamed, and therefore not able to articulate them to any human being, as Nettie tells Celie: "I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was" (57).

Alphonso's and Albert's oppression of her isolates her and imposes physical and personal privacy on her. As explained earlier, during her life with Alphonso, he threatens her not to talk to anybody and imprisons her in the house to hide his crimes of rape. On the other side, in her life with Albert, her fear of being beaten and her frustration with her life lead to her isolation and turn her into a voiceless woman. Also, being consumed with the chores of her daily life and the responsibilities of her role as "the mammy," Celie is forced to stay in the house, not speaking to other people nor socializing with them.

As the years of Celie's struggle continue, she becomes even more frustrated with the way her life conditions have been worsening rather than improving, so she decides that she will no longer pray to God or express her feelings to Him in the letters she has been writing for so many years now. In her last letter to God, she writes: "My daddy lynch. My mama crazy. All my little half-brothers and sisters no kin to me. My children not my sister and brother. Pa not pa.

You must be sleep" (76). This last letter is brief, but it reveals Celie's deep sorrow and disappointment; she does not seem to have the energy to speak or to write anymore. Celie has been perceiving God wrongly, as she discovers after conversing with Shug, her best friend and Albert's mistress. Celie confesses that she has always envisioned God as a man who is "big and old and tall and gray bearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted" (*The Color Purple* 83). Celie's way of thinking about God comes as a result of her living in a patriarchal and racist society that glorifies whiteness and maleness and considers them as two main positions of power; white men have authority over white females and Black people in general and Black men practice control over Black women. This is the first time that Celie shares the way she pictures God with another person, and it is not with just anyone, but with the woman that she trusts most.

Besides, "for Celie, to assert herself as a human being capable of feeling, wanting, and thinking would be disturbing God's structure for mankind" (Andujo 67). Based on that understanding, she believes that she must deprive herself of any feelings of love and sensuality as well as deny herself the right to respect and a decent life. Rather than putting any effort to change her reality and therefore enjoy life, she only manages to survive. Before she meets Shug, she is convinced that submitting to patriarchal force is the right thing to be done by women in her circumstances. Women who show resistance and fight against oppression are doomed: "I think bout Nettie, dead. She fight, she run away. What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (13). At this point in the novel, Celie still believes that her passive attitude towards what has been going on in her life is better than her sister Nettie's courageous one. Not hearing from Nettie for many years—because Albert has been hiding the letters her sister has sends to her—Celie assumes that Nettie is dead. She also assumes that her sister's attempt to fight against her harsh reality has disturbed God and that is why she has suffered this sad fate.

Celie decides to reconsider her way of perceiving God after bonding with Shug, who challenges her old belief and introduces her to a new, broader way of thinking of Him. “She opens up Celie’s understanding to an entirely different God—a God that loves women, sinners, and good times” (Andujo 69-70). Shug convinces Celie that unlike what she thinks, God listens to her, and He answers her prayers when He sends Shug in her way, so that “she gains a friend, lover, protector, and confidant from her sexual partner” (Andujo 69). He has also brought other brave, inspiring women into her life and saved her sister Nettie.

Shug encourages Celie to find God inside herself when she says: “God is inside you and inside everybody else” and persuades her to communicate her feelings to Him at all times, not only when she goes to church. In contrast to her old vision of Him, Celie learns that worshiping God is not only restricted to visiting religious places and praying to him over there because He is present everywhere and is always with her. Shug further introduces Celie to a better and more creative way of finding and worshiping God. She encourages Celie to find Him through His creation; the stars, the trees, the sky, the people, etc. When Celie confronts Albert before she leaves him, she suddenly feels an impulse of power coming from nature, specifically from trees. Threatening her husband, Celie says: “until you do right by me, I say, everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it come to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees” (89). By looking at trees, one creation of God, Celie conjures the power of God; God is close and present, as the trees are. Shug also motivates Celie to praise Him by noticing and admiring all aspects of beauty everywhere around her: “I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it” (84). Celie learns that she can worship God by appreciating the blessings He has given her in life. Shug’s way of understanding God contradicts what she used to believe, but she decides to adopt Shug’s view, as she trusts and

loves her. By reconsidering her old way of understanding God, Celie becomes more able to connect to Him.

Celie's new way of connecting to God has opened a new, private, empowering space. As Patricia Andujo points out, "Celie does not feel such empowerment until she learns to reconsider her understanding of God" (67). The power she draws from Him has not only enabled her to fight against the oppression she experiences from her husband and his children, but also to have the power and the courage to stand against her whole, patriarchal society as well as to discover and practice her creativity right in front of them.

