

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Suggestions

Women's issues have been widely discussed via literature in relation to various topics, among which is the theme of alienation, which sometimes ends in suicide. Regarded as both a social and psychological problem, women's alienation has been depicted in such Western masterpieces as *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and in outstanding Thai fictions like *Khunchang Khunphaen*, and *Phaendin Khong Rao*. Two powerful novels of this theme in dissimilar contexts, *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*, are the subject of this study, especially regarding the social and emotional pressures upon the female protagonists, who are representatives of transitional periods. Their social position poses difficulties in their lives, while limiting their paths to self-fulfillment.

The examination of *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* focuses on the female protagonists' relationships with other characters, their characters and their feelings of alienation. It also discusses literary techniques used to highlight the heroines' social and inner conflicts which lead to destructive endings in the novels.

Social Conflicts

Social expectations upon a woman play important roles in *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*. However, it is found that Edna encounters harder social problems than Ros due to the inflexible conventions of her creole society. The expected role of a woman is to be a devoted wife and mother whose main concern is domestic responsibility. This tradition is against what Edna calls "life-essence", to be an independent woman who can lead her own individual life, feel, think and act freely. Her attempt to actualize her freedom affects her relationships with other

people, especially her husband, who believes completely in the idea of male superiority. In freeing herself, she inevitably alienates herself from her community and finally confronts infinite loneliness.

While a creole woman's role and limited position cause Edna's social conflicts, Ros's crucial troubles are her social environment, work and personal relationships. Ros's hard work in providing a comfortable life for her children is the aim of her struggle in the big city which is in complete contrast to life in her peaceful and natural hometown. Ros lives among conservatives who still hold a negative as well as exploitative outlook on a divorcee, an unfair judgment that humiliates an individual woman who struggles to lead an honest life for herself and her children. Another disturbing problem for Ros is her work on commercial art which brings her no pride, since it is not what she can really call a work of art she wishes to create.

The research finds that Edna and Ros encounter social conflicts. They have problems with their lives and do not feel themselves belonging to the society. Expectations, conventions as well as beliefs of the society narrow their possibility of existing with dignity. This is especially true in Edna's case.

Inner Conflicts

In the analysis of the protagonists, the psychological developments of Edna and Ros reveal their increasing alienation. However, the study has shown that Edna's and Ros's inner conflicts are not totally similar; they differ in terms of origins and impacts upon the heroines' decisions.

The common points which drive Edna and Ros to the loss of a sense of belonging are their unique ways of thinking. Being a woman for Edna does not mean only to be a wife and mother, but an independent human being with dignity. This is why she refuses creole conventions. For Ros, as a sensitive and nature-loving artist, it

seems hard for her to live in a busy society in which many people carry negative opinions of divorcees.

With a different concept regarding womanhood, Edna separates herself from the society. She prefers solitude to companionship as she discovers that being alone enhances her freedom. After her self-realization, Edna enjoys being alone, as epitomized in her moving out of her husband's house, for she can breathe genuine freedom, the "life-essence" she has longed for. But for Ros, the companionship of the ones she cherishes seems to be her preference. Ros hates being alone because it provides her too much time to indulge in sad thoughts and concerns which intensify her loneliness. Art becomes a consolation for both Edna and Ros. However, the company of artists can only briefly relieve Ros's solitude because the only people she really cares for and needs to be close to are her children and her lover.

For both Edna and Ros, love, especially that for the children, is the crucial and common conflict which is so powerful that it can push both of them towards death. Edna's motherly love is clearly seen near the end and causes Edna's moral conflict when she has to choose between her children and freedom after the final departure of her lover, the one from whom she wishes for understanding and ideal love without ownership. Edna discovers that she is a woman with dignity, but the realization of her "life-essence" is impossible with the children as the prime concern.

For Ros, her great love for the children has been shown from the beginning of the novel. The reader learns that a man Ros looks for as her new partner has to be kind and has to care for her children. Her younger lover seems the one. However, her love for him increases Ros's frustration as she realizes it is impossible. Up to the end of the story, it is clear that the only real and lasting love for Ros is that which she gives to her children.

Meanings of Alienation

Under the conventional norms or according to conservative beliefs, the two protagonists seem invisible women in their societies. They do not feel they belong to their communities, but rather encounter feelings of alienation.

Edna's alienation is rooted in her inability to fit the creole norm, which leads to social isolation and her final powerlessness. Edna prefers solitude after discovering her desire for freedom. She separates herself from neighbors and refuses to tie herself to any social conventions, especially to the role of a mother and wife. She discovers the impossibility of following creole concepts of womanhood. However, eventually, she cannot escape motherly attachment, and this realization drives her back to the woman's role she has refused, which means she cannot maintain her selfhood. Toward the end of the story, Edna is too exhausted to struggle for dignity and individual freedom, for she realizes the futility as long as she cannot escape motherhood.

