

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the 19th century, American and Russian women lived in an inequality which was imposed by society. Men were believed to be superior while women were inferior, which means “women were considered delicate and fragile humans who were incapable of making their own decisions” (Thomas). Men were seen as brave, independent, dominant, and strong individuals while women were seen as submissive, weak, dependent, and domestic. Women had to obey and conform to men’s demands. It was also important for women to conform to the social conventions. However, not all women were willing to accept this situation. Some of them tried to go against their predetermined roles in society. The struggle of women to rebel against the social conventions is depicted in the two novels that are going to be analyzed in this thesis: Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* and Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*.

Kate Chopin is one of the most important American women writers in the 19th century. She was first known as a local colorist, who “focuses on a particular setting and segment of society—often mimicking in print their manner of speech, their class system, and other social rules particular to the region, such as specific

roles or assumptions for women or children” (“Introduction”). “Using vivid description, her works capture the local habits, language and characters that make the area unique and real” (“Kate Chopin: Biography, Works, and Style”).

However, after she wrote *The Awakening* and other stories that discuss the inner lives of women who rebel against the society, her image as a local colorist changed. As stated in an article by Katherine Godin, “American audiences in the 19th century found her ideas direct and unsettling [as her stories were considered taboo to be discussed]”, yet “Chopin had gained a [new] identity as a brave writer who explored themes like marriage, sexuality, and identity in her work” (“Kate Chopin: Biography, Works, and Style”).

During her lifetime, Chopin published two novels, and about 100 short stories. “Her short stories were well received in the 1890s and were published by many American’s magazines at that time, such as *Vogue*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s Young People*, *Youth’s Companion*, and the *Century*” (“Kate Chopin: Her Novels and Stories”).

The Awakening is Kate Chopin’s best-known novel. It tells the story of Edna Pontellier, an upper class woman who experiences an unhappy marriage. Feeling disappointed with her husband’s treatment of her, she decides to have an affair and rebel against her predetermined roles as a woman – an act which contradicts the social conventions at her time. However, at the end of the novel, she decides to commit suicide. *The Awakening* was banned in the 19th century because many critics found the story vulgar and morbid. Then, several decades later, this novel was acclaimed as one of the remarkable literary revivals in the United States (“Biography”).

Meanwhile, Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy is a Russian author who is considered one of the world's greatest novelists. According to the English writer Virginia Woolf, Tolstoy was "the greatest of all novelists, his observational powers elicited a kind of fear in readers, who wish to escape from the gaze which Tolstoy fixes on us" (Morson). Moreover, "Tolstoy's writings are filled with passion, careful thought and beautiful language, a real treat to readers" ("Influence on World Literature"). Tolstoy wrote many novels, plays, stories, autobiographical writings, and essays during his lifetime.

Anna Karenina is one of Tolstoy's most famous works. As Matthew Arnold states, "The truth is we are not to take *Anna Karenina* as a work of art, we are to take it as a piece of life" (Sturman). *Anna Karenina* is a story about a Russian woman of the same name who is unhappy with her marriage and decides to have an affair. By doing this, she deviates from the social conventions of her time. Nevertheless, after being seen as a disgrace by society, she becomes depressed because of how society treats her, and eventually she decides to commit suicide.

Anna Karenina actually has two prominent characters: Anna and Levin. However, I will only discuss Anna in this thesis because she is the stronger character of the two. Moreover, her life story is sufficient to represent the issue of unequal treatment of women and the author's purpose of writing the novel. The second reason is because I wish to compare Anna in *Anna Karenina* to Edna in *The Awakening*. Both protagonists experience a similar condition about their predetermined roles as women. However, they live in different places: one is in Russia and the other is in America. Hence, it is intriguing to see whether both protagonists would react differently to their struggle as women and whether the

place where they live – with the different cultures and customs – would have any influence on their life decisions.

As both novels depict the protagonists' change of characteristics in relation to the unhappy marriage caused by their husband's oppression, it is felt best that I choose portrayal of the protagonist as the literary element to be discussed in this thesis. Portrayal "refers to the portrait (characterization) of individuals presented in literary selections" (Shaw 295), while protagonist is "the leading character of a drama, novel, or other literary work" (305).

I am going to analyze the portrayal of the protagonists using formalism, which "refers to a style of inquiry that focuses, almost exclusively, on features of the literary text itself, to the exclusion of biographical, historical, or intellectual contexts" ("Formalism"). Considering that all the information I need to conduct the analysis can be found in the novels, it is felt best for me to use this approach.

Statement of the Problem

The problems that are going to be discussed in this thesis are:

1. How are the protagonists portrayed in the novels *The Awakening* and *Anna Karenina*?
2. What are the purposes of the authors in portraying such characters?

Purpose of the Study

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

1. to show how the protagonists are portrayed in the novels *The Awakening* and *Anna Karenina*;

2. to show the purposes of the authors in creating such characters.

Method of Research

In writing this thesis, I used a library research. First, I began my research by reading Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Then, I used an online research to find the references that are needed. Next, I analyzed the portrayal of the protagonists in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* by using the references that I had acquired to support my analysis. Lastly, I drew some conclusions based on my analysis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters, preceded by Acknowledgements, Table of Contents, and Abstract. Chapter One is 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 contains analysis of portrayal of the protagonist in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* while Chapter Three discusses the portrayal of the protagonist in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. The last chapter is the conclusion of what has been analyzed in the previous chapters. This thesis ends with Bibliography and Appendices, consisting of Synopsis of the Novels and Biography of the Authors.