Lori Duin Kelly in "Theology and Androgyny: The Role of Religion in The Color Purple," demonstrates the way Celie does that:

> [She] challenge[s] and def[ies] the conventional definitions of male-female behavior… by appropriating elements that are traditionally the exclusive domain of the male: in fashion – she wears pants; in career – she runs a successful business; and in romance – she loves another woman, Shug. Celie does this, moreover, without the surrendering of the more traditional female characteristics of being empathetic and nurturing. (8)

The power and the courage Celie has gained enable her to challenge conventional society and to show her taste in clothes in what she wears, not what that society dictates for her. She wears fashionable pants, ones she designs. Celie's pants are unique because they are customized to fit each buyer's personality, the thing that makes both her pants and her business distinct. Her elegant taste in clothes and her creative design talents that were suppressed for a long time have finally found their way to prosper. Women everywhere start to wear her designs although wearing pants had been prohibited for them according to the traditions; female singers, such as Shug, are the only women who have been allowed to wear them. Ironically, men who do not allow their wives to wear pants cannot take their eyes off the women wearing them. In this respect, Celie inspires all women in her society to defy their clothing norms. "To disassociate

herself with a male God means that she has to rethink cultural norms," and encourages other women to do so (Andujo 70).

She owns and runs an amazing business that does not resemble any that women in her society have had before, that allows her to practice her creative pant-designing and sewing skills. The most successful business practiced by women in her society before this had been singing, and if a woman has no singing talent and no beautiful voice, then she will probably have no other chance to succeed. "Celie takes the act of sewing, which is traditionally thought of as a mere chore for women who are confined to a domestic role and turns it into an outlet for creative self-expression and a profitable business" (Nair). She converts a task that has been perceived as a boring chore into a fun business that allows her to imagine, dream about, design, and sew creative pants and makes them available for both genders.

In American culture as well as many others, sewing has been viewed as a woman's task. The women in the house, mostly mothers, are in charge of making clothes for family members—especially children—as well as curtains and blankets, just like when Celie has been sewing curtains for Sofia and Harpo as their marriage gift. "It is no small irony that Celie adopts a traditionally feminine form of art to complete her separation from the violent masculine world. By sewing, Celie narrows the gap between the sexes, making pants for both men and women" (Ross 80). Contrary to what people might have been thinking of sewing as an inferior chore that is supposed to confine women to the house, the task frees Celie and helps her announce her independence. "Celie narrows the gap between the sexes" not only by providing females in her society with the chance to wear a category of clothing that has been prohibited for them, but also by encouraging them to have more freedom of dress, resembling the freedom that men have, and perhaps freedom of income.

In love, Celie has not been enjoying her heterosexual relationship with her husband and has felt ashamed of any sensual feelings. However, she has developed some "undefined" feelings for Shug even before she gets to know her well or live with her; she is drawn to her beauty as well as the power aroma that surrounds her: "I ast her to give me the picture. An all night long I stare at it" (6). Celie has been always suppressing her sexual feelings, and one reason for that is her belief that they are forbidden by God. When Celie reconsiders her understanding of God and His attitude towards such feelings, Shug assures her that "God love all them feelings," she becomes brave enough to admit her sexuality and express it. She challenges her husband and her society by getting involved in a homosexual relation with Shug and finds in it a way to awaken and free her sexuality.

Celie's new way of understanding God and connecting to Him influences her life positively. Empowered by her new relation to Him, Celie fights against the oppression of her patriarchal society and defies its unjust cultural norms in most aspects of her life. She finds the power to challenge the conventions by wearing the clothes she likes, not the ones they dictate for her. She liberates her creativity in the pants she designs and sells, and her sexuality in her relationship with Shug.

The Space of Celie's Bond with Other Women

As a child and a young woman, "Celie has been isolated from the only two women of importance in her life, her mother and her sister" (Martin 32). Alphonso, her stepfather, creates a barrier between her and her sick mother when he impregnates her twice and reacts as if he is uninvolved whereas Albert, her husband, keeps her apart from her sister Nettie when he hides her letters. These two men's main purpose of doing that is to further their oppression of her. Thus, Celie has never had a powerful female role-model: an inspiring literal or literary mother or

an empowering sister that she can learn from or feel empowered by them before getting to know Sofia and Shug.

When Sofia comes to live in Albert's house, Celie notices that she has a totally different personality than hers; she is a powerful woman who does not allow anybody to disrespect her or force her to do what she does not want to do. She is, like Celie, a hardworking woman, yet she only does the type of work she likes to do and when she wants to. Being more passionate about working on the farm and preferring to perform some tasks assumed to be 'masculine' rather than 'feminine,' Sofia enjoys herself and gives no ear to what other people may say about her or her husband. Celie's irrational advice that encourages Harpo to beat Sofia causes a big fight between the couples; describing the scene of their fighting, Celie says:

> They fighting like two mens. Every piece of furniture they got is turned over. Every plate look like it broke. The looking glass hang crooked, the curtains torn. The bed look like the stuffing pulled out. They don't notice. They fight. He try to slap her…She reach down and grab a piece of stove wood and whack him cross the eyes. He punch her in the stomach, she double over groaning but come up with both hands lock right under his privates…She never blink a eye. He jump up to put as hammer lock under her chin, she throw him over her back. He fall bam up gainst the stove. (19)

