

Beyond “Wicked”: The Subversive Agency of Female Protagonists in the 19th Century Literature

Naorin Rahman

Lecturer

Department of English

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)

Keywords:

Women,
19th Century,
Emma,
Anna, Sexuality,
Adultery,
Suicide,
Motherhood

Abstract: This paper is associated with two highly notable 19th-century works: Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. This study employs a qualitative approach, following an explanatory research design, with a primary focus on gaining insight into the representation of women in European literature to define a research problem that has not been previously explored in the same manner. The primary objective of this paper is to examine the representation of female lead characters in the contemporary era and whether this representation tends to uplift women amid social rigors or marginalize them. The paper also offers a close reading of the two novels to indicate notions of comparison, both similarity and dissimilarity, noted by the authors from two different socio-political perspectives. Furthermore, this paper also discusses female sexuality regarding motherhood and extramarital affairs, considering the severity of taboo in such matters. Moreover, finally, this paper seeks to attach new meaning to the values presented in both novels, redefining them to analyze the works of literature through various literary theories.

Introduction

From time immemorial, the representation of women in literature has been a matter of great controversy. From Homer's ancient classic *The Iliad* to F. Scott Fitzgerald's modern *The Great Gatsby*, the way female characters were depicted underscores the deeply patriarchal and repressive bias that has persisted across every age and society, even in the postmodern era. Over time, a few eye-opening changes in the vignette of different literary works were seen. The most memorable era of such a teeter-totter was undoubtedly the 19th century. European and English writers helped propel this journey, promoting women's empowerment and cultural transformation.

Since society's standards strongly influenced the representation of 19th century women in art and literature, most male writers' views on femininity tended to align with those standards. They were therefore regarded as more valuable than those who chose to break stereotypes. Books that depicted or even dared to represent women

differently from quotidian societal beliefs were often shadow-banned, highlighting how ingrained these ideas were. Because females were frequently represented from a male perspective, it became difficult to distinguish between women's identity and individuality. Since feminism back then was not part of a thinking system, any writing empowering women was taken as a disregard against the rules of patriarchy. Writers like George Eliot, Gustave Flaubert, George Henry Lewes, Leo Tolstoy, and John Stuart Mill, however, aimed to redefine femininity by challenging traditional norms in those challenging times. Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878) and *Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary* (1856) both depict the adultery of their titular characters, stuck in unhappy marriages, who then face a tragic end due to societal rejection of their happiness. Both novels are a commentary on each other, summarizing the debates about society's acceptance of male and female dispositions in the stern 19th century era.

Background of the Study

Considering the 19th century timeline, it is clear that various social transformations indeed marked the period. Even though the strict hegemony of men still existed as dominantly as ever, the literature of the time, however, showed a quite subversive aspect in its way. The introduction of some very controversial and complex female characters, with the caliber to defy conventional social norms through intellectual rebellion or sexual agency, paved the way for an inspiring journey that continues to this day. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877) appear in that period as prominent literary works that introduced their notorious titular characters, who will be shamed yet far-famed in eras to come. Heroines of both novels – Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina – are shown as frivolous women, whose pursuit of passion and mental instability leads to their tragic downfalls and eventual suicide. Thus, the question arises: were these monumental characters nothing but, as contemporary critics claimed, merely lustful adulteresses, or were they inconspicuous revolutionaries who shaped the tyrannical mold of patriarchy and challenged slighted marital relationships? Gustav's Emma Bovary, portrayed as a delusional woman, is seen to be dreading her current canton life as she then seeks escape through romantic fantasies and extramarital affairs with various men, only to face unparalleled financial and reputation ruin, and then take her own life. Similarly, Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, trapped in an affectionless marriage, gets entangled in a passionate extramarital affair with Count Vronsky, leading her to kill herself in the end. While contemporary readers criticized both protagonists as nefarious mothers and wives, modern feminist readings defend them vigorously as beings who were victimized by the objectionable and rigid societal ruling, only supportive of men and their vices.

