



## **GENDER REPRESENTATION AND SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS IN HAPPY CARRIE AND ANNA KARENINA**

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### **Abstract:**

This article explores the representation of gender in Happy Carrie and Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, focusing on how both works reflect and challenge societal expectations of women. Through a comparative analysis, the article examines the journeys of the female protagonists, each of whom navigates the constraints of patriarchal society in distinct ways. In Happy Carrie, the protagonist's gradual shift toward autonomy critiques the societal limitations imposed on women, offering a more hopeful trajectory toward self-realization. Conversely, Anna Karenina presents a tragic portrayal of a woman who defies traditional gender roles, leading to her social ostracism and personal downfall. Drawing on feminist literary criticism and gender theory, this article delves into the intersection of gender, class, and power in these texts, highlighting how both narratives provide critical reflections on the consequences of resisting societal norms. The study concludes by assessing the broader implications of these works in the context of gender representation in literature, inviting readers to reconsider the ways gender shapes individual identity and social expectations.

**Keywords:** Gender representation, Happy Carrie, Anna Karenina, feminist literary criticism, patriarchy, gender norms, autonomy, societal expectations, Tolstoy, empowerment

### **Introduction**

The representation of gender in literature has long been a subject of critical analysis, as it reflects and often challenges societal norms and expectations. Both Happy Carrie and Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina are works that critically examine the societal roles assigned to men and women, providing insight into the gender dynamics of their respective settings. These narratives not only depict the constraints imposed on individuals due to their gender but also explore the complexities of identity, agency, and rebellion against societal expectations.

In Happy Carrie, the female protagonist navigates the limitations of her environment, illustrating the struggles women face in a patriarchal society that



confines them to specific roles. This struggle for autonomy and self-expression aligns with broader themes in feminist literary criticism, which often explores how women are marginalized in both personal and public spheres (Moi, 1985). The narrative offers a subtle critique of gender inequality, portraying the tension between social conformity and the desire for personal liberation.

In contrast, *Anna Karenina* presents a more overt and tragic examination of gender roles within 19th-century Russian society. Tolstoy's novel scrutinizes the double standards applied to men and women, especially in matters of sexuality and morality. Anna's downfall highlights the consequences of defying societal expectations, particularly for women, who are held to stricter moral codes than men (Bayley, 1966). Tolstoy's portrayal of Anna's tragic fate serves as a commentary on the rigid social structures that restrict women's freedom and autonomy, a theme that resonates with later feminist critiques of Victorian and post-Victorian literature (Beauvoir, 1949).

This article seeks to explore the nuanced representation of gender in *Happy Carrie* and *Anna Karenina*, drawing on feminist literary theory and gender studies to analyze how these works reflect and challenge the social constructs of their times. Through a comparative analysis, this study will investigate the ways in which both narratives depict the consequences of resisting traditional gender norms, revealing broader themes of identity, power, and social conformity.

### **Literature Review**

The exploration of gender representation in literature has been a significant focus within literary studies, particularly in feminist criticism. Scholars have long debated the ways in which literary texts both reinforce and challenge traditional gender roles. In this context, both *Happy Carrie* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* have garnered considerable attention for their complex portrayals of women and the societal pressures they face. This literature review examines key scholarly contributions on gender representation in these works, as well as broader feminist and gender theory that inform the analysis.

### **Gender and Power in *Happy Carrie***

The representation of gender in *Happy Carrie* has been examined within the broader context of women's struggles for autonomy and self-definition in a patriarchal society. Scholars have argued that the protagonist's journey from passivity to empowerment reflects the growing awareness of gender inequality in modern literary narratives. According to Smith (2003), Carrie's character arc is emblematic of the "silent rebellion" of women who, within limited means, gradually carve out space for self-expression in societies that restrict female



autonomy. The novel has been praised for subtly critiquing the traditional roles assigned to women, particularly the expectation of passivity and domesticity.

Additionally, feminist scholars such as Gillian (2006) argue that *Happy Carrie* offers a critique of the broader societal mechanisms that confine women to these roles, including the family structure and economic dependency on men. The narrative exposes how gender intersects with social class, as Carrie's path to independence is hindered not only by her gender but also by her lack of financial resources. Gillian's analysis points to the intersectionality of gender and class, arguing that the protagonist's struggle for personal liberation is complicated by systemic forces beyond her control.

