

Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The Awakening by Kate Chopin (1850-1904) was written at the end of the nineteenth century, being published in 1899. This novel was scandalous and widely criticized at that time because of its challenging and adulterous content. It challenges a whole tradition of novels, written by and about women in nineteenth-century American literature. This book is the story of Edna, a late twenty-year-old American wife and mother from 'the old Kentucky blue-grass country' (6), who is alienated from the creole¹ society of her husband. She is frustrated with her married-life because she knows that what she really desires cannot be fulfilled. Her growth in understanding and self-awareness can be clearly seen in the novel (Hook, 1983 : 176).

Discovering her desire for independence, Edna changes her behavior. She neglects the responsibilities of wife and mother and commits adultery, which is absolutely unacceptable. Although being an independent woman seems impossible, Edna tries to escape from the untenable life of an ideal wife and mother. However, Edna finally realizes that her desire for freedom and independence cannot be fulfilled, and that she cannot exist without the dignity of being an independent human being. Her only means to keep what she considers her life-essence is suicide, drowning herself in the sea.

In the Thai novel *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai (The Last Love)* by Suwannee Sukhontha (1932-1984), first published in 1973, Ros, the female protagonist, also encounters the problem of alienation. Like Edna, Ros chooses

¹ Descendant from the original French and Spanish settlers of New Orleans ; an aristocrat.

suicide as her escape from the feared loss of love. Neither is *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai* as scandalous a book as *The Awakening*, for when it was published, this novel about unconventional love and women's freedom was accepted by Thai society. However, it is interesting that Ros's alienation is not much different from that of Edna.

Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai is the story of Ros, an early thirty-year-old, middle-class divorcee and mother of three children, who feels alienated from her society and herself. After divorce, Ros's children stay with their grandmother while Ros works as an illustrator and lives alone on a small income. She has intimate relationships, almost at the same time, with two men, Chitchua and Pat. Ros loves Pat, a man five years her junior. However, her love seemingly cannot be fulfilled, for in Thai society, an older woman, especially a divorcee, is considered an unsuitable match for a young man. Moreover, as Pat seems to prefer a carefree bachelor's life without a permanent job, Ros cannot expect any security from this man. Ros, therefore, decides to choose Chitchua whom she believes can help her reconstruct a new family. Unfortunately, Ros's children are later killed in an accident almost at the same time that the man of her choice leaves her with the excuse that he has just realized that he does not love her children. Without her children, Ros finds life aimless. Although she is fully aware of her love for Pat, and although Pat also reveals his love for her, Ros feels insecure, especially when Pat has to go abroad to study as requested by his sister, who cannot accept Ros's divorcee status and age. Ros, finally decides her own fate: to end her life while "the last love" still belongs to her, wishing to have a happy life with her children and Pat in the next life. Like Edna, Ros chooses the sea as her ultimate place of rest.

Although constructed in different times and cultures, both *The Awakening* and *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai* have some comparable points. The frustrated lives of American and Thai women are illustrated via the female

protagonists, Edna and Ros, whose feeling of alienation troubles their lives and finally leads to suicide. It is very interesting that the heroines who represent women of seemingly “different milieus” resort to the same solution to a similar problem.

Women’s issues find powerful means of expression in western literature. Various kinds of women’s problems are used as literary themes; alienation is one. Cornillion (1973 : 253-254) states that there are connections between feminism and literature because literature has been one of the few vocations open to women in which they can “express the states of their minds: their perceptions about the social attitudes of men towards women, their understanding of the way in which women learn to be women and their attitudes towards each other”.

The concept of alienation is used by both sociologists and psychologists to explain certain social and individual phenomena. It is divided into alienation from social values, alienation from others, and self-alienation. Among the especially alienated groups of people are women, industrial workers, white-collar workers, migrant workers, mentally disturbed people, addicts, the aged, the young generation as a whole, juvenile delinquents, sex deviants, and victims of prejudice and discrimination. The psycho-social disorders for which the term alienation is used include anxiety states, depersonalization, the sense of rootlessness, of powerlessness, of meaninglessness, and the rejection of the values of the culture with no alternative (Aptheker, 1965 : 2). These alienated people exist unhappily in their society.