Problem Statement

Even though both *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* depicted women who disregard social norms quite powerfully, their particular rebellion, mostly sexual rebellions, are shown as something punishable not only in earthly surroundings but also in the afterlife, as most religions heavily prohibit self-harm. From the perspective of the lead female characters, depicted through the values of the contemporary society and in terms of gender stereotypes, it is very evident that there can only be two questions that arise from such particularity: are those endings a warning for women against such antagonism, or a picture to condemn the unfair observance that keeps the society biased towards men? As there might be reasons why both writers had decided to utilize motherhood and adultery in their novels, they also uncover a few things about the overall picture of the wants, desires, and fears of women about things that were too forbidden to talk openly, therefore implying a powerful setting to construct the plot of the novel. This study will seek to thoroughly discuss the topic of female image and focus on the expression of the overall essence of motherhood and adultery in the books.

Rationale of the Study

Portrayal of Gustav and Tolstoy's titular characters in their respective novels - *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* had scholars and readers thrown into debate as to whether they should be considered as the victims or the villains of those belligerent times. Despite the dubiousness, recent studies have adopted the styles of Flaubert (French realism) and Tolstoy (Russian moralism) in their treatment of the sexuality of 19th century women and the societal chastisement that comes with it. Modern-day feminist approaches – such as Simone de Beauvoir's "Otherness" and even Gilbert and Gubar's "Madwoman" - challenge traditional understandings of these characters. What at one point seemed to be the only way of redemption for both protagonists for their fair share of sins now seems logical to read as punishment from both writers as they have implied how the women were not exactly compatible to enjoy the freedom reserved for men, and how the horrifying ending both Emma and Anna suffered were nowhere near applicable for the men involved in the affair as well. Even though the books did not abruptly change the society's narrative to empower the female protagonists, they did, however, reflect and resist the gender norms of their time, which can indeed be taken as a climactic point for understanding 19th-century patriarchal impediment. This study's rationale lies in its disciplinary approach, implementing feminism to offer a more comprehensive understanding of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877). By exploring desire, sexuality, and patriarchy

through both French Realism and Russian Moralistic perspectives, this research aims to mobilize and contribute to broader discussions of complex female characters and subversive agency in literature that transcended the limitations of time and space.

Literature Review

As both *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert are deeply linked to the development of the novel through their representation of women as central characters, numerous scholars have studied them.

Muhammad Ayub Jajja, in his paper "Unmasking the Alternative Micro Feminist Narratives in *Anna Karenina*: A Postmodernist-Deconstructive Perspective", states that – "*Anna Karenina* is for absolute conformity to the patriarchal laws and norms, which are represented as the normalized universal truth, demanding from women their total allegiance and absolute loyalty to it. The dominant strand of the novel portrays 19th-century Russian society, culture, and family as shaped by masculine and feminine binaries. The violation of patriarchal laws is presented as crime and sin" (33), which points to the function of Tolstoy in portraying the Russian society at that time, as he explores the crudeness of accepting a woman's need to have freedom.

He further adds that – "Her deep and prolonged implication into dominant ideology produces in her the sense of guilt and shame due to the dissonance between her inner voice and the implicated patriarchal self." (34) Even though the writer does focus on the relative discussion of how the rebellious thoughts of Anna manifest into actions, it is not quite from the perspective of illustrating the writer's inclination of empowering women instead from a romantic friction where her action comprehends and assimilates her destiny.

Berna Köseolu, in her research paper, "The Portrayal of The Female Protagonists in *Anna Karenina* and *Forbidden Love*" also questions gender roles saying – "Considering the situation of the female protagonist *Anna Karenina* in Tolstoy's realistic work, what comes to the fore is that *Anna*, in her marriage, suffers from lack of love as a neglected and ignored female who cannot experience her womanhood, so the romantic desires of *Anna* lead her to look for real passionate love outside, which results in adultery. (436) The writer reconnects different ideas of Tolstoy for *Anna*, including her attempt to come to terms with her adultery and marriage, and powerlessness concerning defending her honor in society. She explains, ".....demonstrating the dilemma of *Anna*, her powerlessness in front of

Vronsky and Karenin, Tolstoy gives a detailed portrayal of the psychological conflicts and sufferings of women in the 19th-century Russian society.” (438).