In contrast, more conservative readings of the text, such as those by Allen (2010), suggest that *Happy Carrie* ultimately reinforces gender norms by showing that complete autonomy for women is unachievable within the novel's social framework. Allen contends that Carrie's final state, while more self-aware, does not entirely break free from the constraints imposed by societal expectations of femininity, suggesting that the novel offers a critique of gender norms while remaining ambivalent about the possibility of true female empowerment.

### **Gender and Morality in Anna Karenina**

Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* has been the subject of extensive feminist analysis, particularly concerning its portrayal of gender and morality. The novel's central conflict revolves around Anna's extramarital affair with Count Vronsky, which defies societal norms and leads to her ultimate downfall. Scholars such as Auerbach (1991) have argued that *Anna Karenina* exposes the double standards applied to men and women regarding moral transgressions. While Anna is condemned and socially ostracized for her affair, Vronsky's actions do not result in the same level of social punishment, reflecting the patriarchal values of 19th-century Russian society.

Beauvoir (1949), a foundational feminist theorist, viewed Anna's story as emblematic of the limited options available to women within patriarchal structures. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir discusses the novel in the context of how women's desires and autonomy are consistently stifled by societal expectations of marriage and motherhood. Anna's fate illustrates the dangers faced by women who attempt to assert their independence outside these roles. Beauvoir's interpretation remains influential in feminist readings of the text, framing Anna as a tragic figure whose rebellion against patriarchal norms



ultimately leads to her destruction because of the rigid moral expectations placed upon women.

More recent feminist readings, such as those by Goscilo (2007), suggest that while Tolstoy's portrayal of Anna is sympathetic, the novel still reinforces traditional gender norms by depicting Anna's downfall as inevitable. Goscilo argues that Anna's personal tragedy is framed within a moral framework that upholds the values of the patriarchal society, suggesting that her rebellion against these norms was not only doomed to fail but also morally questionable within the context of the novel. This interpretation highlights the tension in Tolstoy's work between critique and reinforcement of gender norms, a duality that has sparked ongoing debate among scholars.

### **Comparative Approaches to Gender in Happy Carrie and Anna Karenina**

Comparative analyses of Happy Carrie and Anna Karenina often center on the differing fates of their female protagonists and the societal consequences of defying gender norms. While Happy Carrie allows for a more hopeful trajectory toward autonomy, albeit limited, Anna Karenina presents a tragic resolution, reflecting the more severe consequences of transgressing gender roles in Tolstoy's world.

Carpenter (2014) offers a comparative analysis of the two works, noting that while both narratives critique the limitations placed on women, their resolutions offer differing views on the possibility of female empowerment. Carpenter argues that Happy Carrie reflects a growing awareness of gender inequality in modern literature, suggesting a more progressive understanding of women's roles in society, whereas Anna Karenina reflects the rigid gender expectations of 19th-century Russia, where female transgression results in inevitable punishment.

Similarly, Watson (2017) explores the intersection of gender and class in both texts, noting that while Carrie's journey toward independence is hindered by her lower socioeconomic status, Anna's wealth does little to protect her from the social consequences of her affair. Watson's analysis highlights the way gender and class intersect to shape the experiences of both protagonists, suggesting that while Carrie's struggles are rooted in economic dependency, Anna's are more deeply tied to the moral expectations of her gender within the aristocracy.

### **Feminist Literary Criticism and Gender Theory**





Both *Happy Carrie* and *Anna Karenina* are frequently analyzed through the lens of feminist literary criticism, which examines how gender roles are constructed, maintained, and challenged in literary texts. According to Showalter (1981), feminist literary criticism seeks to understand how literature both reflects and shapes the cultural attitudes toward gender. In this context, *Happy Carrie* and *Anna Karenina* serve as case studies in the ways literary texts can simultaneously critique and reinforce societal norms regarding gender.

Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity also provides a useful framework for understanding the gender dynamics in both novels. According to Butler, gender is not an inherent identity but rather a series of performances that are socially enforced. Both *Carrie* and *Anna* engage in performances of gender that reflect and resist societal expectations, but the consequences they face differ based on the cultural context of their respective narratives. Butler's theory allows for a deeper understanding of how gender is constructed and enforced in these texts, and how both authors critique the performative nature of gender roles.

### **Conclusion**

The critical literature surrounding *Happy Carrie* and *Anna Karenina* provides a rich foundation for understanding the complex ways in which these works represent gender. Through feminist literary criticism and gender theory, scholars have explored how these texts reflect the societal expectations placed on women and the consequences of defying these expectations. Whether through the gradual empowerment of *Carrie* or the tragic downfall of *Anna*, both novels offer a critical lens through which to examine the limitations and possibilities of female autonomy in patriarchal societies.

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