When discussing alienation, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers often illustrate the concept by drawing examples from plays and novels (Kaplam, 1976 : 89-90) in which this concept is revealed in accordance with the themes. Murchland (1971 : 3-80, quoted in Lertchai Sirichai, 1987 : 28) defines alienation in literature as feelings of meaninglessness, powerlessness, value isolation, and social isolation.

The female protagonists of these two selected novels, *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*, encounter problems of alienation, both socially and psychologically, which push them into life-struggle and lead their lives to similar self-destruction. It is the aim of this research to comparatively explore the origins and effects of the alienation which lead the two women of dissimilar social backgrounds to their tragic ends.

Related Literature

To discuss the issue of women's alienation in *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*, some literature is reviewed to give backgrounds in both western and Thai contexts. This section begins with the exploration of women's alienation in literature, followed by criticism and research on both novels and their authors, and finally the study of suicide in modern society and in literature.

1. Women's Alienation in Literature

Women's issues are widely discussed in literature. Varied in themes, some works provide self-realization for women and urge them to discover their dignity. Most of them create female characters whose social and psychological problems allow the feeling of alienation. Classic examples of this group are *Madame Bovary*, a French masterpiece by Gustave Flaubert, first published in 1857, and *Anna Karenina*, a great literary work by the prominent Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, first published in 1877. The female protagonists are outstanding in their rejections of women's stereotypes and social expectations. Being powerful and moving stories of women's adultery and the feeling of alienation which leads to suicide, they were two of the most influential prose works of the 19th century.

Madame Bovary is generally recognized as a landmark in French literature which “shocked contemporary readers” by illustrating the life of a romantic adulteress (Magill, 1952 : 539). The novel is set in Normandy during the golden age of the bourgeois-class, with commercial and industrial growth (Tassanee Nagavajara, 1986 : 96-162). In the story, Emma Bovary, a sensitive, romantic and dreamt bourgeois woman restlessly tries to free herself from her dull existence and searches for an imaginary life. Her life is controlled by desires and illusions which are inevitably broken when she is finally faced with reality. Emma’s expectation of marriage, that it should bring a luxurious life, is more than what she receives from her husband, a provincial doctor, with whom Emma feels so discontented that she commits adultery. According to a critic, this protagonist is created to “mirror the bourgeois mentality and human frailty” (Stern, 1957 : 281-287). She is too fond of the imaginary world to become adjusted to reality. Her alienation reflects isolation of the individual in modern societies. Emma’s suicide signifies a result of the loss of her own self-respect in her growing degradation.

Similar to *Madame Bovary*, Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, becomes a criticism of the author’s contemporary Russia. Like Emma, Anna is not happy with her marriage, although her husband is wealthier than that of Emma. Anna’s husband is a Russian nobleman who provides his wife expensive living; however, this luxury does not fulfill Anna’s life. She expects love and romance from her husband. Insensitive to her feelings, he assumes his wife should be contented with her expected role. Anna’s adultery is her compensation for her husband’s insensitivity; however, this only brings her pain, resulting from the rigid codes of moral conduct of the time. Bound by the fetters of a Russian social system which distorts human nature – a social system to which Anna, a passionate woman and a loving mother, finds it hard to submit – she finally commits suicide.

To Greene (1977 : 106-125), Anna is the mixture of Tolstoy's typical ideal woman, a woman who attempts to own her life, and his preconception of a contemporary Russian woman who must surrender to social convention in order to survive. However, Weitz (1963 : 25-29) points out that this heroine receives sympathy from the reader who agrees that living with an insensitive husband and being unable to attain her humanity lead Anna to an unbearable existence .

Emma and Anna dare to break social traditions by committing adultery for they realize their own needs and discover that they do not appreciate the roles of women dictated by their society. The lives of these two heroines are comparable to that of Edna, *The Awakening's* protagonist, who commits adultery, and rejects her responsibility as wife and mother to achieve her dignity. To all these female protagonists, the rewards of their struggles are alienation and self-destruction. Their comparable lives and final solutions lead to interesting questions concerning women's lives and their quest for meaning in life.

However, it does not mean that the stories about female nonconformists always have to end with a tragic note. About thirty years after *The Awakening*, the scandalous novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) by the British writer D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) was published to declare "the author's belief in the possibility of personal fulfillment through sexual relations" which he regards as "the decisive element in human behavior". Lawrence abandons the "traditional concerns of the English novel – worldly careers, courtship, and social manners" ("Lawrence, D.H.", 1999 : 208). His novel's sexual content shocked his contemporary readers.

