

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The nineteenth century society in England was divided into three major classes. They were the aristocrats; the middle class, which was divided into upper-middle class and lower-middle class; and the lower class, which was divided into the working class and the poor. During that time, the middle class people were the largest population. (“19th Century England Social Hierarchy”)

Besides the class division in the society, there was also a distinction between men and women. The women in the nineteenth century England were stereotyped as weak, passive, timid, illogical, dependent, emotional, susceptible to madness or hysteria, and unable to resist temptation. These traits are the opposite of men's, following the thought that men and women were contrary to one another. More importantly, women who expressed traits or desires contrary

to these ideals were ostracized and deemed to have "unsexed" themselves. ("Women in the Nineteenth Century") Women's roles were limited to the domestic sphere, meaning that their business only revolved around managing the household. They were "expected to be primarily responsible for housework and childcare" ("Gender in the Proceedings").

From the information mentioned above, it is known how women were treated and expected to behave during the nineteenth century. This notion mainly affected the middle class women as they were the largest subject in the society. However, the protagonists of the two novels I have chosen are considered to have some characteristics that were unusual for young middle class women during that time. Both the protagonists lived at the first half of nineteenth century when women – mostly the young middle class ones – received unfair treatment from the society; still, they managed to maintain their characteristics.

One of the novels I have chosen to analyze is written by Jane Austen. Austen is an English novelist who has earned her place as one of the most well-known authors through her novels. Most of Austen's novels depict the lives of the early nineteenth century women. Austen is praised for her social observation towards the patriarchal society at that time. Austen's second novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, which was published in 1813, is "an unputdownable read" (Lambert). Austen "manages her characters with a master's touch" (Thornley & Roberts 116). Anthony Trollope, one of the most successful English novelists of the Victorian era, praised that "Miss Austen was surely a great novelist. What she did, she did perfectly" ("Jane Austen's Art and Her Literary Reputation"). Through Elizabeth Bennet, the protagonist of the novel whom Austen described

“as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print” (Bilger & Greenfield), Austen criticizes the society during the first half of the nineteenth century, in which young middle class women are not considerably in favourable position.

Another author who also gives insight into the lives of the nineteenth century women is Anne Brontë. She also gives the readers a view into young middle class women’s life in the first half of the nineteenth century. Through her notable novel published in 1848, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which “should be credited for its bravery in including elements that stand out as protesting the male-dominated values of the society” (Narter), Brontë refers to certain errors of the society. The protagonist of this novel is a married woman named Helen, who flees from her profligate and alcoholic husband with her young son. At that time, even a married woman was not in better estate because “women who held property of any kind were required to give up all rights to it to their husbands on marriage” (“Marriage: Property and Children”). In addition, at that time it was difficult for a woman to obtain a divorce even if her husband was not faithful or treated her badly (“19th Century Marriage”).

Although this novel received some harsh criticisms because it contained some issues which were considered inappropriate to be displayed openly at that time, it also gained a success throughout England and America. The protagonist in this novel remains as a fascinating character for “Helen’s transgressing the society standards is not only constrained to words; she also *acts* accordingly” (Narter).

Through the two female protagonists as mentioned above, I will analyze the characteristics of young middle class women who were considered unusual at that time. Both of the protagonists are women who are regarded as inferior to men

and have some traits that challenge the social conventions at their times. Since protagonist is “the central character in a literary work” (Perrine 44), I believe that protagonist plays an important role in a novel. Thus, by analysing the protagonists, I expect to reveal the authors’ purpose of creating the characters.

Since the two novels are considered social criticism I believe the strength of such characters will be best revealed using sociological approach. According to the article “Critical Approaches to Literature”, X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia explain that sociological approach “examines literature in the cultural, economic and political context in which it is written or received.” It also explores the relationship between the artist and society and sometimes, in order to understand the author’s literary works better, this approach examines the artist’s society; other times, it may examine the representation of such societal elements within the literature itself. (“Critical Approaches to Literature”) By using this approach, I hope the readers can understand why both the protagonists are considered different from other young middle class women in their times. The approach will give the readers some explanation about the customs at that time that were thought of as important. By using this approach, I also hope to reveal the authors’ purpose of creating the protagonists.

Statement of the Problem

The problems I am going to discuss in this thesis are:

1. How is the protagonist portrayed in each novel?
2. What is the authors’ purpose of creating such characters?

Purpose of the Study

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

1. To show how the protagonist is portrayed in the story.
2. To show the authors' purpose of creating such characters.

Method of Research

The method I use in writing my thesis is library research. I begin the study by reading the primary texts, which are Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Then I read some references from the Internet and books that are relevant to the topic to support my analysis. The information and the knowledge that I have gathered are then used to analyse the texts. Finally, I draw a conclusion from the research I have done.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters, preceded by the Table of Contents and the Abstract. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the discussion on the portrayal of the protagonist of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* by using sociological approach. Chapter Three is the discussion on the portrayal of the protagonist of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by using sociological approach. Chapter Four is the Conclusion. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendices, which consist of the Synopsis of the Novels and the Biography of the Authors.