Even though the writer walks down the same path as the notion of showcasing women as the target of injustice, her work is not solely about exploring the writer's intention regarding the casualties and out-of-the-box women, but rather about the function of a strict Catholic environment within a patriarchal society.

On the other hand, George Gouldin in his research paper “Realism, heroines, Flaubert” describes that – “Flaubert did not let any of his characters speak the same language; each had his manner of expressing himself so that his social position and profession was characterized.” (23) which represents how the female protagonist is clearly in a disadvantageous position comparing the other characters. He further extends his opinion, saying, “Although Flaubert was not considered to be a realist by this early school, he did make use of these characteristics, for he did not create new characters - he remembered people he knew in everyday life and placed them where he wanted them in his novels.” (75) Which clearly states that his female protagonist was a shadow of the real-life 19th-century women, lacking in choice and freedom of action. Moreover, while the writer is loyal to Flaubert's mindfulness, the attention is not entirely on the fence about proving the status of women.

In “The Structure of Hysteria in *Madame Bovary*: The (Deviation) of Femininity”, Mercia Cristina Cardoso states that – “According to Emma, man had every chance to do what he wanted: he was free, could experience all the pleasures of life. The protagonist shows his dissatisfaction was born in the female condition, a condition which makes her suffer the limitations that society imposes.” (35) which connects to the notion of the writer's intention of displaying the drawbacks of being a woman in the 19th century, nevertheless, she adds – “It is understood that Flaubert, brilliantly, gives life to a character that captures the female desire, but ends up committing excesses to identify impossible question to answer, referring to what is a woman in whom it should turn to get the love of the Other.” (37), all the while capturing but missing the dynamics of the writer's true feelings about his need to compose the facts.

From all these criticisms and articles, one notable aspect emerges: none of them focused solely on the writers' intention to disclose the female characters as such and to incorporate them into the ideologies and requirements of human beings equal to men. This significant research gap will be fulfilled in this paper.

Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to identify the connection between social stereotypes and the analogy between the two novels, *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy and *Madame Bovary* by Gustav Flaubert.

The specific objectives are:

- to focus on the subversive agency depicted in both novels, and
- to find out both writers' ideology regarding female representation.

Research Questions

The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. How are different gender stereotypes expressed through the contrasting consequences faced by the female protagonists and the male characters involved with them?
2. Was the death of the titular characters a warning against sexual or patriarchal rebellion by destroying the subversive agency or a critique of it?

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative with both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are novels, *Madame Bovary* by Gustav Flaubert and *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. The secondary sources are various books and articles relevant to the study. This study employs an explanatory research typology, primarily to gain insights and ideas that will help define the research problem. This approach is vital for investigating patterns and trends in existing data on feminism and sexuality within the context of 19th-century literature.

The data collection methods for this study include content analysis and textual analysis. Content analysis involves a systematic examination of documents and other textual materials related to the characterization of female protagonists and to the extent to which their overall conduct had a pervasive influence on feminism and feminist studies. By analyzing scholarly articles, critiques, and interpretations, the study aims to identify recurring themes, terminology, and theoretical constructs. This approach acknowledges that interpretation is influenced not only by readers' interpretations but also by textual features and the further development of the theory involved. This study recognizes that the meaning of the text can shift based on the reader's perspective, context, and the period in which they engage with the literary works.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs three corresponding theoretical approaches to interrogate the dual portrayal of 19th-century women in literature. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) implies that both protagonists, Emma and Anna, are cast as their husbands' wives and lack individual identity. They are known as the 'other,' a part of their husbands' identities. As Emma is known as Charles's wife, while Anna is known as Karenin's property.' In that same manner, most women are often described as their husband's counterpart and not in any other frame – "That same evening this was known in Yonville, and Madame Tuvache, the mayor's wife, declared in the presence of her servant that 'Madame Bovary was compromising herself.'" (Gustave Flaubert, 1856)

Since both novels explore the common theme of sexual desire or sexual liberation, the Psychoanalytic theory by Jacques Lacan plays a huge role in understanding the unfulfilled feelings regarding the psychology of the two female protagonists. As Lacan describes in his "Desire and its Interpretation", "Desire is not simply exiled, rejected to the level of the action and principle of our servitude; which it is up to now? It is interrogated as the very key, or the mainspring, in us of a whole series of actions and behaviors that are understood as representing the deepest part of our truth. Moreover, this is the high point, the summit from which at every moment experience tends to redescend." (1958-1959, pg. 423) To follow that same analogy, it becomes clear that the two titular characters had little control over their desires, as they yearned for things they had not had before or had a sudden taste of, and were tempted to have again.