This novel is the story of Constance Chatterley, a British industrialist's wife who commits adultery because of her impotent husband. Constance elopes with her husband's groundskeeper after finding fulfillment in a sexual union with him. To Yagley (1993 : vii), this novel is Lawrence's means to

comment on the “cold, hard and mechanical” society of England in the 1920s by “exaggerating the sorry state of Britain’s aristocracy through Clifford Chatterley’s impotence, and by portraying Mellors and Lady Chatterley’s explicit sexuality.” The story shows the protagonist’s proclamation of self-belonging and sexual awareness. She feels warmth, courage and sensibility which are never found in her husband.

The three reviewed novels illustrate frustrated lives of women in three social contexts. The heroines’ alienation originates in rigid social conventions which do not allow a happy existence for women, for they are mere objects in the eyes of males in the patriarchal societies of France, Russia and England. The protagonists’ adultery signifies their rejection of abnormal social norms which prevent a woman from achieving complete human dignity, and also suggests the sexual instinct, which a being cannot avoid. The suicides of Emma and Anna, as well as Constance’s elopement, are protests against their societies which rob them of human dignity.

Among Thai literary works, although the theme of women’s alienation is not immediately apparent, there are some stories in which the female protagonist’s behavior is at odds with the social expectations. *Khunchang Khunphaen*, a famous narrative poem, almost 200 years old, and *Phaendin Khong Rao* (1957) by Mae Anong (penname of Malai Chuphinit, 1906-1963) are literary portrayals of Thai women under social and emotional pressure.

The impact of social pressure upon a woman’s decision-making is witnessed in *Khunchang Khunphaen*, in which the protagonist, Wanthong, is condemned as an “immoral woman” because she is unable to make a quick choice between two husbands striving to possess her: her first love on one side and her later indulgent and loyal protector on the other. Being a woman desired by two competing husbands, Wanthong is condemned no matter what her decision is. (Ironically, one of her husbands, the male protagonist, has three other wives). To punish a “lustful” woman who has caused a long

conflict between two noblemen, the king gives her a death sentence. Although even the narrator points out that her sentence is unfair owing to the king's ignorance about human nature and the lack of sensitivity and sympathy, uncritical audiences traditionally consider her an example of an "immoral woman" (Duangmon Chitchamnong, 1979 : 28-41).

With women's growing independence during the second half of the twentieth century, novelists reflected this change through their works. Phakkhinee, a self-confident and romantic heroine of *Phaendin Khong Rao*, does not allow herself to be socially controlled. Similar to Anna Karenina, Phakkhinee sacrifices herself for love and dares to break moral traditions. Despite being condemned as "immoral", Phakkhinee is happy with her decision, even to the last minute of her life. Her elopement and subsequent socially-unacceptable life with her lover illustrate her devotion to love. This can be considered a new attitude toward Thai women in a changing society.

Wanthong's life is far different from those of Phakkhinee and Ros in that Wanthong is under social conventions. She has no choice to make, no right to decide for herself. Yet, even though Phakkhinee and Ros seem to be able to choose their way of life, certain social constraints are still there, and their choices lead to tragic ends.

Although *Khunchang Khunphaen* and *Phaendin Khong Rao* do not focus on the theme of women's alienation, Wanthong and Phakkhinee can be considered social aliens as witnessed in the unusual situation of Wanthong, who is trapped between two rival lovers claiming her as their own, and the unusual decision of Phakkhinee, a married woman who elopes with her sister's fiancé.

These five selected novels reveal women's alienation in various situations and their attempts to achieve human dignity. *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* are European precedents of *The Awakening* which portray difficult struggles for human dignity which have uncommon social conventions

as major obstacles. *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* show women's efforts leading to the tragic conclusion of suicide, because women cannot free themselves from social chains. *The Awakening* can be grouped with them because it represents an American woman's struggle under powerful social norms. These three novels are different from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the protagonist of which dares to decide her own path in the less rigid society of the twentieth century England.