This scene reveals how powerful, brave, and fearless Sofia is. Even though she fights a man who is supposed to be physically stronger than she, that does not terrify her or hold her back from defending herself as well as resisting the oppression. Sofia's courage and power is what evokes Celie's jealousy, leading her to give this piece of advice. Celie later confesses to the angry and disappointed Sofia: "I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't" (20). Rather than fighting with Celie too for her unwise and unfair advice, Sofia pities her after realizing the motive behind her behavior. In fact, Celie reminds her of her own mother who also had been a victim of patriarchal oppression.

The first thing Sofia does after she forgives Celie and reconciles with her is invite her into the space of sisterhood. “Realiz[ing] that Celie is powerless, [Sofia] subconsciously… searches for a way to share power with [her]” and that is when she suggests the idea that they work together on making a quilt: “[l]et's make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains” (21). This quilting experience allows Celie to converse with Sofia and to know more about her life, which as Celie wishes, will help her to “understand Sofia’s strength and to adopt parts of [her] ideology as her own” (Martin 31-2). Sofia tells Celie that her sisters and she have always had to fight the men in their life. Celie understands that Sofia’s power comes from her strong bonding with her sisters and knowing that they will forever back each other up. When she decides to leave Harpo because she gets tired of the way he treats her, Sofia calls her sisters, and “they come early one morning in two wagons to pick [her] up” (32). Celie has learned that women should not accept being oppressed or treated with inferiority, and they should stick together to support each other. Celie’s act of joining the quilt indicates that she officially joins the space of sisterhood and takes practical steps toward entering the arena of empowerment that has been initiated by women and for them in their endeavor to love, support, and encourage each other.

Shug Avery is another woman whose imaginative as well as physical presence has had an affirmative impact on Celie’s life. Shug who is a blues singer and Albert’s mistress has been invited by him to stay temporarily in his house, as she, more likely, heals from a sexual disease: “she got the nasty woman disease” (*The Color Purple* 26). During the period of her recovery, she has been watching the growing bond between Sofia and Celie and eventually decides to be a part of their collaborative space of sisterhood. She comes by them while they are busy working together on the quilt and opens a conversation with Celie, complementing the regularity and the neatness of her stitches. The reason she offers her new friendship to the other two women in the

house is her awareness of the fact that only women are capable of supporting each other and looking after each other unconditionally. Being deadly sick when she arrived at Albert's house, Celie is the one who takes good care of her with pleasure, though she has been nobody to Shug before that time. To return some of Celie's favor, Shug demands that Celie go with her and Albert to Harpo's club on the first night she resumes her singing career there. Upon Albert's refusal, Shug insists on Celie's company, giving some made-up excuses: "Yeah, but Celie going, say Shug, while I press her hair. Spose I git sick while I'm singing, she say. Spose my dress come undone?" (34). Later that night and while Shug is on stage, she calls Celie and tells her in front of the audience that she has created a song and named it after her, "Miss Celie's Song." Shug explains that Celie is the one who has inspired her to write this song: "she scratched it out of my head when I was sick" (35). It is the first time in Celie's life that someone shows appreciation to her or for anything she has done; it has meant a lot to her, especially that this person is Shug, the woman whom she admires most.

From a psychological perspective, another reason for Shug's decision to join Celie's and Sofia's space of sisterhood is that as a pretty singer who is always the center of others' attention, Shug might have felt jealous of the other two women and hated to be left out of their distinct bond and intimate relationship. When Shug offers her friendship to Celie, who has already grasped the value of this supportive and nurturing space after bonding with Sofia, she shows no reluctance to accept Shug's proud request to join their female space. Celie even encourages Shug by inviting her to sew with them: "I hand her the square I'm working on, start another one" and she compliments her "crooked stitches" (27). Shug, in return, asserts her membership to the collaboration by donating a piece of clothes, so both Celie and Sofia can work on.

Shug has been a source of inspiration and support for Celie even before she knows her. Celie's relationship with Shug had started back in the months before she married Albert; it began with a picture of Shug that Alphonso's new wife has shown to her. Drawn to Shug's beauty, as she stares at her photo all night, Celie enters "a space of fantasy" that is totally new to her (Russell 199). In this space Celie escapes reality, dreaming about Shug. Introduced to a new kind of pleasure, "the photograph attracts her erotic attention" and Shug's later "arriv[al] at Albert's house" arouses her "sexuality" (Powers 51). Shug is the only one who has been able to awaken sexual sensations in Celie indirectly by her beauty and directly by encouraging her to explore her body, expressing her love for her, and having a sexual relationship with her later in the novel.