Ros's alienation includes feelings of social isolation and meaninglessness. It is true that after the divorce, Ros is content with her independence, but she also encounters loneliness. Living in the city, she feels like a social alien, especially among conservative people whose attitudes toward a divorcee are negative. It seems she is nobody in the society. She lives for her children, the meaning of her life. She works hard and struggles for the children. Although she naturally would like to find a new partner, this is primarily to serve her children: to provide them a kind and loving protector. This is why she feels absolutely meaningless after the children's deaths. Without them, there is no reason for her lonely and aimless existence in a society which does not seem to welcome her.

Normlessness and powerlessness give rise to conflicts for Edna who, once awakened to her sense of selfhood, totally neglects the creole women's role in order to search for individual freedom. Ros's behavior is not antisocial; but her intense

feelings and the unfortunate situation she faces are not compatible with narrow lot the society assigns to a woman.

Literary Elements

The frustrations which cause the heroines' alienation are elaborately presented by the authors' literary techniques: theme, plot, setting, characterization, imagery, and point of view.

Similarities can be found in the two novelists' themes, plots and settings. The common theme of *The Awakening* and *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai* is a woman fighting against society to maintain her love and dignity. The themes of the two tragic stories are supported by narrations which employ chronological sequences of events. The reader learns that the protagonists' social positions are at odds with their dignity. The causes and effects of the feelings of alienation are clarified step by step and the psychological problems of the heroines worsen towards the timely climaxes when the protagonists' accumulated frustrations rise to their peaks. The protagonists' destructive solutions, the most readily comparable aspects of the texts become reasonable and finally are welcomed by the two desperate alienated characters at the ends of the stories. Setting is also a crucial aspect similarly employed to highlight the protagonists' psyche. The authors share a preference for using real places: New Orleans and Grand Isle in *The Awakening*, and Phitsanulok, which was Suwannee's hometown, and Bangkok in *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai*, to make the stories vivid. Similarly, they both use natural surroundings, especially the sea, which becomes the focus of both authors as the most crucial setting to elaborate the heroines' alienation and to show clearly how fragile a human life is in the face of an indifferent society and nature.

The two authors' uses of point of view, characterization and imagery are dissimilar. A limited third person point of view allows the reader to follow Edna,

observe her actions and interpret her communication through dialogues and Edna's thoughts. In *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*, with an omniscient point of view, the reader is able to observe the three major focuses, Ros, Pat and Chitchua in more depth. Nevertheless, we become closer to and understand Ros more than the two male figures. The ways the characters of both novels are introduced are somewhat different, involving direct and indirect descriptions. Mostly, we are shown character types in *The Awakening*, while we are mostly told in *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*. Imagery is another technique affecting the reader to different degrees. It can be said that *The Awakening* is more a novel of symbols, since it makes effective use of symbols, especially the sea, to present its heroine. Houses and clothes or certain actions such as swimming hint at deeper meanings. The hidden messages in *The Awakening* challenge its readers to discover and interpret, while *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*'s major symbol is the sea, which looms large at the end of the story.

The Awakening and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* are literary reflections of women's alienation. The novels mirror women's status and their psychology so that the society will realize women's problems and their viewpoints. Edna and Ros are two representative creations of women who encounter the problem of being "other". Their miserable lives are instances of the suffering situations of women, social victims whose individual desire is considered wrong.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study focuses on feelings of alienation, reflecting women's situation in different contexts. It compares a Thai novel to a Western literary work. The research findings provide a comparative view, revealing that women may have been viewed as social victims even in the late twentieth century. The research points out that women's position is still in question and thus there is room for further study.

Comparative studies on the theme of women's alienation should be continued, especially using Thai novels and those of other countries in order to provide the understanding of this social and psychological phenomenon within dissimilar cultural backgrounds.

Examination of other women's issues are also interesting. Many literary works in the modern world contexts have been composed to mirror women's real situations, particularly as social victims or as beings regarded as the inferior sex. The roles of women presented via female characters in literature are varied, and these can probably become research focuses with the utilization of feminist perspectives.

According to the literature reviewed, *Anna Karenina* and *Phaedin Khong Rao* have some comparable aspects, especially the female protagonists. Therefore, the study of the two novels in comparison could be useful. The action of suicide is also a debatable issue, since many literary works employ this destructive decision to end the story. Women's or even men's suicidal behavior as well as its motivations in novels or short stories can be comparatively studied within dissimilar cultures.