Khunchang Khunphaen and *Phaendin Khong Rao* provide different images of Thai women. Wanthong is considered purely a social victim who is only an object in a male-dominated society, while Phakkhinee, a new generation heroine, dares to choose although she realizes that her decision will be condemned wrong. It is possible to say that the quest for human dignity is successful in the cases of Constance Chatterley and Phakkhinee, while the other characters - Emma, Anna, Edna, and Ros - decide to end their lives, having discovered that what they choose does not bring the real meaning to their lives. Wanthong's life seems most miserable as she cannot decide her own fate. All in all, we cannot deny that all these literary heroines express a belief in women's strength.

2. Criticism and Research on Both Novels and their Authors

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, while many American women writers produced works concerning romantic idealism and sentimentalism as well as the domestic roles of women in society, Kate Chopin shocked the literary world with *The Awakening*, which defied a conventional moral orthodoxy (Hook, 1983 : 176). What critics attacked was Chopin's regarding of the gratification of a passion as more important than the relationship between a mother and her children. Moreover, her depiction of Edna's sexual pleasure outside marriage was unacceptable because at that time a woman's

noblest act was to give birth. Also, open talk about sex was then considered crude and, therefore, people were opposed both to the author herself and to Edna's behavior (Padlasli, 1991). As a result, the story "was universally dismissed as 'morbid', 'unwholesome', 'essentially vulgar', 'trite and sordid'" (Hook, 1983 : 177).

However, since the 1970s, with the feminist movement in America, *The Awakening* has been reborn with more understanding and acceptance from critics and readers in general. The novel is said to be a creole *Madame Bovary* in portraying an unconventional woman (Ua Unchalee, 2001 : 71). Emma and Edna are alike in their seeking love and fulfillment of their "essential nature" outside "stuffy, middle-class marriage" (Eble, 1976 : 166). It is praised as a feminist masterpiece, while its author is acknowledged for providing opportunities for an open and straight proclamation of women's inner desire for self-fulfillment. In particular, Edna, the female protagonist, receives the honor of being a model of independent women who dare challenge social values imprisoning women within the role of wife and mother (Chusak Phattharakunlavanit, 2000 : 70). However, Ua Unchalee thinks *Madame Bovary* is a more universal portrait of a woman because she is true to life, while Edna Pontellier is a created image who is only Kate Chopin's ideal woman, not a representative of a woman in reality. To this critic, Edna's sexual freedom cannot bring emancipation from gender inequality, but expresses a personal emotion. Her adultery is not a reasonable means to achieve human dignity.

With different viewpoint Eble, (1976 : 165-170) argues that Edna's struggle is "objective, real and moving" because she is not deceived by "ideas of romance." She is a "physical woman" struggling with sensuality and passion she is vaguely aware of. For Eble, Edna is a more universal portrait of a woman than Emma.

To the present researcher, the account of Edna's sexuality is a criticism of stifling social convention which prohibits women from passionate

expression of sexual instinct, which is part of human nature. Therefore Chopin's emphasis on sexuality is part of her attempt to declare the previously denied freedom a woman, as a person, should enjoy. Edna is not a mere Chopin's imagined woman, but a representative of a woman in the real world.

The question whether Edna is "awakened" or is still entrapped in her fantasy has been argued. Hook (1983 : 175) points out that the ending of the novel defines the full achievement of the title: "Edna has found her freedom and independence; her self, her individuality, have gained free, untrammelled existence; she is able to think, to act, and most importantly, to feel, for herself." She is first awakened to "possibilities for self-expression" (Leary, 1976 : 199), but to finally discovers that the possibilities turn to "devoid of hope" (Ringe, 1976 : 205). Edna is at last free to choose but her choice is finally to die. However, Chusak Phattharakunlavanit (2000 : 53) and Ua Unchalee (2001 : 72) argue that Edna realizes her selfhood, but she is not really awakened. She cannot pull herself out of her illusion because even at the last minute she returns to her childhood and teenage fancy. The arguments of both are agreeable for Wolkenfeld (1976 : 218-224), who similarly views Edna's return to childhood her unreal awakening.

But for two critics May (1976 : 189-195) and Ringe (1976 : 201-206), Edna's childhood memory – her father's voice and an old chained dog – symbolize the slavery she cannot escape in the male dominant society. To the present researcher, Edna truly awakes to the sense of being a human; she is ready for the attempt to achieve dignity as an independent woman. The going back to her childhood suggests her realization of the unpleasant reality, symbolized by her father's voice, oppressive and unenjoyable.