In the newly discovered "space of fantasy," Celie also finds consolation and comfort when she must face her reality. Forced to marry Albert, Celie resolves that being intimate with him is bearable, as she learns that Shug has been his mistress for years. This realization leads Celie to accept—not welcome—his invasion of her body: "I know what he doing to me he done to Shug Avery and maybe she like it. I put my arm around him" (12). Because Shug has been involved in a sexual relationship with Albert, Celie tolerates being forced into one with the same person. Further, knowing that Shug, the person whom she feels attracted to, also struggles with her life, as is reflected in her sad eyes in the photo, Celie feels not alone and becomes more capable of enduring her painful reality. Shug's sadness is something that no one but Celie has noticed, though she could do nothing about it at that time. Because Celie lives a tough life, this space of fantasy has been important for her. It provides her with a creative way to escape hardships by seeking pleasure in dreaming about Shug and helps her to endure pain by knowing that she is not alone in this situation.

Even though Celie has many distinct talents, she has been incapable of noticing them because of the way she perceives herself, as an ugly, powerless, and useless woman. To be able to discover her suppressed creativity, Celie first needs to heal her insecurities and relocate her 'real' identity. Living with Celie has enabled Shug to discover the psychological problems Celie suffers from, such as low self-esteem and shame about her body. Shug understands that the oppressive experiences Celie has gone through as a child and an adult are what have caused her to become the unconfident, passive woman she is today. As a successful and powerful woman, Shug believes that one of her missions in life is to empower and inspire other women, and that is what she does for Celie. She takes on her shoulders the responsibility of assisting Celie to heal and gain strength and confidence in several ways, such as modeling the personality traits she wants her to adopt and encouraging her to talk about her traumatic memories as a child and a teenager.

As a woman who appreciates herself and demands respect from both men and women, Shug shows Celie how a woman should love herself and expect to be treated. She provides Celie with the opportunity to observe her living her life as a loved, confident, powerful, and respected woman. Albert, who mistreats Celie and shows no affection for her, has been very capable of behaving well with Shug and feeling fond of her because unlike Celie, she demands that people treat her the way she believes she deserves. Shug also challenges Celie's wrong ideas of herself and of life in general, as when she challenges her wrong understanding of God as a white man who does not love poor women of color. If God loves her then she is more entitled to love herself.

The other approach Shug utilizes to empower Celie and heal her is to provide her with the chance to talk about her past life. She invites Celie into her room and encourages her to share the details of her painful memories, elaborating on those moments, Charles Proudfit says:

> This bedroom scene is the beginning of Celie's working through her rape trauma with abreaction and reconstruction of the traumatic events. Shug, as a "good-enough mother," provides a "holding environment" that enables Celie to verbalize and to get in touch with long-repressed memories and feelings and work them through. (6)

Just like any good mother, Shug gains Celie's trust when she befriends her and expresses her love for her. In the intimacy and the privacy of the room in which she stays, Shug asks Celie about her "children daddy" in an attempt to encourage her to express her suppressed feelings. It is the first time that someone genuinely wants to know more about her as an individual, and to listen to her talk, just because he/she cares about her. Shug gives her the space she needs to talk nonstop and with no interruption from her side, which leads Celie to "think she sleep." This quiet, undisturbed space aims to enable Celie to go back in her memories to the moments in which Alphonso has raped her, but this time to release her repressed feelings of fear, insecurity, and pain that have always been imprisoned inside of her soul and body. Reliving the moments of rape through her memories, Celie breaks down and cries, as she has never cried; she says, "I cry and cry and cry. Seem like it all come back to me, laying there in Shug arms. How it hurt and how much I was surprise." At that time, Shug decides to interfere, comforting and consoling Celie: "Don't cry. She start kissing the water as it come down side my face" (50).

Further, Shug knows how much Celie has been deprived of positive thoughts and emotions, so she works on filling her with them verbally and in deeds. In many places in the text, Shug proves to Celie that she loves her, as when she defends her against Albert, and "through [her] love Celie comes gradually to love herself" (52). She also, as I have said, sings a song for her in front of the club audience and names it after her. Daniel Ross indicates that "Celie lacks an

identity" and "when [Shug] sings a song she has written just for [her]," "[she] awakens [her] desire for identity most explicitly" (76). We see Celie's desire for identity manifest in the decision she makes to reconsider her beliefs of God and her perception of herself, in the way she stands up to her husband and rejects his authority, and in the plan she sets to achieve her personal and business goals. At the end, Shug's approach works very well in assisting Celie to heal psychologically and become empowered personally and financially.

Lastly, Shug plays a crucial role in inspiring and sponsoring Celie's creativity. When Celie discovers that Albert has been hiding the letters of her sister, Nettie, from her in his car all those years, she feels angry and disappointed. She picks up a razor and heads toward Albert, aiming to imitate Sophia's violence and hurt him the way he has hurt her. Shug stops her immediately, calms her down, and convinces her that there are always better ways to take revenge than attacking a person physically or emotionally: "[a] needle and not a razor in my hand, I think" (*The Color Purple* 137). By advising Celie to channel her strong negative feelings in a productive way and use them as a catalyst for her creativity, she "give[s] Celie a lesson in sublimation" (Nair).