Looking at the tragic fate of the female protagonists and understanding the similarity, it seems quite visible that Sigmund Freud's monumental Psychoanalytic theory of sexual drive, along with the death drive, represents, respectively, the struggle between life as centered in erotic impulses and aggression. (Otto Kernberg, 2009) On the other hand, the implementation of unconscious guilt is also explored under this very theory of Freud which explicates, "The mildest cases of all these sadomasochistic developments are found in those patients who, because of unconscious guilt, usually related to profoundly forbidden oedipal urges or unconscious aggression to an early object of their dependency.....self-destructiveness has the function of the 'price' that must be paid in order to permit a gratifying relationship to develop, and does not have the primary function of destruction of a potentially good relationship." (Kernberg, 2009) In addition to that statement, it is evident that both Emma and Anna had to choose suicide as a means

of ending their pain of disappointment, even guilt, as well as to get rid of the social shame that would have followed them till rapture.

The Russian formalist reading of the novels has also strongly influenced how readers perceive the tone offeminist or pseudo-feminist readings of 19th-century literature. The process of "defamiliarization" allows readers to view the perspectives of female protagonists from unfamiliar angles. As for the novels, Flaubert's attempt at beginning *Madame Bovary* (1857) with a description of Charles's childhood is quite an approach to a varied narrative. In the same manner, Tolstoy introduces his novel *Anna Karenina* (1878) with an opening that delays the introduction of Anna's affairs and instead opens with Oblonsky's affair. The use of ordinary objects as motifs also helps readers feel enlightened about rediscovering the unfamiliar strategies of the writers. This connects the themes of motherhood, sexuality, and suicide in a complex way.

This study takes Psychoanalysis, Russian formalism, and Feminism as independent variables to showcase how the dependent variables: suicide, motherhood, and sexuality work to formulate relations in the mentioned novels of Gustave Flaubert and Leo Tolstoy.

Discussion

Subversive agency is often seen as similar to the power a character has to subtly undermine a tyrannical system, not necessarily through open rebellion but by using existing regulations against it or by finding hidden ways to assert their will. Given the 19th century literary era, writers lacked the capacity to be obstinate against the prevailing discriminatory system, as literary freedom was not a given right. However, it cannot be stated with certainty either that the authors of selected novels also desired to empower female characters. Regardless, their writings have had an enduring impact, and thus, the credit is given where it is due.

Anna Karenina (1878), as most critics assume, "as a novel strenuously interrogates the institutions of marriage and romantic love." (Mandelker, 1988), Leo Tolstoy fairly breaks the conservative values, incorporating the yearning of a woman for a life outside the mundane walls of restrictions and freedom. As the wife of a man twenty years older than her, her desire to have attention, passion, and an adventurous life stays under a pile of rocks, unexplored, unattained. Meeting the very wealthy and very ambitious army man Vronsky, Anna's life turns upside down, and her aristocratic image starts crumbling in the face of the unforgiving society,

leading her to the cruelty of drugs and suicide, implying the contrariness of the rules between men and women. As she explores “the Freudian experience between the pleasure principle and the reality principle”. (Lacan, 1958-59)

Making Anna a victim also incorporates the biasness of society as critic Evans suggests that Anna is not a victim rather – “morally ambivalent character, a character who is far from passive, and far from helpless and betrayed.” (1885) Even though Leo himself portrays the picture of the society though Anna as she says – “Well, you must excuse methere. You know to me, all women are divided into two classes...at least no...truer to say: there are women and there are...I’ve never seen exquisite fallen beings, and I never shall see them, but such creatures as that painted Frenchwoman at the counter with the ringlets are vermin to my mind, and all fallen women are the same.” (Flaubert, p. 90)