Edna's suicidal motive is another major focus of criticism. On the issue of human dignity, Yonoki (1989) considers Edna's final decision reasonable. Under social pressure and without any possibility to attain human dignity constructively, the struggle for self-realization turns to self-destructiveness to

maintain one's integrity. It is a liberation from the marital cage, social rules and motherhood. For Seyersted (1976 : 180-186) and Eble (1976 : 165-170), Edna's final gesture is considered the "heroic grandeur" which gives her "the power, the dignity" and the real "self-possession." However, Spangler (1976 : 186-189) attacks the ending of *The Awakening*, arguing that Edna's suicide is an unpredictable event, for there is no motivating grounds leading to suicide. To Splanger, her self-destruction may be considered acceptable if *The Awakening* is "an ordinary sentimental novel", not a novel of "woman's passionate nature and its relation to self, marriage and society" as it in fact is. To Splanger, a self-confident, strong and daring woman such as Edna should not end her life with suicide; she has struggled throughout the story, but suddenly fails simply because of her inability to endure her lover's farewell note. But Wolff (1976 : 206-218) asserts that Edna's suicide is a regression from a "sense of inner emptiness" not caused by failure in love. Edna is incapable of accommodation herself to the "limitations of reality." It is the consequence of the realization of her "solitary nature" (Ringe, 1976 : 206-218). In the present researcher's opinion, her suicide is a reasonable act to maintain her dignity. Throughout the story, she is self-confident and strong with a hope for success. But being a lone fighter with no support and with no prospect of achievement must finally exhaust her. Although self-destruction is not an attractive solution, it declares Edna's determination to define herself as a free woman.

Edna's alienation has been discussed and studied. Culley (1976 : 224-228) points that Chopin previously named this novel "A Solitary Soul" to underline her protagonist's solitude. This story is an illustration of a female independent and willful soul whom May (1976 : 189-195) and Ringe (1976 : 201-206) regard "selfish," for she can sacrifice others in order to maintain her sole self. According to Hook (1983 : 167), the price for Edna's realization of her sensuous self is isolation and alienation. Her identity cannot be defined by

her relationship with other people, for that means denying and thwarting her awakened self. Chametzky (1976 : 200-201) also concludes that Edna's struggle is related to the question of women who want to free themselves from being objects and to loosen themselves from social conventions which have power over their lives. However, it is still a question for women of how to be free while still meaningfully relating to others, not to be a lonely and isolated if autonomous, being such as Edna.

Female alienation is explored in "The Struggle towards Self-Fulfillment in Comparative Perspective" (1989). Yonoki finds that three literary heroines (Emma, Edna, and Aru Onna, a Japanese Madame Bovary created by Arishima Takeo) encounter similar problems in attempting self-fulfillment and a new feminine identity which lead to self-destruction. The three protagonists face difficulties in fitting themselves to the traditional female roles of a good wife and mother since there are no other possibilities to be explored within their inflexible societies.

This comparative study indicates that to become an independent woman means to encounter loneliness as long as conventional beliefs concerning women persist. To die is the only solution to stop frustration. Yonoki's work is an inspiration for this cross-cultural research examining women's alienation as she has explored two Western heroines and one Japanese female figure. *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai* has certain points concerning alienation to be investigated through comparison with *The Awakening*.

Chopin's literary technique is also widely discussed. In "A Forgotten Novel" (1976 : 165-170), Eble appreciates *The Awakening's* advanced theme and technique and compares the elaboration of "scene, mood, action and character" to a painting of a French impressionist painter Renoir, whose work expresses sensitivity of "light and shadow, color and texture." Eble concludes that Renoir's eye is matched with the perception of character and incident of Chopin. Her use of color to describe New Orleans and Grand Isle is also

compared to the technique of Stephen Crane (May, 1976 : 189-195) for its “delicate impressionistic touches.”