Celie later expresses her anger, pain, and disappointment through her art of designing pants. Indulging in the processes of imagining unique designs and sketching them as well as cutting the fabric into pieces and sewing all of the pieces together allow her to connect with her inner self and reflect on her troubling emotions and release them in the unique pants of different sizes and styles she designs. Her practice of this art helps her to feel better and heal as she brings more positivity into her life through the sense of accomplishment and to put her energy into something creative that changes her life as well as that of other people around her.

In order to leave her husband's house, Celie needs an alternative, nurturing place to live in; and she needs money so that she can thrive as a person and artist. As noted earlier, the physical spaces Shug sets aside for Celie, such as Celie's bedroom and the dining room, enhance her ability to design and dream about the pants she is making and imagine how they will look on the people for whom she makes them. Also, Shug does not demand any kind of domestic tasks from Celie and refuses her offer to work for her because she wants her to focus on her creative talent of sewing and stay away from any type of distraction. Knowing that Celie will not be able to feel comfortable and empowered to exercise her art without being financially supported, Shug gives her money from time to time and makes sure that she is supplied with all that she needs.

Finally, Shug's successful career as a singer and her friendship with other businesswomen and men enable her to work as a business counselor for Celie, who is completely new to this experience. For instance, Shug is the one who suggests that Celie hire some female tailors so that she can have the time to dedicate herself to the art of designing and customizing her pants while the other women do the sewing. Moreover, when Celie inherits her mother's property and the attached store, Shug advises her to use the store as a site for selling her pants.

The female friendship that Celie shares with Sofia and Shug functions as a metaphorical space that empowers her personality and inspires her creativity. It is a private site that only welcomes females into it and gives them the space they need to work together as a collective group to resist all kinds of oppression, including the patriarchal one. In the text, Sofia and Shug model their power in front of Celie; Sofia defends herself and Shug defends Celie, giving her practical lessons in resistance that Celie can learn from. Even though Celie's bond with these two women has been established late in her life, it has immediately put her on the right track to build an empowered, creative identity.

Physical spaces such as Shug's house and Celie's mother's house are the main sites that nurture Celie's creativity. These two places allow Celie to have the luxury and privacy she needs to grow her business of pants designing and reclaim her personal and financial independence. The metaphorical spiritual space of Celie's connection to God empowers her to resist the oppression and defy the cultural norms imposed on her and other women by her conventional society. The private metaphorical space of female friendship that Celie shares with Sofia and Shug teaches her how to be powerful and resist patriarchy, as well as inspires and supports her creative work.

Conclusion

This thesis seeks to mediate and resolve the tension between Virginia Woolf's "room" with a lock on the door, which represents her vision of the private spaces necessary for creating art, and the visions of some feminist scholars of color (such as, Alice Walker, Gloria Anzaldua, and Ortiz Cofer), whose "room" is actually the kitchen table, the bus, or the welfare line. Woolf, Walker, and other contemporary scholars agree on the importance of private physical spaces for women to be creative. However, they disagree on the nature of these spaces. As noted earlier, Woolf's vision of what private spaces allow and promote women's artistry is primarily restricted to physical spaces. Woolf's private physical spaces are rooms resembling those utilized by upper-class women artists during the twentieth century and portrayed in their fiction with a lock on the door.

Feminist scholars of color support Woolf's insight that emphasizes the importance of physical space for female artists to be creative, though they challenge the narrowness of her room. Woolf's vision of private physical spaces are locked spaces generally only available to white wealthy women. In their opinion, any locked spaces or rooms would be a luxury for poorer women that they cannot normally have. Walker and like-minded writers revised Woolf's idea to match their own real-life conditions as well as those of their mothers, daughters, and whole female communities. They particularly seek to expand Woolf's rooms to cover new domestic and public places such as kitchens, dining tables, buses, and streets that will embrace women of all ethnicities, races and social classes.

Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* is mainly concerned with physical private spaces, material rooms, but she also touches upon the other two types of private spaces, the psychological space—as she talks about the space of women's minds and souls—and the

metaphorical space—when she discusses the space of women's literary writing. Woolf is quite aware of the importance of the other two types of private spaces though she perceives them as of a less importance than the physical form of private spaces. Further, Woolf considers that physical and psychological states of privacy are quite related; the former improves the quality and promotes the performance of the latter. As she indicates, it is almost impossible for women to produce excellent pieces of literature accessing psychological privacy only. Throughout history only a few women have been able to do it. This state of privacy is doubtlessly essential to creativity, but sole reliance on it is partly beneficial and not enough in their quest for literary excellence. Because Austen's physical space, the general sitting room, was constantly interrupted, Woolf argues, she had to rely more on psychological privacy, the only space that she was in control of, to write her prose. If Austen had been given access to a locked room, she would have been able to write poetry, a more complex form of literature, as Woolf believes.

