

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

In the 19th century, women and men were expected to fill separate spheres of society. Men were expected to live a public life, while women were bound to their domestic work at home (Sailus). In other words, women's freedom were limited to the responsibilities as a mother and a wife. The inequality roles between men and women make women socially considered as inferiors.

There are two notable authors who deal with the issue of women in the 19th century. The first is Henry James, one of the major figures and successful writers in American literary realism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In some of his works, James creates "female characters, women who are independent of their social role, remaining strong in their personality" (Ludwig). Some of his major works are *Daisy Miller* (1878), *Washington Square* (1880), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). The second author is Kate Chopin, one of the important American women writers in the 19th century. In some of her works, she "transcended simple regionalism and portrayed woman who seeks spiritual and

sexual freedom amid the restrictive mores of nineteenth-century Southern society” (“Kate Chopin 1851–1904”). As she raises taboo issue about women in her second novel *The Awakening* (1899), she got a lot of criticism. Chopin is “recognized for her pioneering examination of sexuality, individual freedom, and the consequences of action—themes and concerns important to many later twentieth-century writers” (“Kate Chopin 1851–1904”).

There are two novels that I will analyze in this study. The first novel is Henry James’ *The Portrait of a Lady*, which “stands as James’s contribution to the great nineteenth-century novel” (Bellringer 59). The story is about an American woman who feels oppressed mentally by her husband; however, she prefers to stay in her awful marriage. The second novel I chose is *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin’s most prominent work. The story is about an American woman who feels oppressed by her role as a mother and a wife and commits suicide at the end to get the freedom that she wants. The novel becomes a controversy in the 19th Century, as “most critics regarded the novel as vulgar, unholy, and a misappropriation of Chopin’s exceptional talent” (Sprinkle). However, later it is “re-discovered in the late 20th century, bringing Chopin attention as a remarkable storyteller and feminist writer” (Godin). I think both novels are compatible to be compared as both novels deal with women in the 19th century.

I am going to analyze the portrayal of the protagonists because the stories of the two novels happen around the female protagonists. According to Harry Shaw in *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, portrayal “refers to the portrait (\*characterization) of individuals presented in literary selections” (295). Both female protagonists of the novels are dynamic characters. By definition, dynamic

character is "one that does undergo important change in the course of the story" (Baker).

As both novels happen around the 19th century, an age characterized by gender inequality ("Women in the 19th Century"), I think it is suitable to use feminism approach. Feminism is "the organized movement which promotes equality for men and women in political, economic and social spheres" ("Different Types of Feminist Theories").

I choose the theory from Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). Simone De Beauvoir is a French existentialist philosopher and women's rights activist ("Simone De Beauvoir"). De Beauvoir states that man considers himself as the self or the subject and woman as "the Other" or the object which causes men to oppress women fundamentally. Her theory is to attack the facts which make women regarded as "the Other". By stating, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (De Beauvoir 330), she wants to prove that a woman is not born as an inferior and feminine, but she is shaped by the society. De Beauvoir also gives her negative view about marriage institution that makes women subjugated by men. Thus, feminism approach will be used in analyzing the portrayal of the female protagonists in order to make the readers understand the portrayal better.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problems I would like to discuss in this thesis are:

1. How do the authors portray the female protagonist?
2. How is the change in characteristics of the protagonists related to feminism?

## **Purpose of the Study**

Based on the statement of the problems above, the purposes of the study are:

1. To show how the protagonists are portrayed in the novels.
2. To show how the change in characteristics of the protagonists is related to feminism.

## **Method of Research**

I use the library research that includes reading and understanding the primary texts which are Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Then, to support my analysis, I perform a research for additional information, which is done through secondary reading from Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Then I gather some information from the Internet which supports my research. Lastly, I draw some conclusion from my analysis.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of five chapters, preceded by Table of Contents, and Abstract. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two deals with the theoretical background of feminism. Chapter Three is the discussion on the portrayal of the protagonist of Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*. Chapter Four is the discussion on the portrayal of the protagonist of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The last chapter, Chapter Five, is the Conclusion. The thesis ends with Bibliography and

Appendices, which consist of the synopses of the two novels and the biographies of the authors.