Even her lover Vronsky does not miss a chance to insult her, seeing her wear a provocative dress explaining the view of society towards a woman who is rakish or wanton saying – “In that dress, with a princess only too well known to everyone, to show yourself at the theater is equivalent not merely to acknowledging your position as a fallen woman, but is flinging down a challenge to society, that is to say, cutting yourself off from it forever” (Flaubert, p-1181) The compelling and attractive features of Anna’s characterization are attributed either to Tolstoy’s masterful intent to avoid a two-dimensional characterization, or, to Tolstoy’s failure to master his psycho-sexual drives and uncontrolled repressions.

Similarly, in *Madame Bovary* (1856), social conditions and cultural norms played a significant role in the portrayal of female characters. By depicting Emma as an immature woman, Flaubert showed a woman who is too busy living in a fantasy to face life's hardships. Who, in the hallucination of having a picture-perfect love, pursues affairs with various men and then, by being struck with the harsh truth that she will not find the fairy tale love life, commits suicide. As said in the novel, “She fell back upon the mattress in a convulsion. They all drew near. She was dead.” (Flaubert 425)

Neither Tolstoy nor Flaubert can be called heroes from this perspective, as their portrayals of Anna and Emma provoke outrage and indignation. Since Flaubert and Tolstoy could not accept their own belief that women have the same space as men in terms of sexuality, they stood and killed them, implying injustice in their fate, pointing out that women of such values cannot make it to society in any way. Since

marriage is posited as the moral and ideological coherence of the novel, it is, in most senses, particularly damaging to the saving grace and ballast against the uncertainties and confusions of a crumbling social and political order.

Similarly, the mother was often a problematic figure in 19th-century literature. The absent or dead mother in novels helps to maintain the ideal of the good mother while simultaneously allowing the author to avoid dealing with the problematic transition from virginal ingénue to sexually active wife. As both Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary were sexually active in pursuing pleasure and sensuality, their image as mothers is condemned. Most readers' potential disapproval of both Anna and Emma's troubling indifference towards their child is further destabilized by the writers' construction of mothers who do not fulfill the ideal of motherhood. Furthermore, While Emma's disregard for her mothering role in her pursuit of sexual pleasure may have indirectly led her to a tragic suicide, Anna is simply bashed away from seeing her son, in the manner of not letting a child learn about exploitation from their parents - shows the absurd legislation of women having to bear the absolute responsibility of the upbringing of a child, while the father may be absent or not care about the children is entirely acceptable.

As Flaubert writes – “She (Emma) hoped for a sonA man, at least, is free; he can explore all passions and all countries, overcome obstacles, and taste the most distant pleasures. Nevertheless, a woman is always hampered. Being inert as well as pliable, she has against her the weakness of the flesh and the inequity of the law.” (Flaubert, p. 118) Both Anna and Emma make the readers ask - can a mother who pushes the boundaries of her sexuality, who does things that are considered unorthodox, ever be a sympathetic character? What is our culture's attitude toward that mother? How far can we go, as a reader or a novelist, in representing the mother as a sexual being? Moreover, how can we confront our culture's profound ambivalence toward women's sexuality?

As critic Amber Hollibaugh, one of the most prominent LGBT activists, proclaims - ‘Women in this culture live with sexual fear like an extra skin. Each of us wears it differently depending on our race, class, sexual preference, and community, but from birth, we have all been taught our lessons well. Sexuality is dangerous. It is frightening, unexplored, and threatening. Many of us become feminists because of our feelings about sex...’ (1996). Whereas sex was simply a biological drive or, in theological doctrine, a licentious lust stimulated by the devil for men, it was a licentious lust stimulated by the devil for women. Therefore, the infidelity of women was particularly damaging to the moral and ideological coherence.

With time, the criticism of novelistic adulterous heroines proves that they are primarily misogynistic, and the acceptance of society has gone through a paradigm shift in the last two centuries to come to a point where the desires of women, neglected by their rightful partners, are not only sympathetic but also understandable. Yet, Anna and Emma's inadequacy in the task of self-development and social reform may be read as continuing a literary tradition that couples the impulse to social rebellion with individual weakness and impotence.