Just like Woolf, feminist scholars of color agree that physical, psychological, and metaphorical private spaces are all crucial to the process of art making. However, they disagree on the degree of their importance. While Woolf conceives the private physical space as the most essential space for promoting women's creativity, Walker and feminists of color studied here perceive this space as equally important to the psychological and metaphorical private spaces. These writers are convinced that talented women will always find empowering private spaces, not necessarily physical ones, compatible with their life conditions and needs, to utilize in order to free their creativity.

This will take us back to Walker's question in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" regarding Phillis Wheatley—a Black woman poet who lived in the 18th century. Walker challenges Woolf's theory by wondering how a slave woman such as Wheatley who "owned not

even herself" could write great poems (Walker 404). A possible answer to this question is that though it is quite true that Wheatley did not have a private room of her own to retreat to, perhaps she could indulge in an uninterrupted psychological state of privacy—maybe when she did the household labor—in which to write her poetry. Working for the Wheatley family, Phillis had also been able to access the metaphorical space of supportive people. The Wheatley family that owned her offered her education and supported her writing when they noticed her talent. Phillis Wheatley had been given several privileges that almost no other male or female slave in her time could have had.

Further, I argue in many places in this thesis that privacy should be freely chosen, not imposed, to allow for creativity to prosper. When privacy is imposed on women, it confines them and likely hinders their creative artistry. In *O Pioneers!*, Alexandra, the female pioneer, has been fond of the uninterrupted solitary moments she accesses on her land, inspiring and nurturing her creativity. However, when her brother Emil dies, Alexandra's solitude on the land turns into a terrifying experience that imprisons her mentally and emotionally in sad memories of her brother and evokes melancholy thoughts about her life in general. To end this undesired state of loneliness and resume her creative spirit as a female pioneer, she decides to marry Carl and to move with him willingly into a new space that they choose together. Another example supporting the point that imposed private spaces disable women's creativity is found in *Corregidora*. Ursa, the blues singer, has been forced into the metaphorical private space of her mother's and grandmother's narratives and imprisoned within it. As a result, the space of their stories, which could enable and inspire her creativity, suffocates many aspects of it, including the sexual one. If Ursa had been given a chance to choose whether or not to join that space from the beginning, she would not have struggled to see it as a source of inspiration and creativity.

It is also important to note that based on Woolf's text and my analysis of the literature, empowerment and creativity prove to be two interrelated personal traits in the life of female artists. In *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf indicates that her aunt's inheritance empowered her financially and liberated her creativity. It opened her eyes to new ways of seeing and saying things, as it unlocks new potentials for creativity and gives her more freedom in articulating her opinions. Women's empowerment is not necessarily economic; it can encompass other kinds of empowerment, such as psychological, personal, and social. In *The Color Purple*, for example, Celie's emotional bond with Shug is the first factor that empowers her. Shug's love and praise of her stiches empowers her psychologically to practice her creative talent of sewing that later grows into a pant-designing business.

Lastly, the expanded version of Woolf's room that goes beyond the physical form of it to the psychological and metaphorical ones is reflected in the four analyzed texts, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Willa Cather's *O' Pioneers*, Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. The significance of the physical, psychological, and metaphorical kinds of private spaces and their positive influence on women's creativity appear in the literature of these female writers. The four female fictional characters in the chosen texts exploit those private spaces to empower themselves and to unleash the creativity in their personalities as well as their artistry.

The metaphorical private space of supportive people or of female friendship is one of the most influential private spaces that the main female characters in these novels have utilized to thrive and grow as artists. In Cather's novel, *O Pioneers!*, the supportive relationships that Alexandra has with her father and other people in her small community such as her household members and some neighbors, including Carl and Marie, empowers her to stand up to her patriarchal society and enables her to practice her creativity in jobs that are prohibited for women

in that society. Alexandra's unique bond with her father is the most supportive space that provides her with the first essential conditions to grow into a creative female pioneer. Noticing her pioneering traits, John Bergson, Alexandra's father, empowers her and paves the way for her to succeed before he dies and after, by appointing her as the head of the family business and giving her the authority to make any crucial decisions related to the farm. He also supports her by providing her with the space she needs to experiment with the land and asks her brothers to embrace any potential mistakes she might commit because they are one essential part in their quest for becoming successful farmers.