Imagery is a crucial component in *The Awakening*. The author effectively employs both landscape and nature, especially the sea, in presenting Edna’s position and state of mind. Hook (1983 : 176) praises its “unity of effect” and a “fluent, flexible, and often lyrical prose,” which carries powerful psychological conviction. Also elaborated in detail is Chopin’s use of natural landscapes. In “The Hidden Darkness: Landscape as Psychological Symbol in Kate Chopin’s Fiction”, Russell (1995) describes Chopin’s use of landscape imagery as an important symbolic element in elucidating themes and to influence as well as reflect her characters’ attitudes, emotions and behavior in her works. For Russell, Grand Isle in *The Awakening*, particularly the sea, is a natural environment which symbolizes Edna’s search for limitless personal freedom. Ironically it also signals her “complete withdrawal from society and her total isolation” The sea dominates other imagery with the use of personification (May, 1976 : 189-195). Characterization is also Chopin’s talent. Simplicity and directness are found in *The Awakening*. Edna is a clear portrayal with “the blur illustration” of other supporting characters (Leary, 1976 : 195-199).

The author of the Thai literary counterpart, Suwannee Sukhontha, belongs to the new generation of writers of the late twentieth century whose works have received awards for their outstanding literary merit. Her writing style is a topic of discussion, while only slight attention is given to the issues raised in *Khwanrak Khrang Sutthai*.

Plunpid Tiankaraht commends Suwannee on her style in “An Analysis of Suwannee Sukhontha’s Style and Techniques in Novel Writing” (1982). Plunpid finds Suwannee’s descriptions of setting, characterizations and dialogues support the stories as well as make her characters vivid. This point is supported by Sumantana Chantaroajwong’s comparative study of Colette’s and

Suwannee Sukhontha's writings (1983). Sumantana concludes that Suwannee's descriptions, like Colette's, are detailed, delicate, colorful, and lively. Her language is found to be carefully selected to give the readers both vivid images and emotional impact.

Khvamrak Krang Sutthai is one selected novel studied in *Comparative Study of German and Thai Women's Literature* (1995), by Sirirat Thaveelertnithi, who states that the main theme of this novel is the failure of love for a divorcee whose divorce comes from marital pressure. To Sirirat, the author demonstrates via her heroine that divorcee status is one among many social problems that women encounter. Although this research framework is comparative, *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai* is not compared to any particular German novels because the female characters of her three selected German stories are middle-aged widows who have been familiar with being inferior to their husbands. They live under social conventions, being stereotypes, not expressing their desires for any human dignity. They have not struggled for their own selves. To Sirirat, Ros is representative of a woman who fights against former attitudes toward a divorcee.

The above studies indicate that *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai* has not been studied in depth although it has debatable issues. However, Sirirat's exploration on the theme of a divorcee helps in studying Ros's alienation since the protagonist's divorcee status is a part of the main conflict. The research of Suwannee's literary techniques is also helpful for this study in analyzing the literary methods utilized in presenting Ros's alienation.

As an English language novel of almost a hundred years before *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai*, *The Awakening* has a much larger audience around the world. It is appreciated among feminists as a pioneer work about women's quest to satisfy their needs. Above all things, it attracts readers as well as critics with its scandalous content. Without such attractive features and being written in a much more modern time, *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai*, on the other

hand, has enjoyed very limited study and criticism. Therefore, there are important points of interest for this research to pursue – especially, in comparison to *The Awakening* in terms of the theme of women's alienation.

3. Suicide in Modern Society and in Literature

Suicide is a social phenomenon with a long history of study within two areas. Psychologically, this action is considered an aggressive response to one's own frustration, and the expression of a death instinct which pushes a person towards death under the influence of an exaggerated depression. Sociologists, however, believe that suicide is not solely conditioned by mental factors, but is more a result of social pressures (Aiken, 1991 : 70-84).

Suicidal motives are varied. To Piyachat Nennit (1981, 21-25), crucial causes of this destructive act are extreme depression and exaggerated sadness, while for Shneidman and Farbelow (quoted in Nawamon Yuden, 1992 : 17), suicide is a way to escape from frustration in order to have the better next life.

Sociologically, this self-destruction is classified into three groups regarding social integration: altruistic, egoistic and anomic suicides. Altruistic suicide, committed when a person is highly attached to the society, is the opposite of egoistic suicide, done by a person lacking social integration having loneliness a major conflict. Anomic suicide concerns low social regulation or collective disorder often found in affluent society (Kastenbaum, 1998 : 187-192).