Conclusion

Both novels invite many possible readings, suggesting that they are about social conflict; there are feminist, psychological, religious, linguistic, and a host of other readings as well. However, the absence of many positives is, in fact, an essential element in the sweeping of passion, degeneration, and destruction. Namely, the way both central characters ended up, and how their disastrous marriage is one of the main reasons for their untimely deaths, shows the writers' reserve and the destruction of bodily passion and unbridled temptation. Although both Anna and Emma had tried to construct a romantic world for themselves throughout the novel, the inevitable reality wrenched them, fully and finally, out of their dreams and onto the path of taking their own lives. "She suffered only in her love and felt her soul passing from her in this memory; as wounded men, dying, feel their life ebb from their bleeding wounds." (Flaubert 408) There was finally no more eluding the harsh, biased society that had done them wrong in every sense.

Moreover, while Tolstoy portrays a radical reorganization of society, such as would actually occur, his imagination grasps and presents problems to which revolution is the obvious answer. However, his understanding balks at confronting their implications. On the other hand, Flaubert creates an archetypal character who commits an escapist form of suicide in order to avoid the mistakes she has made in the legislation of society as a bad wife and mother. As the famous writer Milan Kundera reflects on the event of Anna's suicide, "Why does Anna Karenina kill herself? The answer seems clear enough: for years, people in her world have turned away from her; she is suffering from the separation from her son, Seryozha; even if Vronsky still loves her, she fears for that love; she is exhausted with it, overexcited, unwholesomely (and unjustly) jealous; she feels trapped. Yes, all that is clear, but is a trapped person necessarily doomed to suicide? So many people adapt to living in a trap! Even if we understand the depth of her sorrow, Anna's suicide remains an enigma." (Kundera, 1985)

It could be quite impossible and inclined toward a too-optimistic view of Tolstoy and Flaubert, since neither writing fully reflects a social reform fully risen to conscious thought. As Andrea Dworkin quotes – “Men have constructed female sexuality and in so doing have annihilated the chance for sexual intelligence in women. Sexual intelligence cannot live in the shallow; predestined sexuality men have counterfeited for women” (1986). The tragedy, therefore, lies in the portrayal that the paradox existing in the face of women being empowered through sexuality or even regarded as the doomed dissidents, does not bear much positivity in their representation either way. Their attributes either end in them being absolutely immoral beings, or simply as mythical creatures who would not dare to live in the same manner in real-life scenarios. However, through feminist and even psychoanalytical analysis, it can be considered a platform where women can clearly see the visions of incompatibility created by society, regardless of social status or geographical location. Considering the bigger picture, it is of no confusion that Flaubert’s irony and Tolstoy’s moral ambiguity in their respective novels testify that no matter how much difference a writer tries to make, the overall picture for women in the same altitude as men can be considered nothing more than utopian agency and to get it back into realist portrayal, it is necessary to show a tragic end for the female protagonists, so the women of the age and of coming ages will not consider delving into vicious activities or think of themselves as equal to men.

Scholar Gary Adelman refers to this point in *Anna Karenina: The Bitterness of Ecstasy* when he states that: “Tolstoy oscillates between moral condemnation and love for his heroine, and the richness of the novel lies in the equilibrium he achieves between those contrary impulses, reflected in Anna’s often repeated formula, guilty but not to blame. However, in the opening segment of part 4, Tolstoy shows more prejudice against his heroine than love for her.” (Adelman, 1993, p.77) In an almost similar manner, scholar Francesca Montalti, in her “Serial Killer: Gustave Flaubert’s Pro-Woman, Woman-Killing *Madame Bovary*” stated that, “While it is easy to misunderstand Flaubert as punishing Emma throughout the work for her sexual deviance and various wrongdoings, as there is no shortage of consequences in her life, Flaubert’s ultimate murder of Emma at the novel’s end is quite literally her only chance at escaping her abysmal existence.” (2021)

