

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I am going to draw some conclusions based on the analyses of the portrayals of the protagonists in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. I would like to reveal how the protagonists are portrayed and what are the purposes of the authors in creating such protagonists.

The first protagonist, Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, is an American woman who is unhappy with her marriage and tries to escape from the social conventions that bind her. In this novel, Edna is portrayed as a dynamic character. At the beginning of the novel, Edna is portrayed as a restrained and obedient woman. These are the ideal characteristics that women are expected to possess at that time. However, her disappointment with Leonce Pontellier's – her husband's – treatment of her, combined with her encounter with Robert Lebrun, causes her ideal characteristics to change. She is no longer restrained and obedient; instead, she becomes expressive and rebellious. She then has an affair with Robert and begins to live according to her own desires. However, at the end of the novel, she decides to commit suicide by drowning herself in the sea. By creating such a protagonist in this novel, Kate Chopin, as the author, has several things to inform

her readers. First and foremost, Chopin wants to show how women live in inequality and that they are expected to submit to men's domination in the patriarchal society. She wants to reveal that at that time, women are oppressed by the social conventions and forced to fulfill their predetermined roles. Second, through the change in the protagonist's characteristics, as well as the ending of the novel, Chopin wants to show that women will never succeed in liberating themselves from the social conventions. By portraying the change in Edna's characteristics, she wants to reveal that no matter how hard women try to rebel against the social conventions, they will eventually fail, as illustrated at the end of the novel when Edna decides to commit suicide.

The second protagonist, Anna Karenina in *Anna Karenina*, is a Russian woman who experiences an unhappy marriage and tries to escape from the social conventions that oppress her. Just like Edna in *The Awakening*, Anna is portrayed as a dynamic character. At the beginning of the novel, she is described as a responsible and obedient woman – an ideal woman in the eyes of society. However, her disappointment with her husband's treatment of her, as well as her encounter with Vronsky, triggers the change in her characteristics. She is no longer responsible and obedient; instead, she becomes irresponsible and rebellious. She has an affair with Vronsky, abandons her son, and goes abroad with her lover. Losing her good reputation, being outcasted by the society, and feeling disappointed with her failed affair, she then commits suicide at the end of the story by throwing herself to a train.

By creating such a protagonist in the novel, Leo Tolstoy, as the author, wants to tell his readers that women, in particular, have to conform to the social conventions where they live if they want to survive in such a patriarchal society.

He wants to show that rebelling against the social conventions will only lead to destruction, as depicted through Anna, who commits suicide at the end of the story.

After analyzing the portrayal of the protagonists in the two novels and also the purposes of the authors in creating such protagonists, I can conclude that there are some similarities and differences between the two novels. The first similarity is that both protagonists experience an unhappy marriage. Both Edna and Anna are oppressed by their husbands, who represent the patriarchal system of society.

The second similarity is that both protagonists experience some changes in their characteristics because of their disappointment with their husband's treatment and their encounter with their lover. They are no longer seen as the ideal type of women at that time; instead, they change into women who deviate from the social conventions. Towards the end of the novel, Edna is portrayed as an expressive and rebellious woman, while Anna is depicted as an irresponsible and rebellious woman.

The last similarity is that both protagonists commit suicide after they experience an unhappy marriage, have an affair, and try to rebel against the social conventions that bind them. At the end of the novel, Edna commits suicide by drowning herself in the sea, while Anna ends her life by throwing herself to a train.

Other than those similarities, there are also differences between the two novels. The difference lies in the setting of place where the protagonists live. In *The Awakening*, Edna lives in the late 19th century American society where various aspects begin to change, except for the roles of women, which remain steady. Although there is a movement to seek equality between men and women, America still holds its traditional values about women's roles. This is the reason why Edna eventually fails when she tries to liberate herself from the patriarchal society's oppression. Meanwhile, in *Anna Karenina*, Anna lives in the late 19th century

Russian society which is very conservative. At that time, the inequality between men and women is very strong; women, in particular, have to conform to the social conventions where they live. Therefore, it is impossible for Anna to rebel against the Russian society as it is extremely, strictly patriarchal.

The second difference lies in the type of pressure that both protagonists experiences. In *The Awakening*, Edna mostly experiences psychological pressure as the society does not really know that she tries to rebel. At the end of the novel, Edna actually still has a choice to return to her husband, but she decides not to and chooses to commit suicide instead because she does not have any strength left to deal with the psychological pressure she feels. However, unlike Edna, Anna in *Anna Karenina* experiences both tremendous psychological and social pressure. The society knows exactly the improper actions Anna has done, and this causes them to put more pressure on Anna and outcast her. Unlike Edna, Anna has no choice to return to her husband and family as the society has rejected her. Thus, unable to deal with the psychological and social pressures, Anna finally commits suicide.

To sum up, through the similarities and the differences between the two novels, it can be concluded that wherever they live at that time, whether in Russia or America, women who try to rebel against the social conventions, will experience both psychological and social pressures which make them unable to free themselves from the oppression of the patriarchal society. No matter how hard they try to rebel against the social conventions where they live, their effort will eventually end in failure.

Having analyzed these two novels, I think both *The Awakening* and *Anna Karenina* are two literary works that successfully deliver the messages the authors wish to convey to the readers. Through the portrayal of the protagonists in the two

novels, the authors have provided the readers with a very clear depiction of the inequality and the oppression women have to experience at that time.

As a reader, I realize that both novels have a deep and meaningful message, especially for women. However, personally, I disagree with the purpose of the authors. As a woman, I can imagine how difficult and depressing life would be when women are treated unequally and forced to submit to male domination in a patriarchal society. In my opinion, despite the assumption that men are created to lead, women still have the rights to speak up their opinions and decide what they wish to do. Women are also human beings who have feelings and deserve to live with equal status as males. I believe that women are born not only to bear children and take care of households; instead, women also have the right to pursue their own goals and happiness. Women are not slaves who have to obey men, whatever men order them to do, nor are they objects that men can easily use to fulfill their sexual desires. Reading these two novels makes me realize how blessed I am to be born at a time when women live far more equally than in the past, when women can live as they decide to. I am very grateful that behind this better life, there are many women who had endlessly fought for women's rights and freedom in the past.