Suicide rates are partly related to marital status (Allen, 1993 : 411-412). Its rate is highest for divorced people, next for the widowed, then for singles, and lowest for married people. However, according to McCulloch and Philip (1972 : 11-12), for married women, the breakdown of interpersonal relationships is an important reason for attempting suicide. Women are more likely to think about suicide and have higher rates of attempted suicide due to

the changing role of women in the society as well as emotional problems such as loneliness. The suicidal person is one “who is living alone or whose character keep others at a distance. The isolation is both a major source of depression and a factor which prevents others from becoming aware of and responding to the need for help” (McCulloch and Philip, 1972 : 11-12). Yet, women succeed less often than men in committing suicide owing to men’s use of more effective lethal methods.

The act of suicide has been interpreted in many different ways throughout human history. It can bring an honorable death to a suicidal person, as in the Harakiri of Japanese soldiers (Kastenbaum, 1998 : 187-192). On the other hand, some cultural traditions regard suicide as a sinful act because it represents fighting against the order of the universe. Similarly, the self-murderer in Buddhist religion is considered completely sinful.

Although committing suicide is religiously regarded as evil, it is sometimes used as the last and best alternative of characters in literature who encounter problems too pressing to endure. According to Supanee Warathon (1976 : 155-249), this destructive act is mostly committed by the female protagonists in tragic love story in order to produce impressive endings. However, this does not mean that is employed only for the end of tragic love story. In her study of suicide in Thai novels from 1977-1987, Nawamon Yuden (1992) concludes that her characters’ suicidal motives are caused by two types of problems: social and environmental influence and up bringing or wrong value judgement. The two male and eight female characters are defeated to social problems for their survival which lead to psychological conflicts, loss, depression and meaninglessness and end their frustrated lives with suicides.

This self-destruction can also be the last resort of alienated characters, as shown in “Alienation in Thai Short Stories (B.E. 2507-2511)” (1987). Lertchai Sirichai points out that the characters commit suicide because of mental and

social pressures. They feel meaningless and become social “outsiders” without human dignity.

Suicide is considered a social and psychological problem of all nations which is committed by more women than men owing to the role changing and emotional pressures: marital situation, loneliness, failure in love and the feeling of alienation as shown via the literary portrayal of depicted novels: *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* as well as in *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*. All female protagonists encounter the mentioned problems which lead their lives to the tragic ends.

Women’s alienation has been depicted in literature, particularly in Western masterpieces, as a commentary on society and as the voice of women fighting against social conventions. Many of these works end with suicide as a solution for the alienated person. This issue is not *apparent* in Thai heroines although their conditions are actually similar. *The Awakening* and its central figure have been widely studied. However, few researchers focused on Edna’s alienation. Neither is *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* a topic of extensive literary discussion. This thesis, therefore, attempts to study the two novels in depth, with special emphasis on women’s alienation as experienced by the protagonists of completely different cultures together with the novelists’ literary techniques.

Objectives

This research is intended to study literary portrayals of women’s alienation in dissimilar cultural backgrounds via the female protagonists in *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* as presented through the novelists’ literary techniques

Significance of the Study

This study will give a comparative picture of women's alienation through literary works of two different cultures. The literary analysis will highlight how the alienated females' condition is effectively and artistically portrayed. The findings will contribute the realization of women's frustrating existence in the real world to the society and will represent a woman's voice for dignity.

Limitations of the Study

1. This research is a comparative study of American and Thai women's alienation as depicted in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Suwannee Sukontha's *Kwamrak Krang Sudtai*.
2. This study focuses on the female protagonists. Other characters are included if relevant to the main analysis.

Definition of Terms

Female protagonist : the major female character of a story, here referring to Edna in *The Awakening* and Ros in *Kwamrak Krang Sudtai*.

Alienation : an emotional separation from a society or group, feelings of normlessness, powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement and social isolation. Both sociologists and psychologists divide the feeling of alienation into alienation from social values, alienation from others, and self-alienation.

Research Methodology

1. Collection of Data

Studying the two novels in depth and searching the related literature concerning the selected novels, and related literary works as well as theories of feminism, psychology, sociology and literature, together with documents on the historical contexts of both novels.

2. Data Analysis

2.1 Analyzing and comparing both female protagonists with regard to women's alienation, based on the collected materials.

2.2 Comparing and contrasting both novelists' themes and styles of writing and their use of specific literary techniques in relation to the issues of women's alienation and its aftermath.

3. Conclusion