Thus, in the end, it can be said that the two works from different linguistic, political, cultural background, as well as countries are realistic in portrayal that the rebel of women in the 19th century as to live like a man was nothing more than a fantasy that ended in misery, while describing that it was only acceptable for women to be

realistic with their wants and accept whatever they are offered rather than becoming demanding or trying to fulfill their desires. No matter what the endings once conveyed, years later, the views of the readers, societal moral scales, and overall acceptance of the novels clearly indicate that, once known as ‘wicked writings’, they surely challenged the subversion existing against women, despite being precarious. With their proficient use of language, they describe the hidden revolution with outstanding clarity and concreteness, without demolishing or outright angering society. It is, then, not surprising to encounter the same retreat from the implications of what they knew in their treatment of women.

Reference

1. Adelman, G. (1992). *Anna Karenina: The Bitterness of Ecstasy*. Twayne Publishers.
2. Beauvoir, S. de. (2011). *The Second Sex* (C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Trans.). Vintage Books.
3. Cheriyan, A. (2016). Powerlessness of women: A study of *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, and *The Awakening*. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, 4(4).
4. Dworkin, A. (1987). *Intercourse*. The Free Press.
5. Evans, M. (1989). *Reflecting on Anna Karenina* [Unpublished manuscript]. (99 pp.).
6. Flaubert, G. (1856). *Madame Bovary* (L. Bair, Trans.). Penguin Classics.
7. Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (1979). *The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*. Yale University Press.
8. Gouldin, G. (1961). *Realism, heroines, Flaubert* [master’s thesis, University of Richmond]. UR Scholarship Repository. <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/masters-theses/168>
9. Hollibaugh, A. (2000). *My dangerous desires: A queer girl dreaming her way home*. Duke University Press.
10. IvyPanda. (2020, May 30). *Life Conflict: "Anna Karenina" by Leo Tolstoy*. <https://ivypanada.com/essays/life-conflict-anna-karenina-by-leo-tolstoy/>
11. Jajja, M. Ayub (2019). Unmasking alternative microfeminist narratives in *Anna Karenina*: A postmodern-deconstructive perspective. *Global Social Sciences Review*, IV(IV), 31-37. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2019\(IV-IV\).05](https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2019(IV-IV).05)
12. Kernberg, O. F. (2009). The concept of the death drive: A clinical perspective. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 78(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2167-4086.2009.tb00379.x>

13. Köseoğlu, B., (2016). *The Portrayal of the Female Protagonists in Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary, and Aşk-ı Memnu (Forbidden Love): Questioning Gender Roles*. International Multidisciplinary Conference, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice, Italy (pp.435-444). Venice, Italy.
14. Kundera, M. (1985, January 27). *The Unbearable Lightness of Being: A talk with Milan Kundera*. *The New York Times*. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-talk.html>
15. Lacan, J. (2019). *Desire and Its Interpretation: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI* (A. R. Price, Trans.). Polity Press.
16. Mandelker, A. (1988). Feminist criticism and *Anna Karenina*: A review article. *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 1(1), (pp. 83–103).
17. Meyer, P. (1995). *Anna Karenina*: Tolstoy's polemic with *Madame Bovary*. *Russian Review*, 54(2), 243–259.
18. Montalti, Francesca, "Serial Killer: Gustave Flaubert's Pro-Woman, Woman-Killing *Madame Bovary*" (2021). *CUNY Academic Works*. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/4156
19. Rodrigues, M. L., Cardoso Mercia, L. O. de, & Montreozol, J. R. (2019). The structure of hysteria in *Madame Bovary*: The (deviation) of femininity. *European International Journal of Science and Technology*, 8, 30–39.
20. Shklovsky, V. (1965). Art as technique. In L. T. Lemon & M. J. Reis (Trans. & Eds.), *Russian formalist criticism: Four essays* (pp. 3–24). University of Nebraska Press.
21. Thuduwege, P. (2021, March 25). *Echoes of Madame Bovary in Anna Karenina: A comparative study* [Paper presentation]. 7th International Research Conference on Humanities & Social Sciences (IRCHSS), Sri Lanka. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3812190>
22. Tolstoy, L. (1877). *Anna Karenina* (C. Garnett, Trans.). Modern Library.