Alexandra's second space of supportive people that she surrounds herself with after her father passes away encompasses the three young Swedish girls, Marie, old Ivar, Carl, and some neighbors. Each one of those people supports, empowers, and inspires Alexandra in his/her own way. The three Swedish girls entertain Alexandra and keep her heart alive with their giggles, secrets, and love stories. Also, Signa—one of the three Swedish girls—takes on her shoulders the responsibility of taking care of Alexandra and comforting her when she gets sick after the murder of her brother, Emil. Marie is a female companion and a friend with whom Alexandra exchanges visits and has honest conversations. The sense of emotional connectedness that Alexandra shares with the girls on one hand and Marie on the other empowers her and inspires her creativity; she is quite aware that, as young ladies carving their own space in a patriarchal and masculine society, if she ever needed their help and support, she would get them.

Lastly, Alexandra also draws support from bonding with sensitive men, such as Ivar and Carl. These men are able to understand her emotional needs and fulfill them with advice, in the case of Ivar, and understanding and words of encouragement, in the case of Carl. Ivar and Alexandra exchange and share mutual trust; Alexandra trusts him and takes his advice on what

crops to grow in her farm and what to feed hogs, and he in turn trusts her and takes her word that she will defend him against people who want to harm him. Carl, on the other hand, has a strong relationship with Alexandra built on mutual caring, understanding, acceptance, sympathy, and encouragement. Carl comes to support her and rescue her from her devastation after her brother's murder. Alexandra marries him and moves with him to a new place where he can always be present for her, supporting and inspiring her creative talent of managing the farm and creating beauty in it.

The supportive space of female friendship and sisterhood, another metaphorical space, is reflected in Chopin's work, *The Awakening*. Madame Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, the two women Edna befriends during her summer stay at Grand Isle, contribute to Edna's personal and artistic awakening, each in her own way. The sympathetic and loving nature as well as the frank and unjudging character of Madame Ratignolle encourages Edna to talk freely about her life. In the supportive space of their friendship, Adele provides Edna with the privacy and the intimacy she needs to recall and narrate her old memories, which in turn assists in releasing the suppressed but authentic creativity that has been hidden in the space of her subconscious. Also, Adele encourages Edna's creativity with her praise and encouraging words and coaches her on how to open up emotionally and physically to the offerings of intimacy given by other women, so that she joins that supportive space of female intimacy.

Edna has been also introduced to Mademoiselle Reisz, who later becomes an inspiration and a role model for her. Edna is inspired by Mademoiselle Reisz's music and lifestyle and feels encouraged to focus on her art of painting. In the private space of their friendship, Mademoiselle Reisz and Edna take on the roles of an artist foremother and a daughter. As an artist who has worked in the music field for many years, Mademoiselle Reisz teaches Edna what to expect if

she wants to become an artist in a conventional society such as theirs, where there are not many female artists.

Spirituality is also a metaphorical space that plays no less important role in empowering and promoting the creativity of some of the female characters in those novels. In Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, the spiritual space of connecting to God and understanding Him empowers Celie to endure pain as a little girl and resist patriarchal oppression as a powerful, successful woman. In her childhood, Celie feels a great relief as she communicates her feelings of fear and confusion to God in the letters she writes to Him. Reconsidering her understanding of God, Celie feels empowered to challenge the norms of her conventional society. She, for instance, wears and designs pants— a type of clothes that has been prohibited for women other than singers—for herself as well as other people in her community. Celie's empowerment boosts her creativity, as she becomes a great designer; her pants designs are unique and are customized to fit people's personality. This spiritual space is private. Only God knows the details of Celie's daily suffering, and no one else.

The space of music is also another metaphorical, perhaps spiritual, space present in both Chopin's *The Awakening* and Jones's *Corregidora.* Mademoiselle Reisz's unconventional music plays a significant role in Edna's personal, artistic, and sexual awakening. Unlike traditional music, the music of Mademoiselle Reisz evokes strong feelings in Edna that empower her to make bold changes in her life. Being unhappy with her life and her conventional role as a wife and mother, Edna rebels against that role and finds the courage to go after her dream of becoming an artist and proclaiming her real identity regardless of the complexity of her situation. Further, the powerful space of Mademoiselle Reisz's music helps release Edna's sexual

creativity when she experiences new feelings and unprecedented sensations that she has never thought she is capable of feeling.

In *Corregidora,* the blues music assists Ursa to locate her voice and release her creativity and her sexuality. Feeling suffocated by her foremothers' narratives, the blues, as a space, gives her the chance to participate creatively in those narratives by incorporating her own experience of oppression alongside those of the elder women. Also, after her accident of falling down the stairs leaves her sterile at a young age, Ursa exploits the blues and uses it as an alternative, creative way to leave evidence and document the history of Corregidora's abuse of her Great Gram and Gram. Lastly, Ursa, who has been emotionally haunted and sexually disabled by the stories of her female ancestors, finds in the blues a creative way to free her sexuality by mastering the art of manipulating men, appearing in the image of the seductive, elusive woman, and shifting her status from a mere sexual object into a sexual subject.

Physical and psychological private spaces have been crucial to the female artists in the four analyzed texts and have had a great impact on their creativity. In *The Awakening*, Grand Isle, the summer home, and the pigeon house, Edna's own house apart from her family, are the two main places that allow Edna the physical and psychological privacy to fuel her personal and artistic awakening. While Edna's first seeds of rebellion against her conventional society and its moral norms have been planted on Grand Isle, they have prospered in the pigeon house. Grand Isle is not a private space; however, some of the solitary moments Edna accesses there give her the chance to connect with her inner self more and understand herself better. The space outside her husband's cottage where she lies down for hours, and the space by the sea in which she sits chatting with her friend Adele or alone contemplating the water, enable her to confront her feelings of dissatisfaction and re-evaluate her life. Edna realizes that she is willing and able to be

more than a traditional wife and mother, and she becomes aware of the potentials of her creativity. Taking the decision to move into a house of her own, Edna furthers her social and personal independence by reclaiming her right to privacy and chasing her dream of becoming an artist and painter. The uninvaded physical and psychological privacy of the pigeon house helps Edna to concentrate on her art and proclaim her real identity, which shows up through her later paintings.

In *Corregidora*, Ursa's creativity is mostly released by the physical and the psychological privacy she accesses at her own house away from the plantation—especially before marriage and after divorce—and the nightclubs she works for. Ursa leaves the plantation and her mother's house so that she can carve an identity for herself that differs than that of the other Corregidora women and live her dream of becoming a successful blues singer. At the nightclubs, the stage contributes to Ursa's creativity in the way it allows her to maintain a great deal of physical and psychological privacy and connect with her innermost feelings, expressing them in beautiful, moving songs. As a territory, the stage also enables Ursa to reconcile with her history of sexual abuse and liberate her suppressed sexual desires. When Ursa sings, her body wanders freely, breaking the stereotypical image of women's bodies as attainable sexual objects for males' desires. Even though the stage occurs in a public space such as nightclubs, this site still feels private for Ursa, as it is not freely accessible by other people attending the nightclub, particularly during her singing sessions. The stage gives Ursa a reasonable expectation for privacy and people never attempt to interrupt that state of physical and psychological privacy when she is singing.

In *O' Pioneers!*, Alexandra's land—also referred to as farm or garden—is the main place that allows her to access a high degree of physical and psychological privacy. As an untraditional

woman and a female pioneer, the garden is Alexandra's real house and the only place where she feels at home and fully connected to her inner creative self. Alexandra's retreat to her land inspires and nurtures her creative talent of taming the wild land of Nebraska, transforming it into a beautiful garden, and cultivating new crops on it. In the physical and the psychological uninterrupted privacy of her land, Alexandra feels empowered to take crucial decisions and inspired to imagine new projects for improving the farm and increasing its productivity.

In *The Color Purple*, the house of Celie's mother, Albert's house, and Shug's house are the three main physical spaces that contribute to shaping Celie's identity and inspiring her artistry. Moving from one house to another, Celie's personality and creativity develop gradually until they reach their peak at her eventual return to her mother's house and success as businesswoman and pant designer. Even though the house of Celie's mother has been the place that isolates her from other people and allows her stepfather to further his oppression of her, it is also the site that empowers her to announce her personal, economic, and artistic independence when she returns to it as the owner, at the end of the novel.

Moving into Albert's house after marrying him, Celie experiences physical and verbal abuse at the hands of her husband and his kids and suffers from the burden of domestic duties she has to perform with no objection. Even though Albert's house in itself, as a physical space, does not give Celie solitude, it provides her with the opportunity to observe powerful women and to be mentally able to reflect on the observations she makes from watching them. This physical site also enables Celie to unite with both Sofia and Shug intimately, accessing the metaphorical supportive space of sisterhood that has been explained earlier.

Shug's house, the third house Celie moves to, has functioned as an enabling private physical space for Celie's creative potentials. Confirming Woolf's idea that women need rooms

of their own as well as money to be able to produce art, Shug provides Celie with an appropriate physical space to live in and money to supply her business. She particularly gives Celie a private bedroom that suites her personality to sleep in and the dining room that is big and wide to use as a small factory. Also, the uninvaded physical and psychological privacy of Celie's assigned spaces at Shug's house enables her to imagine new designs, experiment with assorted fabrics and sizes, and sew many pairs of pants, which in turn unleash her creativity.

In conclusion, the private metaphorical spaces of supportive people and females' bond, spirituality, and music as well as the private physical and psychological spaces of Grand Isle, the stage, Celie's mother's house, and the pigeon house are all examples of Woolf's expanded rooms. These physical, psychological, and metaphorical sites can be considered a response from Woolf's literary sisters and daughters, represented in all female writers to her call for them to forge new spaces for themselves, allowing for creativity in places that are new to them. Cather, Chopin, Walker, and Jones are examples of writers who move beyond traditional spaces in their lives, as their biographies indicate, as well as in their literature, as the close reading of their chosen texts reveal.

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